

MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS, MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

OVERVIEW

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Budget 2002-03 \$m</i>	<i>Budget 2003-04 \$m</i>	<i>Variation %</i>
Department of Local Government			
Total Expenses	91.8	90.3	-1.6
Asset Acquisitions	0.8	0.3	-59.4
New South Wales Fire Brigades			
Total Expenses	365.1	401.8	10.1
Asset Acquisitions	42.3	37.9	-10.5
Department of Rural Fire Service			
Total Expenses	125.8	129.4	2.9
Asset Acquisitions	1.5	14.4	858.4
State Emergency Service			
Total Expenses	25.0	28.5	14.0
Asset Acquisitions	4.9	4.3	-13.9
Total, Minister for Rural Affairs, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Emergency Services			
Total Expenses	607.7	650.0	7.0
Asset Acquisitions	49.5	56.9	14.9

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Department of Local Government's primary functions are to:

- ◆ provide strategic direction to the local government sector;
- ◆ develop and oversight the legislative and policy framework within which local councils operate;
- ◆ examine and investigate issues affecting local government performance and operations;

- ◆ improve accountability for performance of local government to their residents and ratepayers; and
- ◆ manage the State's relationship with local government.

The Department provides an overall framework for the system of local government. Major service delivery outputs are generally in the form of legislation, policies, programs, publications, training, mediation and strategic advice.

Current operations focus on meeting the ongoing needs of the community, improving accountability for performance of local government, and responsibility for the investigation and prosecution of pecuniary interest complaints about councillors and staff.

EXPENDITURE TRENDS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

During the last five years, the Department has adopted a more proactive role in fostering improvements in the performance of the local government sector.

Over the same period, rate rebates for pensioners increased by nearly \$4 million to \$74 million and payments from the Companion Animals Fund established in 1998 have increased to a total of \$7.7 million in 2002-03.

During the 2002-03 financial year, the Department of Local Government relocated successfully from Bankstown to Nowra, opening for business in the new Government Office Block in January 2003.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Department of Local Government provides a high-level analytical and intervention capacity, concentrating on:

- ◆ legislation and policy;
- ◆ finances of councils;
- ◆ major investigations and pecuniary interest matters;
- ◆ performance management; and
- ◆ assisting councils with the process of structural reform.

The Department continues to promote the structural reform of councils and encourages councils to review their operations to better meet the needs of current and future communities.

2003-04 BUDGET

Total Expenses

Estimated total expenses for the Department in 2003-04 are \$90.3 million, including:

- ◆ \$77.5 million for the pensioner council rates rebate scheme; and
- ◆ \$0.6 million for the On-site Sewage Management Program

The Companion Animals budget for 2003-04 is \$4.6 million. The large one-off increase in 2002-03 occurred because all companion animals had to be registered by October 2002.

The total expenses in 2003-04 are lower than in 2002-03 because the 2002-03 Budget and revised expenses include one-off staff relocation and fit-out costs associated with the Department's move to Nowra.

Asset Acquisitions

The Department's asset acquisition program of \$0.3 million provides for plant and equipment, including replacement of the records and document management systems and upgrading of computer systems.

NEW SOUTH WALES FIRE BRIGADES

The New South Wales Fire Brigades serves and works with the community to prevent fire and to respond to fire, hazardous material and rescue incidents in order to protect and preserve life, property and the environment. The Brigades is responsible for providing fire protection to developed centres throughout the State. In times of emergency, such as a bush fire crisis or other natural disaster, the Brigades also supports the other emergency services in both urban and non-urban areas.

EXPENDITURE TRENDS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The New South Wales Fire Brigades is funded 73.7 percent by the insurance industry, 12.3 percent by local government with a net cost to the State of 14 percent.

Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, there has been a 13 percent growth in the number of incidents attended by the Brigades. In 2002-03, the Brigades are expected to respond to 134,000 incidents, a response on average every four minutes.

The Brigades has received significant funding increases over the past nine financial years. In 1994-95, expenses and asset acquisitions totalled \$241.5 million. In 2003-04, \$439.7 million will be allocated for these items, an increase of 82 percent over this period. Since 1994-95 almost \$3 billion has been injected into the Brigades including more than \$130 million for state-of-the-art fire appliances.

In 1997, the Government embarked on the first major fire station building program in 75 years. Strategic programs in the greater Sydney area, Central Coast, the Hunter Valley and regional New South Wales, have seen 22 new stations built and made operational. Seventeen stations have been significantly refurbished including a significant rebuild of No 1 Fire Station in Sydney.

Since 1994-95, \$1.9 million has been committed to establish 224 Community Fire Units. The units operate in residential areas with a high level of bushland nearby. To date, approximately 3,500 volunteers attached to the various units have received training. These units and volunteers are an integral part of the Brigades' public education and fuel reduction strategies in bushfire affected areas.

