

# 50 Years

ANNIVERSARY

**SES**  
TAS STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

1976 - 2026



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■ Tasmania SES respectfully acknowledges the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work, and we pay our respect to Elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita/Tasmania.

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■ Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication. Much of the content draws on historical records and personal recollections, and while care has been taken to verify details, some inadvertent inaccuracies or omissions may remain.

# Message from the Executive Director

For half a century, the Tasmania State Emergency Service (SES) has played a vital role in safeguarding communities across our island state.

Since its establishment, the organisation has grown into a trusted and essential element of Tasmania's emergency management framework – defined by service, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to helping others in times of need.

At the heart of Tasmania SES are its people. Volunteers and staff from diverse backgrounds have come together with a shared purpose: to promote and support community safety and resilience to floods and storms, respond effectively to flood, storm and other emergencies and to enable a smooth transition from response to recovery.

From remote rural districts to regional centres and towns, local SES units provide a vital link between communities and emergency response – drawing strength from local knowledge, teamwork, and a deep sense of responsibility.

Over five decades, Tasmania SES volunteers have responded to countless emergencies – floods, storms, landslips, road rescues, land searches, and disaster recovery operations. Often working in hazardous and unpredictable conditions, members have demonstrated professionalism, adaptability, and courage. Their actions have not only saved lives but have also helped communities endure and recover from some of the most challenging events in Tasmania's history.

The organisation has continued to evolve alongside changing risks, advances in technology, and growing community expectations. Capability, coordination, and training have expanded, strengthening partnerships with other emergency services, other SES jurisdictions, and government agencies. Yet, despite this evolution, the approach of Tasmania SES has remained constant: service above self, respect for the community, and readiness to respond when help is needed most.

As Tasmania SES marks its 50th anniversary, it is an opportunity to honour the generations of volunteers, staff, supporters, and families who have contributed to its success. Their commitment – often given quietly and without expectation of recognition – has shaped an organisation that communities rely on and trust. Their work has protected lives and strengthened communities right across the state.

This 50-year milestone is not only an opportunity for us to reflect on the past, but to reaffirm our purpose for the future.

With resilience, innovation, and community at its centre, Tasmania SES stands ready to meet the challenges ahead, continuing a proud tradition of service for generations to come.

**Mick Lowe**

Executive Director, SES and Volunteers

# A brief history

## From Civil Defence to State Emergency Service

### 1930s-1950s Civil Defence Legion

#### What did 'Civil Defence' mean?

Civil Defence was about protecting everyday people – families, towns and communities – from the impacts of war or hostile attack.

By 1938, Civil Defence work had grown beyond the capacity of what the Police could manage alone, especially as planning began to focus on the wider civil population.

In March 1939, the Civil Defence Legion was formally established, led by a Minister of Defence.

The purpose of the Civil Defence Legion was not to train the public to defend themselves

against an enemy, but to protect civilians from the effects of attack, prepare communities to survive emergencies and plan ahead so that services could respond quickly.

Civil Defence units soon formed rapidly across Australia, operating at local levels such as districts, shires and municipalities.

### 1960-1965 Civil Defence and Emergency Services

During the 1960s, the focus shifted. Training and planning moved away from wartime hostilities and towards natural disasters such as floods and storms.

As a result, the organisation was renamed Civil Defence and Emergency Services.

Local groups became known as Divisions – each with a headquarters and seven service areas consisting of Rescue, Ambulance and First Aid, Welfare, Warden Services, Scientific Services, Signals, and Supply and Transport.

This structure laid the groundwork for the modern emergency response model that we see in the SES today.



### 1975 onwards – State Emergency Service

In 1975 the name changed once again – this time to the State Emergency Service.

The *Emergency Services Act* came into effect on 21 June 1976, with the purpose: "to make provisions with respect to the protection of life and property from the effects of disaster and matters incidental thereto."

Led by a Director of Emergency Services, the SES was organised into the four key areas of planning, training, operations and administration that we see today.

Tasmania was divided into three regions, supported by volunteer-based regional

and municipal-based units. These units were initially led by Local Coordinators, later called Team Leaders, and from 1987 became known as Unit Managers.

#### Uniforms through the years

In Tasmania's early Civil Defence days (pre-1970s), uniforms were practical and understated, with navy blue being the standard colour. The blue uniforms were second-hand from the Air Force, while white uniforms were used by Welfare and SES members. The tunics were adapted from Prison Officer uniforms and over time they were phased out and replaced with sports coats and blazers.

Today's PPC consists of highly visible orange, to improve safety and recognition during rescue operations. Today, that bright

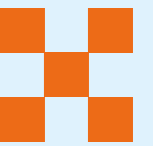
orange is a proud symbol of the SES – and aligns with the national branding and identity of SES.

#### Roles and functions

Over the decades, SES members have supported communities in many ways, including land and sea searches, emergency communications during fires, managing Emergency Operations Centres, road and rail response, flood response, oil pollution and chemical spill response, storm damage response, winching operations, municipal emergency activities, logistics support, and assisting with mine accidents, whale strandings, and logging and forestry incidents.



# Key milestones



## 1960s–1970s

### From Civil Defence to disaster response

What is now known as the Tasmania State Emergency Service (SES) originated with the Civil Defence Legion during WWII. During the 1960s and 1970s, the focus shifted from wartime preparation to managing natural disasters. Major events like the 1967 Hobart bushfires helped to drive this change.

RIGHT: A home ablaze in the 1967 bushfires. The Mercury, TAHO (AA193-1-1641)



## 1976

### State Emergency Service established

The SES was formally established under the *Emergency Services Act 1976*, providing a clear legislative framework for protecting life and property during emergencies.



## 1980

### Road Accident Assistance

As part of Road Accident Assistance, Road Accident Rescue was introduced – now named Road Crash Rescue – expanding the SES role in responding to serious road incidents.



## 1990

### Statewide emergency management planning introduced

The first *Tasmania Emergency Management Plan (TEMP)* was issued, setting out whole-of-government arrangements for managing major emergencies.

## 2006

### Establishment of the *Emergency Management Act 2006*

The Act replaced earlier legislation and strengthened Tasmania's approach to emergency planning, coordination and risk management.

## 2007

### Emergency Management Unit

Established to lead statewide emergency management planning and risk reduction activities.

## 2015

### Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day)

WOW Day became a national day of recognition during National Volunteer Week. It celebrates the vital contribution that SES volunteers make to communities.

## 2018



### Flood risk capability strengthened

The Flood Risk Unit was established to coordinate whole of government flood risk management. Delivering world-leading flood mapping, supports public education, and provides specialist flood intelligence during operations.

### Volunteer Association re-established

The Tasmania State Emergency Service Volunteer Association was established as a non-profit organisation to advocate for SES volunteers. The Association supports unit leadership, works cooperatively with SES management and government, and focuses on volunteer skills, safety, and wellbeing.

## 2021



### Supporting volunteers

The Volunteer Strategy and Support Unit (VSSU) was established to strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention across the SES and Tasmania Fire Service (TFS).

### Public Information and Warnings Unit

The TFS/SES Public Information Unit was established in March 2021. It provides timely, targeted and tailored information and warnings to empower communities to make informed decisions, to take protective action, and to reduce the potential impacts and consequences of a hazard.

### Emergency Services Computer Aided Dispatch (ESCAD)

In October 2021, SES moved to the ESCAD system through FireComm, improving response efficiency and enabling automated paging of SES units. This change introduced a unified approach to command and control.



## 2022

### Australian Flood Warning System

The SES Flood Warning System was implemented in August 2022, aligning with the Australian Warning System.



# SES badges and logos

## HISTORIC



\*While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, some badges may have been omitted unintentionally.

## CURRENT



# SES values



### Professionalism

- Uphold the SES Principles and Code of Conduct.
- Diligently pursue ongoing skills development and learning.
- Challenge and innovate, take action to fix problems.
- Be accountable for your actions.
- Protect the good image and reputation of the SES.
- Be safety conscious for one another and the community.

### Respectfulness

- Contribute towards a united and supportive team.
- Communicate well and regularly.
- Be compassionate, understanding and empathetic.
- Be equitable and value diversity at work and in the community.
- Treat all people with dignity, respect and honesty.
- Build good working relationships within and outside the SES.

### Commitment

- Commit to helping others – dedication to duty.
- Stay proudly connected to your community.
- Safely challenge individual and team abilities.
- Attend training and operations, but know when to have a break.
- Don't just join for yourself, but stay for the team.
- Support the volunteer ethos.

### Integrity

- Communicate clearly, consistently and with accuracy.
- Be honest, trustworthy and discreet.
- Have realistic expectations of yourself and others.
- Lead by example, with honour and strength of character.
- Be ethical and values-driven.
- Look after yourself and each other, and seek help if you need it.



# A long view of service

When the formation of the State Emergency Service occurred in 1975, I joined the Regional Headquarters Unit (RHU) South.

In those early days, we were issued with a white helmet, boots, and blue overalls – with side badges for roles such as Rescue, First Aid, and Communications. After the SES received Royal Assent, we were given round SES badges, unit identification, and orange helmets.

In 1977, I attended the National Emergency Service College at Mt. Macedon in Victoria, where I completed a three-week Rescue Instructor Course. The training covered height safety and light rescue techniques, and provided a strong foundation for my future work in the SES.

One moment that is forever etched in my memory occurred on Saturday, 5 January 1975. I was at the Elwick drive-in theatre with family and friends when an urgent message suddenly appeared on the screen: “Tasman Bridge Knocked Down.” Eastern Shore residents were advised to return home via the Bridgewater Bridge.

My brother Malcolm, an ambulance officer with the Tasmanian Ambulance Service and Civil Defence, immediately left to assist with rescue and first aid. That left me responsible for driving eight family members home in my car as the situation unfolded.

Malcolm went on to start the Brighton SES Unit. I joined him, while remaining with RHU South until the Clarence Unit later amalgamated with RHU South

about twenty years ago. In the early days, our equipment was stored at a private residence, until Brighton Council approved the use of a storeroom at Pontville Hall, which also became our training base.

We had no official transport and relied on our own private vehicles for callouts. To change that, we began fundraising – including riding a push bike with a trailer from Launceston to Brighton, collecting sponsorships and donations along the way. Council support later helped purchase a Ford 351 V8 ex-ambulance. A second ex-ambulance followed, partly funded through an SES grant, although unfortunately neither vehicle had a radio.

At a field exercise at Chauncy Vale with other units, Brighton subsequently demonstrated communications using tin cans and string between vehicles! The point was well made, and that simple demonstration was enough to prompt the Regional Officer to quickly supply us with proper vehicle radios. Thanks, Geoff [Marsh]!

“*I was at the Elwick drive-in theatre with family and friends when an urgent message suddenly appeared on the screen: “Tasman Bridge Knocked Down.”*”

”

RIGHT: 50 year celebration for Peter Geard (centre) with fellow volunteers.

BELOW RIGHT: Brighton's fundraising message trailer.

BELOW: Peter in helicopter.



# The call that changed everything

## What first inspired you to join the SES?

After leaving university without completing my degree, I was unemployed when I received a call from Gayle Paltridge (then Director of SES). That call led to employment and a role helping establish a 24-hour radio and phone emergency listening service – even though I knew virtually nothing about the SES or Civil Defence at the time.



## What do you remember about your early days of training and induction?

There was little formal induction. Training focused mainly on preparing radio operators for our role as an emergency listening and communications service. We supported national parks officers, forestry officers, and other field officers who had no other means of reliable contact.

## What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

One of the most memorable events was the cement train derailment at the Emu River Bridge on 16 January 1986, when a truck tried to beat the train across the crossing... and didn't.

Another significant event was the Legionnaires' disease outbreak in Burnie in 1989, which required a coordinated and sustained response.

## What achievement are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of helping to strengthen the professional skills and capabilities of our SES units, particularly in road crash rescue and search and rescue – which I loved.

We ran a wide range of exercises, including helicopter and search and rescue operations. The Defence Department provided annual funding which also allowed us to run major exercises to help build our operational strength.

“*I'm most proud of helping to strengthen the professional skills and capabilities of our SES units, particularly in road crash rescue and search and rescue – which I loved.*”



Wivenhoe Train Disaster, 16 January 1986.



Paul (left) receiving a certificate from the Australian Counter Disaster College.

## What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

Supporting our staff was often challenging. An unpopular military style structure and 'thin' budget led to a high turnover of staff – with no overtime or time in lieu available. Moving to Burnie provided some distance from headquarters, and later changes under Fred [Bevis Dutton] finally allowed more flexible and supportive working arrangements.

## What equipment, training, or cultural shifts have made the biggest impact?

From a volunteer point of view, the introduction of road crash rescue, storm and flood response, and dedicated search and rescue roles made a huge difference – particularly in communities like Latrobe.

## Is there a particular lesson or piece of wisdom you would pass on to new volunteers?

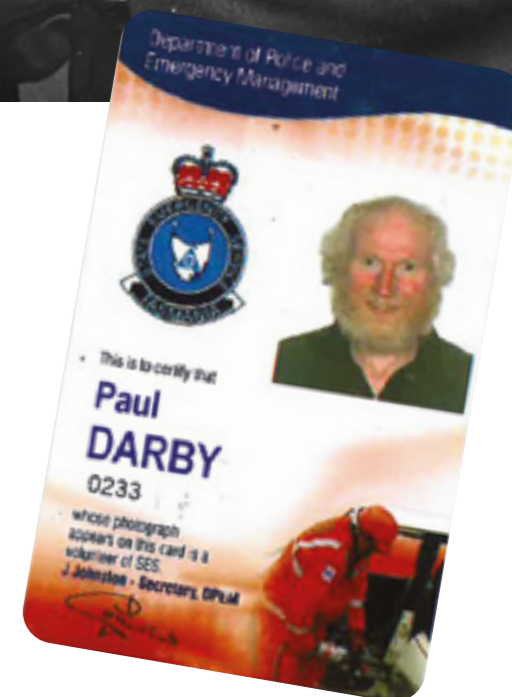
Have the right attitude and a genuine willingness to help. Being available when you're needed is essential. And yes – doing as you're told helps too!

## How did your involvement in the SES influence your life outside the service?

The knowledge and hands-on skills I gained, especially operating winches and hydraulic tools, proved invaluable later in life. I even relied on those capabilities when constructing my own two-storey log cabin!

## What does the SES's 50 year anniversary mean to you?

I think it's a great milestone. It will bring the SES to the attention of a lot more people and help raise its profile in the community.



# Shaping the modern SES: from former Director to active volunteer

I served as Director of the SES for 21 of its first 50 years, following the establishment of the Tasmania SES under the *Emergency Services Act 1976*. Today, I'm now a proud SES volunteer with the Huon Valley Unit.

The origins of the SES reach back to 1939 and the establishment of the Civil Defence Legion, which was formed under the *Civil Defence (Emergency Powers) Act 1939*. The founding Director of Civil Defence happened to be my great-uncle, Mr G. A. Walch.

Through the organisation, Tasmanians began preparing for World War II and civil hazards such as the threat of aerial bombing. Key roles back then were to provide Air Raid Protection, community engagement, emergency planning, and coordination across local and state government agencies.

As skills and experience developed within the Civil Defence organisation, responsibilities were expanded to include natural hazards such as flooding and severe weather events. Although not formally named the SES until 1976, the core roles and functions were already in place, allowing it to assume statutory responsibilities immediately.

I reflect on my time in the SES since 2001 with great pride and gratitude for all those who served their communities before me, alongside me during my time in the SES, and since. I am especially proud of the strong SES identity that now exists across Australia today. Every SES staff member and volunteer has helped build that identity through professionalism, respect, integrity, and their unwavering commitment to helping communities in their time of need.

When I started with the SES at age 39, there were just over 400 volunteers and only 16 staff. Since then, volunteer numbers, equipment, training, and facilities have grown significantly. Supporting legislation was strengthened with the *Emergency Management Act 2006*, which replaced the earlier Act. While funding has increased over time, public expectations, workplace standards, and new technologies continue to evolve – so there's always going to be a need for more improvement.

“*By far, the most important asset we have in the SES is its people. I'm enormously proud of what we've achieved over all these years.*”



Andrew Lea ESM, Director  
2001 - 2022

By far, the most important asset we have in the SES is its people. I'm enormously proud of what we've achieved over all these years.

While my 21 years as Director saw significant change, the fundamentals remained the same – to support emergency management and a motivated, skilled and committed volunteer workforce to deliver essential emergency services across the state, and to maintain the systems that hold it all together.

On this 50th anniversary, Tasmanian communities should be enormously grateful for the commitment and achievements of all SES members – past and present.

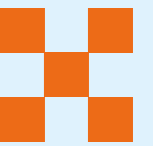


CLOCKWISE from top left:

With our team at the National Disaster Rescue Challenge which we hosted in 2017.  
Andrew presenting at the Fire and Emergency Services Conference, Burnie.  
Presenting Ian 'Snow' Nielsen ESM with his Life Membership Award in 2017.  
Volunteer training at Huon Valley Unit.  
Presenting Richard Elliot ESM his SES Long Service Medal in 2007.



# 50 years of SES vehicles



## 1970s



Civil Defence vehicle



9.2 secondary rescue truck



2026 rescue truck



## 2000-2026

## 1980s



Proud new Landcruiser for Waratah Emergency Service, 1989



1980 Clarence Unit mobile operations



Road Accident Rescue Vehicle



1994 Mobile Operations Bus



## 1990s

# A different kind of rescue vehicle!

“ I rebuilt this car from the ground up at a time when SES units were responsible for building or sourcing their own vehicles. ”



FAST FAX	
SAND BLASTER	
VEHICLE:	'68 VW Baja Bug
ENGINE:	VW 1600 dual relief case, 1824cc
INDUCTION:	Single 40mm DCN Weber, fabricated manifold
HEADS:	VW, ported & CCd
CRANK:	76mm stroke, 8 dowel
RODS:	Holden Starfire
PISTONS:	Mahle 85.5mm, 8.2:1 CR
IGNITION:	Bosch 009 mechanical advance
EXHAUST:	4-1 Quiet Pak
DRIVETRAIN	
TRANSAXLE:	'72 VW IRS 4-speed, Custom pressure plate, lightened flywheel, Bug Pak quick shifter
CLUTCH:	
WHEELS & TYRES	
FRONT:	Custom 15x5.5, Ansen 165-75
REAR:	Custom 15x8, Alliance 11R15LT

We had recently completed our Toyota Dyna rescue truck, and along the way, collected many various emergency vehicle lights and accessories.

One training night, we hatched a plan to create a display to attract new members. After a couple of beers, the plan for the SES buggy was born!

The buggy generated a good bit of interest, and I entered it in a couple of car shows in full SES trim, and before long, a magazine contacted me about running a story on it.

The buggy was only fitted with the SES gear a couple of times for promotional occasions, but it certainly made an impression!

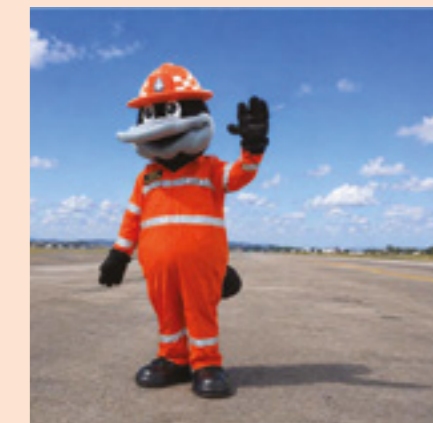
Not long after, I received an offer on it that was simply too good to refuse, and it became someone else's pride and joy – less the lights and magnetic signs, of course!



Article in the Fast Fours and Rotaries Magazine, November 1993.

# Paddy the platypus

## An SES icon



Paddy the SES platypus was 'born' in Tasmania in August 2019 and is the proud national mascot of the SES.

The platypus was chosen because it is closely linked with waterways and flood events – key areas where SES volunteers are often called into action.

Paddy is a true local – right at home in rivers and creeks and perfectly placed to help teach communities how to stay safe during floods.

Paddy's main role is community engagement, education, and visibility. You'll often see Paddy popping up at community

events such as local parades, mascot races, and open days, bringing that special SES energy and friendly presence to the community. Through these appearances, Paddy helps to raise awareness of the SES, encourage community preparedness, and support volunteer recruitment.



# From automatic sign-up to a lifetime of service

I joined the SES in April 1984, at the same time as I joined Ambulance Tasmania as a volunteer.

The funny story there was, that if you joined T.A.S. (as it was known then) you were automatically signed up to the local SES unit – so I became a volunteer twice over! What started as an automatic membership in George Town – simply to complete a first aid course – turned out to become a lifelong commitment. Almost 42 years later, I'm still proudly serving in the SES.

Until 2009, the George Town Unit operated from the Ambulance Tasmania facility. We also used part of the municipal hall, where radios were locked up and used in an emergency. That arrangement changed when radio technology and statewide facilities became operational. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and SES

then followed, enabling co-location of the two services – a decision that the SES Unit has never looked back from.

During this time, the SES focused heavily on traditional search and rescue responses, while Ambulance Tasmania handled Road Accident Rescue (RAR). Our core capabilities included radio communications, lighting, and foot-based search and rescue. Annual exercises tested specialist skills, with awards presented for communications exercises (often done blindfolded!), lighting, rope/winch exercises, navigation, site assessments, and even uniform consistency.

In 1988–89, the transition to an SES-based Road Accident Rescue model began. Responsibility moved from Ambulance Tasmania to the SES for rural areas, followed by an MOU enabling SES to provide country Road Crash Rescue (RCR) coverage across 18 councils. I drafted the first MOU for George Town and completed RCR training at the Police Academy, assessed by Colin Ransley, using the hand hydraulic equipment of the time.

So much has changed. We now have modern uniforms, PPC, outstanding RCR equipment, and an ever-improving fleet of appliances. Health and wellbeing services are simply amazing, which puts our people's general and mental health at the forefront.

What has never changed is the camaraderie between members and different units, united by a shared commitment to community safety and emergency response, forging lasting friendships.

It is still an honour and privilege to serve the community in which I've worked, and now retired to.

We often see people at their worst and their most difficult moments, yet SES volunteers are the ones to try and assist in so many ways. This is something that is not lost on me, and I will never take it for granted.



Andrew (right) attending the AFAC National Memorial Service in Canberra.



Rescue training in the late 1980s.

“*We often see people at their worst and their most difficult moments, yet SES volunteers are the ones to try and assist in so many ways. This is something that is not lost on me, and I will never take for granted.*”



ATV training

# A legacy of leadership and care

## Honouring Bevis 'Fred' Dutton ESM

It is with great sadness that SES acknowledges the passing of Bevis 'Fred' Dutton ESM, SES Life Member on 30 March 2026, aged 79 years, after a long and courageous fight.

Naomi Dance, Coordinator Volunteer Strategy, VSSU, was fortunate enough to sit down and interview Fred and his family to reflect on his valued history with SES. We were honoured to have captured Fred's memories before his passing.

### What first inspired you to join the SES?

I was 19 years old when I joined the Civil Defence. At the time, I didn't much like living out of a suitcase and in 1979, I decided it was time to settle down. I completed the rescue course in Mount Macedon, and the following year I became the rescue instructor for Devonport, Latrobe and Sheffield. Not long after, a job came up, and I applied for it.

### What do you remember about your early days of training and induction?

In those early days, much of the training still reflected practices developed during the Blitz in London. There was a heavy focus on the impacts of atomic bombs – heat effects, blast effects, overpressure, and similar hazards. Nuclear-related training formed a significant part of our preparation.

After the *Emergency Services Act 1976* was established, the emphasis on nuclear threats gradually reduced, although it still lingered in the background. At that time, we were essentially trained as Civil Defence Officers. Australia had an obligation to provide independent

personnel during overseas conflicts to ensure that civilian populations were being treated fairly, and our training reflected that responsibility.

### What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

I started in September, and just a few months later, in December, a tanker ran aground at the mouth of the Tamar River. To lighten the vessel, the hatch covers had to be removed and raw petrol was pumped straight into tanks onshore. If any of that had ignited, it could have blown half of George Town off the map!

Another major job was the project later nicknamed 'the Road to Nowhere'. At the time, Premier Robin Gray pushed for the construction of a road from Circular Head to the Pieman River – what is now known as the Norfolk Road. The SES handled all the logistics to support police throughout the entire build, which lasted many months and was a massive undertaking. Police and SES were involved to prevent environmentalists stopping the road from being built and were stationed at four

different locations. We provided everything – from washing, food, accommodation, water, toilets, fuel, and a radio network across the whole operation. The construction took eight to ten months, and then we also had to manage the protesters, who chained themselves to the bulldozers.

Then there was the 1983 Franklin River Blockade. While the SES wasn't directly involved in the main response, I spent a lot of time installing high frequency radio antennas in remote locations – often in terrible weather, hanging out of helicopters. It was not exactly comfortable work!

### Can you describe a time when the SES made a significant difference to a community?

From the administrative side, a colleague, Mike Tarant, and I developed the idea of resilience in emergency management. Up until the early 1990s, if you asked anyone where the priorities lay, the answer was always – 'more fire engines, more equipment'. The focus was entirely on resources, and people missed the point that some fires you simply can't fight.

We introduced the concept of resilience and brought together a group of experts to develop a risk assessment model. I later sat on the committee that drafted the Australia–New Zealand Standard 4360 for risk management. The North-West region produced the first regional risk assessment in Australia, and soon, every municipality had one. They were all coordinated, and the process made a lasting impact across the country. It strengthened the full cycle of emergency management – prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. Before this, almost no one was focusing on prevention or preparedness, but the risk assessment process changed that entirely.

### What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

One of the biggest challenges we faced was chronic underfunding. Even trying to secure a reliable Toyota Hilux with a proper equipment pack was almost impossible, and many units relied on second hand ambulances. We were available 24/7, and our home phone number was even listed in the telephone book, which placed an enormous burden on our families.

That changed later on, but in those early years the demands were constant. The support I received from my wife, Lynne, and from my family was incredibly important. It wasn't just a job, it was a life choice.



“*I'm most proud of establishing the SES Units – working with the local councils, advertising for volunteers, and finding the right people to lead them.*”



FROM TOP: Fred was known to regularly smoke his pipe at work; Opening of the Burnie headquarters building; Inspecting new emergency communications equipment in Burnie, *The Advocate*, 9 June 1976.

**What achievement are you most proud of?**

I'm most proud of establishing the SES Units – working with the local councils, advertising for volunteers, and finding the right people to lead them.

I'm also proud of the Lifeline project, where we studied what communities actually needed during an emergency. We wrote the documentation that was eventually approved for the Charles Sturt University's Bachelor of Emergency Management, which helped formalise and professionalise emergency management education.

**What equipment, training, or cultural shifts have made the biggest impact?**

The biggest impacts came from the formalisation of training for volunteers.

Introducing Vocational Education and Training (VET), along with having qualified assessors under the scheme, significantly lifted standards.

Another major improvement was achieving consistency in road crash rescue training across the entire state.

“ ... don't go in with the preconceived idea that there's a perfect answer about what to do, where to do it, when to do it, or how to do it. You have to be adaptable. ”



Fred (second from right) in his dress tunic.

**Is there a particular lesson or piece of wisdom you would pass on to new volunteers?**

I always remember a lesson that came up whenever things started going wrong. Someone would inevitably ask, "What else can go wrong?" and that's when Murphy's Law kicks in: if something can go wrong, it will.

If you're in the SES and involved in operations, don't go in with the preconceived idea that there's a perfect answer about what to do, where to do it, when to do it, or how to do it. You have to be adaptable. You make a lot of decisions with very little information, and you just have to swing the blows as they come.

In 32 years, I never had a single volunteer or staff member say to me, "No, I won't do that." Not one.

**How did your involvement in the SES influence your life outside the service?**

When I left the SES, it hit me harder than I expected. I went from a role full of pressure and authority to suddenly having nothing. I visited the department's psychiatrist, who looked at my file, shook his head, and asked two questions. First was, "how many coffees do you have a day?" I counted around 13 or 15. He told me I was switching to decaf, and he meant it. Then he asked if I smoked. Which I did. So, I quit cigarettes cold turkey and started drinking 'fake coffee' (decaf), and the change had an immediate effect.

Once you accept that the next generation is stepping up and carrying things forward, you can finally relax and do other things. Lynne and I went back to

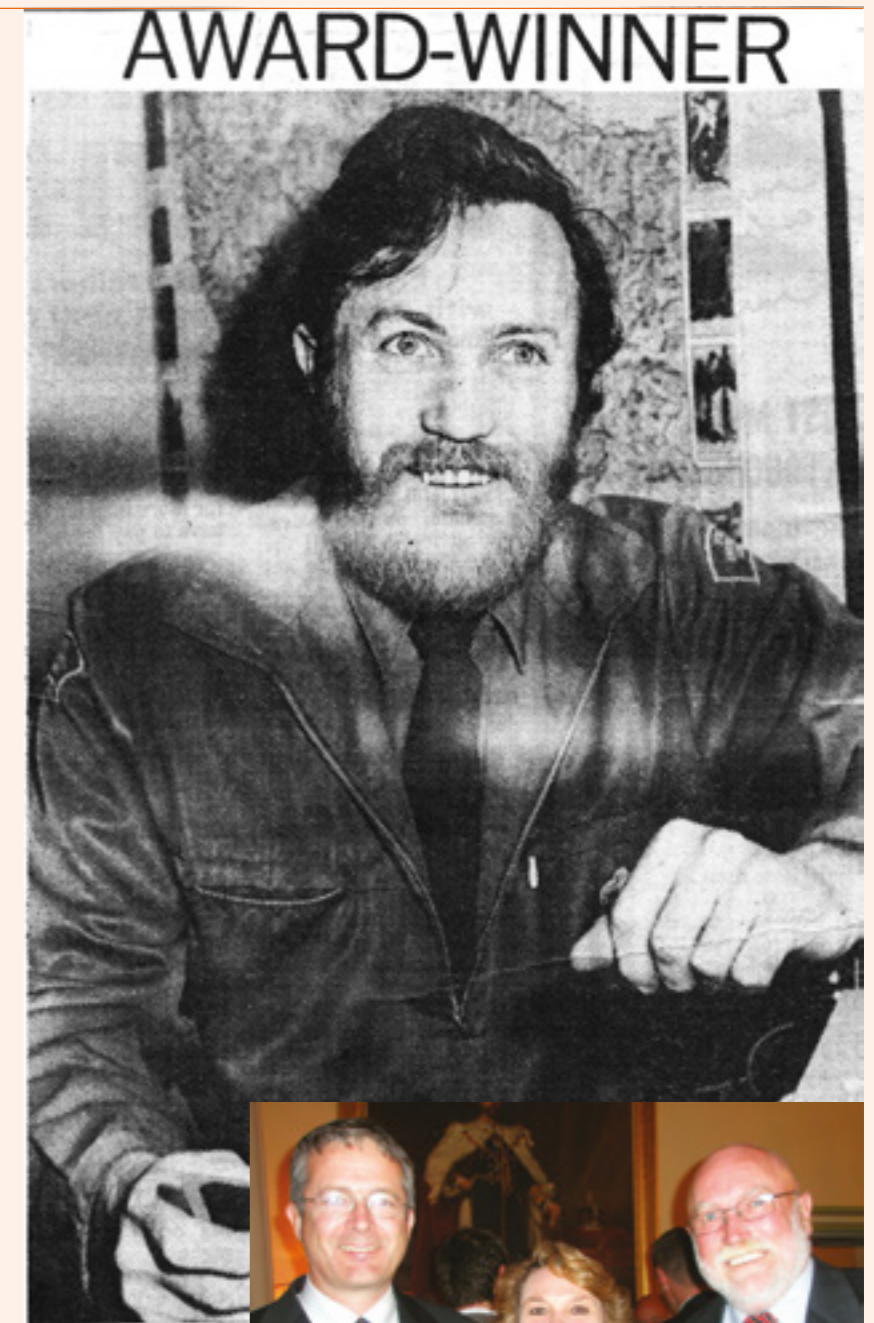
bushwalking, and I kept busy in my shed welding – though I kept managing to set myself on fire!

After that, I worked at a golf course, in charge of the crew, designing drainage, using big mowers, and cutting down trees using skills I'd learned over the years.

**What does the SES's 50-year anniversary mean to you?**

I'm quietly surprised that the organisation hasn't just disappeared in a puff of smoke, especially considering how much the world has changed over the last 20 years. It wouldn't have surprised me if it had. But the inherent strength of the SES has carried it through to this milestone.

Every time I see SES volunteers, they look highly professional and are excellent ambassadors for the organisation, and I see no reason why the SES won't continue well into the future.



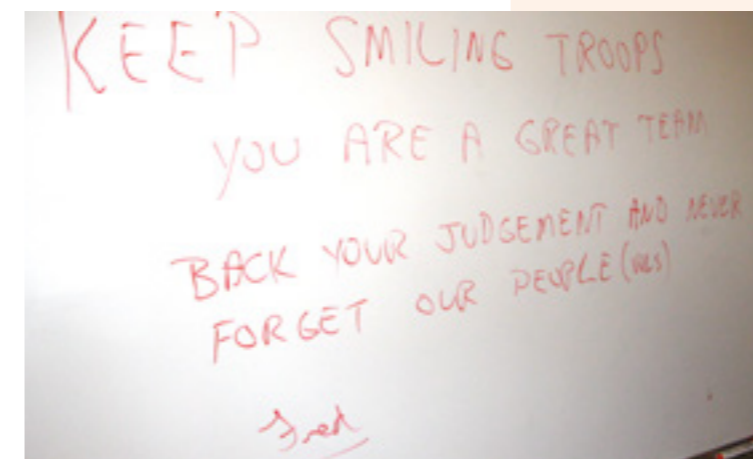
CLOCKWISE from top:

Fred received an Outstanding Young Australians Award for training volunteers. *The Examiner*, 16 August 1978.

Left to right: Andrew Lea ESM, Toni Brown ESM, and Fred at Government House, for the presentation of Toni's ESM.

Naomi Dance interviewing Fred.

Fred's last message to the SES.



# Events that made us



Aerial view of Kings bridge, quarry, Ritches Mill, Rowing Club and flood waters.  
Source: QVMAG Collection (QVM:1983:P:1151)



Graders clean up after the 1960 flood.  
Barry Winburn, The Mercury Newspaper



1967 bushfires - the Mill in Gore St, South Hobart.  
TAHO (NS5391)

## 1912

### Mt Lyell Mine Fire 12 October

Fire broke out in the pump house on the 700-foot level. With no emergency warning system in place, rescue equipment and teams were rushed to the scene by train and by sea. Seventy miners escaped, 58 were rescued after spending 107 hours underground, and 42 lost their lives.

ABOVE: North Lyell disaster. Police and onlooker at tunnel.  
TAHO (NS3245/1/291)

BELOW: View of the Tamar Rowing Club, Launceston, Tasmania, 1929 flood.  
QVMAG Collection (QVM:1983:P:1146)



## 1929

### The great South Esk flood 4-6 April

Severe flooding of the South Esk River left 4,500 people homeless, with the historic Ross Bridge completely submerged.

#### Cascade Dam burst

Locally known as the Briseis Dam, burst with a loss of 14 lives.

## 1947

### Hobart floods

June

Devastating flash floods hit Hobart and southern Tasmania. After a series of coastal cyclones with record-breaking rainfall, the Hobart Rivulet burst its banks, inundating the CBD and nearby suburbs, resulting in widespread property damage.



A truck submerged in the 1947 flood in Hobart.  
The Mercury Newspaper

## 1960

### Hobart Rivulet floods April

A torrent from Mount Wellington and the Cascades flooded the site of today's Cat and Fiddle Arcade, bringing water, logs and debris roaring through the warehouse.

#### New Norfolk floods

Flooding affected several areas of New Norfolk as the river rose to 6.40 metres.



Aerial view looking downstream from Boyer Mill.  
Libraries Tasmania, (Pauline Plunkett Collection).

## 1967

### Black Tuesday bushfires 7 February

Among the deadliest bushfires in Australia's history, the Black Tuesday fires destroyed over a thousand homes across southern Tasmania and 64 lives. Although the SES did not exist in its modern form, the scale of this event was a catalyst for improving coordinated state emergency management.



1967 fires.  
TAHO (AA193/1/1644)



1960 flood Hobart Rivulet flood.  
The Mercury Newspaper

## 1975

### Tasman Bridge Disaster 5 January

When the carrier ship, *Lake Illawarra*, hit the bridge, two pylons and three spans of decking covering a 73m section of the Tasman Bridge were destroyed and 12 lives lost.

## 1986

### Rail accident Emu River 16 January

A cement train derailed on the Emu River bridge after colliding with a semi-trailer truck at a level crossing in Wivenhoe. Two of the three engines pulling the Burnie bound train, and five wagons plunged off the rail bridge into the Emu River. The truck driver, train driver, and train fireman died in the accident.

## 1998

### Deloraine flood 22 September

A deluge that dumped 100mm of rain on the Western Tiers in 24 hours resulted in the largest flood in Deloraine in 70 years.



Emu River train derailment. 1986  
SES



The Tasman Bridge with missing spans, after being hit by the *Lake Illawarra* in 1975.  
TAHO (CBE43-6-1-1)

# 2003

## South Esk floods again 3–14 August

Major flooding affected the middle reaches of the South Esk River, resulting in the evacuation of caravan parks at Longford. At the same time in the Huon Valley, three bridges were damaged, and homes were flooded in Huonville.



2011 floods isolated rural properties. SES



Floods in North-West Tasmania, 2016. SES



COVID emergency services debrief. SES

# 2007

## Major flooding statewide 9–14 August

Major flooding occurred in the Forth River, with at least 10 families evacuated. The Ringarooma River also flooded, forcing the evacuation of over 40 homes and causing major damage to roads and bridges.

The Tayatea Bridge over the Arthur River was washed away, and debris snarled the safety cable of the Fatman barge on the Pieman River.

Flooding also reached the River Derwent, closing major roads and disrupting several schools.

# 2010

## St Marys flooding 28–29 May

Floodwaters flowed through the main street of St Marys. A car carrying four people was swept away – rescued by locals with a bulldozer. Homes and businesses sustained extensive damage.

# 2011

## Mersey and Meander River Floods

12–17 January

Major flooding hit the Mersey and Meander Rivers, forcing rescues at Basin Creek and the evacuation of around 100 homes and businesses. Infrastructure in the north-west was washed away, St Helens was cut off and sections of the Tasman Highway were destroyed.

# 2013

## Dunalley bushfires January

In early January, hot windy conditions fanned up to 40 fires throughout Tasmania. The main fire started near Forcett, in the state's south-east, and caused significant damage to local townships, particularly Dunalley, east of Hobart, where more than half of the town's buildings and the primary school were destroyed. Another significant fire front was located at Lake Repulse and Bicheno.

# 2016

## Major flooding statewide June–July

Severe flooding in the Forth, Mersey, South Esk, North Esk, Huon and Derwent river basins resulted in three fatalities and over \$180 million in damage. This was the worst flood ever recorded in Latrobe and the most significant flood of the Huon River in 20 years.

# 2018

## Southern Tasmania floods May

Significant flooding of the Hobart Rivulet, New Town Rivulet and overland flows in greater Hobart, Kingston and Blackmans Bay. More than \$135 million damage was caused.

# 2020–2022

## COVID-19 pandemic

SES staff and volunteers played a significant part in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping people safe and delivering emergency services 24/7.

SES Emergency Management Unit (EMU) staff were instrumental in establishing an interim consequence planning structure prior to the declaration of the State of Emergency and the activation of the State Control Centre on 19 March 2020 (both firsts for this state).

SES operations staff were at the forefront of coordinating and conducting quarantine compliance checks, in support of Tasmania Police. Approximately 85,800 checks were conducted between 25 March 2020 and 15 January 2022.

# 2022

## Flooding in the North and North-West October

Major flooding occurred in the Mersey, North Esk and South Esk Rivers, with record flood levels in the Meander and Tinamirakuna/Macquarie and Duck Rivers. Multiple dwellings and businesses flooded, especially in Latrobe and Deloraine.



Latrobe in flood, 2022. SES



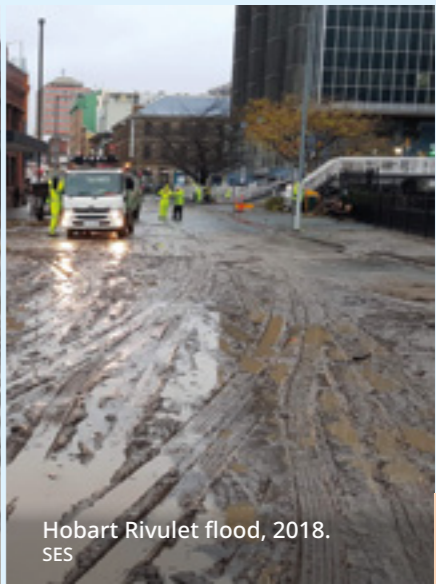
2007 floods. SES



Dunalley bushfire, 2013. TFS



Latrobe streets flooded, 2016. SES



Hobart Rivulet flood, 2018. SES

# A lifetime of quiet commitment

## What first inspired you to join the SES?

I was already serving with the TFS at the time, and many of us moved across to the SES together. We all knew each other well, so it felt like a natural transition.

## What do you remember about your early days of training and induction?

Training in those early days was largely led by Peter Geard. We also travelled to Mornington and Hobart for hands on sessions and took part in weekend training at Waratah and a few other places.

“  
*Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be flexible, don't stress about things, and most importantly... have a good time. Every job will be different.*  
”

## What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

One memorable event was providing support during a bushwalking event at Chauncy Vale, where an injured walker was carefully transported out by four-wheel drive due to the distance and terrain.

## Can you describe a time when the SES made a significant difference to a community?

During the 2003 bushfires, rural properties were threatened for around two weeks. The SES played a vital support role to the TFS, particularly with managing road closures and providing catering. It was a major event for the community and was eventually coordinated from the town as the response grew.

## What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

A major challenge occurred during heavy snowfall in Hobart, when we stayed overnight at the unit on standby. In the early days, limited resources meant using personal vehicles, as the unit's first ambulances carried only two people. Because of this, I often used my own vehicle with a winch onboard when responding to jobs!

## What achievement are you most proud of?

I am proud of my 40 years of service. But I'm not in the SES for glory. It's something I genuinely enjoy, especially being able to assist the community. There is also a strong sense of family connection throughout the emergency services, which makes the experience even more meaningful.

## Is there a particular lesson or piece of wisdom you would pass on to new volunteers?

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be flexible, don't stress about things, and most importantly... have a good time. Every job will be different.

## What does the SES's 50-year anniversary mean to you?

We've certainly come a long way in 50 years.

Council provided the funding, and volunteers built the SES units from scratch with the help of Peter Geard, who was a builder. Before the unit was constructed, we met at the Pontville Hall, so seeing how far we've progressed since those early days is something I'm really proud of.



James (centre) receiving the SES Long Service Medal 35 year clasp.



Brighton early rescue vehicles were from Ambulance Tasmania.

# Training, teamwork and getting the job done

Since I commenced with the SES, training has changed significantly. In the early years it was run at unit level, and was informal, practical, and engaging. Competency was judged by the training officer and unit manager – a style that kept many of us involved and keen to learn.

Our training was hands-on and often quite inventive. We carried out rescue exercises in a 900mm stormwater system under the streets of Latrobe, and practiced rescuing someone from the container crane on the Devonport Wharf, lowering a stretcher vertically some 20m to the ground. We also ran an exercise transferring a patient from the bow of a port tug on the wharf. I was the patient

“*Our training was hands-on and often quite inventive. We carried out rescue exercises in a 900mm stormwater system under the streets of Latrobe, and practiced rescuing someone from the container crane on the Devonport Wharf...*”

and was a bit nervous as I passed from the vessel to the wharf... I had visions of being dropped in and having to do a Harry Houdini act to get out!

Often, members' children would be roped in to be 'lost persons,' stretcher patients or first aid casualties. They seemed to have as much fun as we did!

We practiced knots and lashings – tripods, sheer legs and gin poles – and we used them to lift and lower our equipment. Behind our Latrobe unit was a deep creek bed where we regularly constructed a flying fox to transport stretcher patients across the creek on rafts that were made from 200-litre drums. Securing a drum to the line with 12x12 lashings was quite a challenge in itself!

We also ran a few exercises in the freezer at the port just to see how we performed at sub-freezing temperatures. It quickly taught us the importance of short exposure times, large crews and good handovers between teams. We got far more out of those exercises than just cold hands.

Alongside this, we covered the essentials – map reading, radio work, basic traffic management, and first aid – as we still do today.

## Weekends away

Weekend training 30 or 40 years ago was a big event, and always well received by members. North-West units would often spend time at the Savage River Unit for a weekend of fun activities, including

things like winching cars up steep inclines, building a punt out of 200-litre drums to get a car across a tailings dam, searching in scrub, and of course, a lot of tall stories after the work was done!

Navigation challenges were a big part of the yearly calendar – they were great fun and hard work if you wanted to be in the winner's circle at the end of the twelve hours. As a member of the Mersey Gremlins, we had our share of wins and losses. In one memorable event, we were running close to the expiry time, as usual, when we came to a control that Bevis Dutton was starting to dismantle. Despite having two more controls to collect, we didn't argue, just got on our way, picked up the two extra controls on the way and made it back with four minutes to spare! Bevis arrived a few minutes later and made a big noise about how late the Gremlins were going to be and a few other comments until someone informed him we were already back. His surprise was priceless: *"They can't be... they left the last control the same time as me, and I was driving back."*

## Jobs

Back years ago, there seemed to be less jobs than today, but the jobs were often more challenging. We responded to all manner of jobs – from lost people, storm events, sieges (with police officers and guns), horses stuck in muddy dams, road crashes, and lots of public events doing traffic management (not the most fun job).

“*... Search and Rescue have taken me all over Tasmania, and ... the mainland, doing some remarkably interesting and challenging jobs – and meeting some wonderful people ...*”

But one traffic job stands out. About 39 years ago, during a cycling event, my wife Pam was doing the radio work on one of our old pack set radios. When she needed a break, I took over. Jack Armsby promptly asked if I could put Pam back on the radio as her voice transmitted better than mine! I told him no – she was in the back [of the vehicle] feeding the baby, and not with a bottle!

Over the years, jobs with the Mersey Unit and North-West Search and Rescue have taken me all over Tasmania, and a few on the mainland, doing some remarkably interesting and challenging jobs – meeting some wonderful people in SES, other agencies, and those we have helped.

## Unit working bees

In the early days, budgets were tight and equipment scarce. We were always terribly busy with building projects – converting buildings to suit our ever-growing needs – and always making do, recycling materials, and building what we needed ourselves. The Mersey unit even passed the hat around to buy and convert an old truck into our first rescue vehicle. It was capable of 80 km/h downhill, and it wasn't much, but it served us well for several years and we eventually got our money back.



ABOVE: Shell of first rescue vehicle.  
BELOW: Conversion of old truck into rescue vehicle.



# A celebration of confidence and community

## What first inspired you to join the SES?

Living in Savage River, there wasn't a lot to do, and I wanted to be part of the local community atmosphere, so joining the SES felt like the right thing to do.

## What do you remember about your early days of training and induction?

At Savage River, we had a fantastic crew drawn from the mines, with everyone bringing different and unique skills and experiences. Being isolated from outside help meant that we relied on one another and worked very much as a single team.

## What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

One of the most significant events was the 1982 Savage River fire, part of widespread fires across the North-West and West Coast. With 100% support from the mines, we managed communications, logistics, and the community shelter, while the surrounding SES units worked together. This prompted the later establishment of evacuation centres.

## Can you describe a time when the SES made a significant difference to a community?

The Savage River community was incredibly supportive, with the mine, council, and SES working closely together. Establishing an SES unit alongside the mine's rescue obligations created a dual role arrangement that proved highly effective for the town. It was a unique setup that worked exceptionally well.

## What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

Being a woman in the SES brought challenges I didn't fully recognise at the time. It was an era when women as volunteers were rare and the SES was often referred to as the 'men of the SES'. Despite obstacles and some unrecognised contributions, I put myself out there in my role, as I valued my role in the community, and took pride in preserving the unit's history.

## What achievement are you most proud of?

I am particularly proud of coordinating the Savage River Challenges, which became an annual event made up of adventurous and practical challenges for teams to work through. With support from the mine, families, ambos, police, and broader community involvement, it became a wonderful celebration of teamwork and community.

## What equipment, training, or cultural shifts have made the biggest impact?

For me, the biggest impact came from having a good Unit Manager and a supportive unit. That support made a real difference, both personally and operationally.

## How did your involvement in the SES influence your life outside the service?

The SES taught me to think outside the box and become more self-sufficient. It also helped me build strong connections within small groups and develop lasting bonds.

Special thanks to Lyndsey Gray, who has written several books on SES history and provided items for the historical trade stall at the State Fire and Emergency Services Conference.



“*The SES taught me to think outside the box and become more self-sufficient. It also helped me build strong connections within small groups and develop lasting bonds.*”



L-R: Lyndsey Gray, Paul Darby and Anthony Dick ESM after interviewing at their home.

# My time with the SES

## from volunteer to leader.. and back again!

I was encouraged to join the SES in 1979 by a relative while I was still in my teens and about to finish school. I suspect my mother had been asking around for something meaningful for me to do – and, no doubt, to get me out of the house.

Off I went to the local State Emergency Service Unit at Latrobe, where, eager to join, I may have been less than accurate about my date of birth. I quickly became part of the unit, enjoying the hands-on activities, the places we went, and – most importantly – the people. The SES gave me early exposure to emergency services work and the chance to contribute to supporting the community. It provided me with experiences I would never have otherwise had.

“*Joining the SES was one of the best decisions I have ever made. It gave me opportunities I would not otherwise have had, helped shape who I am today, took me to places I would not have gone, and introduced me to many wonderful people.*”

The Latrobe Unit met weekly on Wednesday nights, where we trained in traditional rescue roles associated with Civil Defence and Cold War-era techniques. Training was conducted by unit members, occasionally supported by regional staff. It was informal, practical, hands-on – and built around members sharing their knowledge and demonstrating their skills.

Safety practices were very different to today. Training often took place in (cigarette) smoke-filled rooms, and there were no safety harnesses, height safety systems, or comprehensive WHS policies and procedures that are now standard. Typical training activities included knots and lashings, ladder work, derricks and gin poles, flying foxes, and lifting and winching operations. Equipment was very basic – ropes, pulleys, ladders, hand tools, Tirfor winches, a low-output generator, and portable incandescent lighting.

Uniforms were equally simple – typically second-hand ex-Air Force blue overalls, leather-soled work boots, leather gaiters, gloves, and a simple broad brim construction-style helmet, much of it shared between members.

The unit's response capability consisted of an ambulance-style vehicle and trailer, with no ergonomic or compartmentalised storage. Equipment was loosely packed, often requiring a full unload to access what was needed.

As Latrobe was particularly flood-prone, flood response was the unit's primary role. There were also numerous coastal searches

for lost fishermen and swimmers, along with bush search operations supporting Police. Interestingly, storm damage requests were rare, likely reflecting the greater self-reliance of the community at the time.

The unit regularly took part in training weekends, both independently and with other units across the region, where we camped out, undertook rescue exercises, developed our skills, and enjoyed strong camaraderie.

Over the years, I have witnessed considerable change within both the unit and the broader organisation, including name changes, new branding, upgraded facilities, and the introduction of modern equipment and vehicles. The Latrobe Unit expanded to include Devonport, later becoming the Latrobe-Devonport Unit, before being renamed the Mersey Unit to better reflect its area of responsibility and connection to the Mersey River. The unit eventually relocated to Devonport, where it remains today.

The SES as an organisation has also grown significantly, with clear advancements in capability, professionalism, and support provided to volunteers and communities, alongside the natural changes that come with staff and membership turnover.

After 22 years as a volunteer – serving in roles including Unit Training Officer, Deputy Municipal Coordinator, and Unit Manager – I was fortunate to be appointed to Regional Staff at North-West

Regional Headquarters, turning what began as a hobby into full-time employment within the SES.

Working alongside Bevis Dutton and Judy Templar, and later Damian Hingston, I served as Assistant Regional Emergency Management Officer, later renamed Regional Officer – a position I held for a further 23 years. It was a highly rewarding position, allowing me to draw on my volunteer experience, technical knowledge, and operational expertise to support volunteers and unit managers across the region and throughout the state, in strengthening individual, unit, and organisational emergency response capability.

In my current role, I am grateful to continue supporting the SES through project management within the Volunteer Strategy and Support Unit. I have also recently returned to active volunteering as Deputy Unit Manager (Administration), returning to the Mersey Unit where my SES journey began.

Joining the SES was one of the best decisions I have ever made. It gave me opportunities I would not otherwise have had, helped shape who I am today, took me to places I would not have gone, and introduced me to many wonderful people. It has remained a central part of my life ever since.

It is a privilege to be part of the SES in its 50th year and to reflect on its history and continued service.



Anthony in the Burnie office as Regional Officer.



Presenting at the 2024 State Fire and Emergency Services Conference.

# Mersey Unit

## Serving the Mersey with pride

The Mersey Unit was first formed in 1986 as the Latrobe Unit.

In 1988, its area of responsibility expanded to include both the Devonport and Latrobe municipalities, and it became known as the Devonport/Latrobe Unit. In 1993, it was renamed the Mersey Unit, reflecting its broader regional role.

The unit's headquarters were initially based at the old Latrobe Police Station. In 1990, operations moved to new headquarters at the former Latrobe Fire Station, located at 13A Hampton Street, Latrobe. The unit is currently co-located with Tasmania Police.

### A creative touch – the 'boxes' float

The well-known 'boxes' float was created for the Latrobe Christmas Parade by the then Latrobe Unit Deputy Local Coordinator, Jack Armsby. Jack used a petrol-powered toy car he had built for his grandchildren to tow a large trailer carrying oversized boxes.

Through this creative display, he delivered a simple but effective community preparedness message: 'Latrobe SES – You don't have to be big, just well prepared.'



### Unit vehicles throughout the years

- 1966 Dodge Ambulance (1978–1989)
- 1984 Ford F100 Ambulance (1989–1994)
- 1977 Toyota twin-cab truck
- Toyota Hilux (to 1994)

Today, the Mersey Unit operates a modern fleet consisting of two rescue trucks, two 4x4 utes, two ATVs and trailers, and one box trailer.



ABOVE: Christmas Parade float.

BELOW: Mersey SES boxes float.



# Serving our community, together

### What do you remember about your early days of training and induction?

We spent many weekends training intensively to build our skills. We trained in logging, cribbing and lifting, heavy rescue, and general rescue techniques. Land and sea rescue were also major training focuses in our area, and we even attended a job where someone had a sewing machine needle through their finger!

### What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

We played a significant role in the 2013 Dunalley Bushfires.

Another memorable operation was the Candlestick rescue. We were deployed at 11am, after a climber was knocked unconscious by a falling rock while ascending the Candlestick and fell to the base. In six metre swells, I skippered the vessel, stern first, into position, and on the third attempt we brought him safely aboard.

During the rescue, the helicopter pilot dropped his helmet into the water, so we had to retrieve that as well – which added pressure with night approaching as the aircraft was unable to fly after dark. We finally returned home around 1am.

“*your heart has to be in it – you need to be genuinely committed.*”



### Can you describe a time when the SES made a significant difference to a community?

The introduction of Road Accident Assistance made a lasting difference, particularly in improving response times and outcomes for serious incidents in rural areas.

### What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

One of the biggest challenges came with the shift from local government managed units to regionally managed units. This weakened direct links with local councils, making coordination and understanding local community needs more difficult.

### What achievement are you most proud of?

I'm proud of the establishment and growth of Road Accident Assistance RCR as a reliable and skilled capability within the SES.

### What equipment, training, or cultural shifts have made the biggest impact?

The move from basic Telstra pagers and the shift of 132 500 to FireComm improved communication, response times, and volunteer safety. The upgrade from hand-operated rescue tools to hydraulic equipment also significantly increased speed and efficiency at incidents.

### Is there a particular lesson or piece of wisdom you would pass on to new volunteers?

I think the biggest thing is that your heart has to be in it – you need to be genuinely committed. You must have family support. You have to want to be part of the community.

Dick Smith once said to me – “To get anywhere in this world, you've got to work your hobby” – and that's always stayed with me. It reminds me that passion and dedication are what carry you through.



# SES Life Membership Award

SES Life Membership is awarded to members – volunteers or staff – who have demonstrated long and consistently outstanding service to the State Emergency Service.

Life Membership may be awarded to members who are still serving, as well as those who have retired.

The award is a lasting symbol of the recipient's significant contribution to the SES, recognising a lifetime of dedication, commitment and service to the community.

## Award recipients

- Philip Bird
- Alton Bond
- Paul Branch
- Graeme Brown
- Harold Deverell
- Anthony Dick
- John Duncombe
- Bevis Dutton
- Peter Geard
- Maxwell Heyward
- Leigh Higgins
- Nigel King
- Ian Kingston
- Alex Lawrence
- Andrew Lea
- Ian Neilsen
- David Oakley
- Maurice Richards
- Jason Robins
- Craig Vellacott
- Frank Walker
- Adrian Webster

\*listed in alphabetical order



# A lifetime of service

In 1959, just after my 16th birthday, I became a Volunteer Ambulance Attendant with the St John Ambulance Service in Hobart. This followed four years as a St John Ambulance Cadet, where I reached the rank of Sergeant before aging out of the program.

That first step led to a total of 62 years as a Volunteer Ambulance Officer in Hobart, Burnie, Launceston and Avoca. While Principal at Avoca school, I co-founded the local Ambulance Service. My final posting was on Bruny Island, where I served for 40 years, retiring at age 78. My retirement coincided with the appointment of paramedics to the island, and a period when my wife Janice – herself a Volunteer Ambulance Officer for 15 years and recipient of the National Medal – was suffering ill health.

I was also a Volunteer Fire Officer on Bruny Island for 35 years... retiring because of my age and realising I was not fit enough to pull a loaded fire hose up a hill!

I joined the SES when it first started on Bruny. With my Ambulance background, I was keen on joining – it seemed to be a natural extension

*“ I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as a member of SES and have made many great friends who I still value today. ”*



of my services. As a Bruny Island Councillor, and later Kingborough Councillor, I was also in a position to support the unit and help secure assistance where it was needed.

Service has been a family commitment. My son David was a member for 15 years and was awarded the National Medal just before he died of cancer 16 years ago at just 37 years of age. My daughter's partner, Michael Barnett, was also a member of our unit. After moving to Rosebery to work in the mines, he became the mine's rescue leader and was a member of Queenstown SES, where he received a regional award.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as a member of SES and have made many great friends who I still value today. I was thrilled when I was granted Life Membership of SES,

after already being awarded the Emergency Services Medal.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to receive many unsolicited awards after being nominated by others – something I value greatly. These include the National Medal with five clasps; Ambulance Service Medal 2014; Emergency Services Medal 2004; Centenary Medal; Life Membership SES; TFS Volunteer Medal; Kingborough Certificate of Merit 1997; Kingborough Citizen of the Year 2006; and the Community Achievement Award for Tasmania 2020.

Service has shaped my life. Above all else, I am grateful for the opportunity to help others and to be part of organisations that have been built on care, commitment, and community.

# The origins of organised rescue

## What first inspired you to join the SES?

As a volunteer firefighter, I had witnessed too many poorly equipped rescue attempts at crash scenes, with passers-by often using whatever tools were at hand, or trying to separate crashed cars by pulling them apart with trucks. I thought that there had to be a better, more organised way – so, with no local SES to join, we started one ourselves!



## What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

Every event is memorable when lives are lost. You carry every death you see with you forever. Accidents involving people I knew personally were particularly difficult, especially two different accidents involving former employees.

## What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

Challenges included fundraising for basic second hand equipment, recruiting and training volunteers, and finding time for training while balancing work and family commitments.

“Even though at times it is difficult and sad, there’s great satisfaction in helping people.”

## Can you describe a time when the SES made a significant difference to a community?

We went from a time when there was no organised rescue capability at all, to having a coordinated rescue response that we initiated and partially funded ourselves. That capability soon grew beyond motor vehicle accidents to include assistance with storm damage and flooding.

## What achievement are you most proud of?

Every single person we got out alive.

## What equipment, training, or cultural shifts have made the biggest impact?

Equipment and vehicles made the biggest impact. Our first vehicle was a Ford F150 V8 ex-ambulance, fitted with second-hand gear. In 1999, through fundraising, grants, and council support, we purchased a new Mazda truck and spent nearly two years fitting it out. Later improvements came through state SES support and donated funds.

## Is there a particular lesson or piece of wisdom you would pass on to new volunteers?

Even though at times it is difficult and sad, there’s great satisfaction in helping people. The reward of meeting people again who you have helped... makes it all worth doing.

The volunteers you work with often become your best friends, and you share things with them that other people just would not understand.

## How did your involvement in the SES influence your life outside the service?

Volunteering has an impact on family life and business, but it also brings positives like meeting great people, making lifelong friends, and being part of a unit and a social group. I would absolutely go back and do it all again.

## What hopes do you have for the next 50 years of the organisation?

That volunteers continue to see the value in being part of the organisation.

# My journey with the SES

## A time of connection, growth, and service

Being a part of the SES for the past three years has been a really rewarding experience. While it represents just a small piece of the organisation’s incredible 50-year history, it’s something I’m deeply proud to be part of, and I hope it’s just the beginning of a long journey ahead.

Stepping into a leadership role as a woman in SES has been both a privilege and a responsibility. It’s given me the opportunity to not only grow personally, but support and encourage other women to step forward, get involved, and realise that they belong here too. Seeing that confidence build in others is something that never gets old.

What stands out most to me is the people. The SES is full of individuals

who give their time, energy, and heart to support their communities, and being surrounded by that dedication is incredibly motivating. I’ve loved getting to know our members – their strengths, their stories, and what drives them – and helping create an environment where people feel connected, supported, and valued.

“SES is about connection, growth, and service. It’s about showing up for your community, but also for each other.”

Training has been a huge highlight. Whether it’s teaching new skills, watching someone achieve something they didn’t think they could, or learning alongside others, there’s always a strong sense of progress and shared purpose. Some of the best moments have come from training with other units, building camaraderie, sharing knowledge, and reminding each other that we’re all part of something so much bigger than our own team.

For me, SES is about connection, growth, and service. It’s about showing up for your community, but also for each other. I feel incredibly lucky to be part of IMU South and the wider SES team, and I’m excited to see what the future holds.



# Strengthening systems and supporting communities

## What first inspired you to join the SES?

After a 32-year career as a police officer in the United States, and a move to Tasmania with my Tassie husband, I was looking for a career in emergency management within the Tasmanian Government.

During visits to Tasmania, I met with SES Director Andrew Lea, and knew I wanted to work for the Tasmanian SES Emergency Management Unit. I was appointed as a Senior Planning and Education Officer in the Emergency Management Unit in September 2010.

## What do you remember about your early days of training and induction?

The training and induction programs were well organised and informative. They provided me with an opportunity to meet the emergency services workers and non-government organisations I would go on to work closely with.

“*The Dunalley bushfires stand out as a defining experience. They provided me with an opportunity to be involved in a truly great multi-agency operational and functional team.*”

## What is your most memorable moment?

On my fourth day of work, the Assistant Director of Emergency Management at the time, Chris Beattie, announced that he was leaving, and I wondered – what the heck did I do for him to leave so soon after my arrival!

## What is the most memorable operation or event you responded to?

The Dunalley bushfires stand out as a defining experience. They provided me with an opportunity to be involved in a truly great multi-agency operational and functional team.

## Can you describe a time when the SES made a significant difference to a community?

During the Dunalley bushfires, I was sent to the Dunalley Hotel, where the local community had done an amazing job pulling together to establish a recovery area on the grounds. The SES Emergency Management Unit was tasked with the coordination of local and government resources. The sense of community resilience and teamwork was remarkable.

## What were the biggest challenges faced by the SES during your time?

Human resources! Particularly, the shortage of sufficient staff and volunteers. In the early days, there was a division between operational and emergency management/support areas. This has significantly changed, in part due to the



addition of the Regional Emergency Management Coordinators, who now work alongside the operational staff and volunteers.

## What achievement are you most proud of?

I am most proud of developing and facilitating a suite of workshops and exercises for whole-of-government agencies, helping to strengthen coordination and preparedness across emergency management organisations.

## What equipment, training, or cultural shifts have made the biggest impact?

One of the most significant developments has been the establishment of the TasEMT, the online training platform. It has been embedded in the induction programs of many agencies, including local government, that have a shared role in emergency management.

# Bruny Island SES

## A community responding to its own needs

In 1980, Bruny Island was a rural location with timber, apples and agriculture being the main source of employment. Although there had been a Civil Defence Unit on the island, it was no longer operating.

Given the island's relative isolation and the resulting delays to any incident that may require assistance, the Bruny Island Council decided to form a SES unit. Following consultation with the SES in Hobart, discussions began around the various roles the unit may undertake. These included road crash rescue, wind damage response, steep-slope retrieval, water rescue, search for missing persons, and clearing fallen trees that blocked roads.

Recruitment was led by Tom Mulcahy and myself. We were issued a second hand troop carrier fitted with a winch and trailer, along with basic equipment. With no permanent base to work from, a shared double garage and training room was constructed – funded by the RED scheme and built by unemployed workers, alongside a qualified tradesperson.

Training required travel, to work alongside other SES units across Tasmania. We trained with the Tasman Unit for chainsaw training, undertook road crash rescue training at various locations, practiced navigation skills, and learned the safe operation of cutting and other equipment as it was issued to the units. Training alongside other units built strong camaraderie and we practiced skills regularly.

Responding to car crashes in those days was difficult, as incidents often involved locals we knew personally. At that time, safety features in cars were not as they are now, and crashes often involved serious injuries. We worked with the volunteer ambulance members and local nursing staff, as no doctors resided on the island. One of our key roles was to prepare and light up a landing area for the helicopter when evacuation was required at night.

We were issued new vehicles regularly, as government bodies were exempt from sales tax and could trade the vehicle at a profit. However, the trailer we relied on was not great for carrying the heavy equipment required at the time, including lighting, and hydraulic pumps for cutting and spreading equipment.

Much has changed since then: tourist enterprises are attracting huge numbers of day-trippers, many from overseas; car accidents are prevalent, especially on gravel

“*Training alongside other units built strong camaraderie and we practiced skills regularly.*”

roads; and road crash rescue is now a major role.

Modern SES vehicles and equipment are far better suited to current incidents and are supported by more specialised training, including for vehicles with advanced safety features and electric systems.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Bob [Jager] who has carried out the role of Training Officer for the unit, and other units, for many years. His commitment to training has played an important part in ensuring capability, safety, and continuity of skills.



# Emergency Services Medal

The Emergency Services Medal (ESM) is awarded in recognition of outstanding service by members of the Emergency Services, all relating to emergency management, education and training.

The Award was established in 2000. Recipients of this medal are entitled to the post-nominal letters, ESM.

YEAR	ESM RECIPIENTS		
2000	Joseph Paul	Catherine Bradley	Rodney McGee
2001	Bevis Dutton	John Duncombe	Rex Rainbow
2002	Geoff Marsh	Ian Kingston	Edwin Humber
2003	Garry Muldoon	Richard Elliott	Rodney Sweetnam
2004	Rupert Sandy	Leigh Higgins	Ian Holloway
2005	Anthony Dick	Frank Lawes	Bryan Watson
2006	David Dowden	John Mackonis	
2007	Paul Darby	Claus Wilkens	
2008	Craig Blizzard	Roger Brown	Antonio Chirichiello
2009	Paul Shipp	Toni Brown	
2010	Philip Bird	Michael Street	
2011	David Oakley	Frank Henderson	Robert Butterfield
2012	Andrew Lea	Ian 'Snow' Neilsen	Gregory French
2013	Mark Nelson	Bevis Perkins	Donald Mackrill
2014	Harold Deverell	Susan Powell	Paul Branch
2015	Mark Gillies	Timothy Kirkwood	
2016	John Campbell	Kelvin Jones	Peter Geard
2017	Mhairi Bradley	Andrew Taylor AFSM	Chris Fagg
2018	Nigel King	Christopher Draffin	
2019	Mark Dance	Lynton Zane Free	Alton Bond
2020	William James Folder	Vincent Holthouse	Neil Gerard Van Veldhuizen
2021	Cheryl Ames	Jason Lawrence	Jason Robins
2022	Adrian Webster	Rose-Anne Emmerton	Graydon O'Halloran
2023	Leon Smith	Neil Wright	Brett Robins
2024	Raymond Cooper	Brian James	Frances Manning
2025	Bianca Callinan	Paul Le Fevre	Curtis Salter
2026	Susan Kelder	Wayne Dowling	

## Then and now

### OPERATIONS CENTRE



### DISPATCH



### FIELD COMMUNICATIONS





**1976 – 2026**