The New South Wales Fire Brigades deployed significant resources in response to the 2002-03 bushfire emergency. Overall the Brigades incurred \$6.2 million of additional costs in responding to this emergency.

In 2002-03, enhancements of \$7 million were approved enabling the Brigades to;

- ◆ establish a further 97 Community Fire Units;
- ◆ purchase new helmets, gloves and other equipment for firefighters;
- ◆ provide staff for two new fire stations at Schofields and Shellharbour that were opened in December 2002; and
- ◆ commence the rollout of additional computing resources to all retained fire stations.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The New South Wales Fire Brigades aims to minimise the impact of emergency incidents on the community. The Brigades continues to develop initiatives to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of core business processes including incident prevention, fire suppression, management of hazardous material incidents, the provision of rescue services and response to natural hazards.

The Brigades will receive an additional \$17.1 million over the next four years to fund an additional 58 staff. This includes 33 permanent firefighters, ten positions for training instructors, eight for operational communications and seven for a Health and Fitness Assessment and Support Program.

Over the next four years, the Brigades will also receive nearly \$72 million to purchase 145 state-of-the-art fire appliances, and \$8 million for improved communications and \$12 million to improve the Brigades' information technology capability.

Since 1997 new stations have been completed at St Andrews, Blacktown, Kellyville, Horningsea Park, Rosemeadow, Narellan, Huntingwood, Regentville, Bonnyrigg Heights, Kariong, Bateau Bay, Berkeley Vale, Umina, Dubbo, Kelso, Doyalson, Toronto, Lawson, Schofields, East Maitland, Shellharbour and Portland.

The Brigades will receive \$4.7 million over the next four years in total funding for counter terrorism activities and will share a helicopter with the NSW Police, increasing the Brigades' capability for counter terrorism and hazardous materials response.

2003-04 BUDGET

Total Expenses

Total expenses in 2003-04 are estimated at \$401.8 million. In 2003-04, the Brigades will receive additional funding to:

- ◆ commence the implementation of the provisions of the Death and Disability Settlement (\$8.8 million);
- ◆ meet superannuation and long service leave costs (\$5.1 million);
- ◆ provide additional relieving firefighters, training instructors, communications operators and health and fitness support personnel (\$3.3 million);
- ◆ train new recruits (\$1 million);

- ◆ enhance counter terrorism preparedness (\$0.7 million);
- ◆ meet retained firefighter callout costs (\$0.2 million);
- ◆ establish a health and fitness program (\$1.6 million); and
- ◆ staff and operate new fire stations (\$1.3 million).

Asset Acquisitions

The New South Wales Fire Brigades' 2003-04 asset acquisition program of \$37.9 million includes provision for the following projects:

- ◆ continuation of an ongoing program to acquire and replace firefighting appliances (\$18 million);
- ◆ upgrading of the Brigades' information technology assets (\$5 million) and communications network (\$2 million);
- ◆ maintenance and renovation of fire stations (\$3.6 million);
- ◆ the Sydney No 1 Fire Station redevelopment (\$2.8 million);
- ◆ acquisition of Hazmat and rescue equipment (\$1.7 million);
- ◆ acquisition of counter terrorism equipment (\$1.7 million);
- ◆ a new fire station at Warnervale (\$1.4 million); and
- ◆ other minor works (\$1.7 million).

These asset acquisitions will be of particular benefit to both city and rural areas of New South Wales and will continue to address the need for additional facilities in growth areas.

DEPARTMENT OF RURAL FIRE SERVICE

The Department of Rural Fire Service is responsible for the promotion of effective rural fire fighting services within the State, including the co-ordination of bushfire fighting and bushfire prevention activities. The Office for Emergency Services is included under the Service's administration and is responsible for policy advice to the Minister and executive and administrative support to the State Emergency Management Committee and the State Rescue Board.

The prevention and containment of bushfires would not be possible without the unpaid work of some 66,000 volunteers, who operate through 2,259 community based bushfire brigades attached to 142 local councils.

EXPENDITURE TRENDS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Expenditure by the Rural Fire Service on bushfire fighting activities is financed from the Consolidated Fund (13 percent), local government (13.3 percent) and the insurance industry (73.7 percent).

The State's contribution towards fire-fighting services is paid into the Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF), along with the fire levies from insurance companies and councils. These funds are then dispersed in accordance with the advice of the Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee.

The level of funding provided to the RFFF has increased significantly over the past eight financial years. The total amount provided to the RFFF in 1995-96 was \$65.8 million. In comparison, the total amount to be provided in 2003-04 will be \$125 million, an increase of 90 percent over this period.

The Rural Fire Service deployed an unprecedented level of resources towards fighting fire during the 2002-03 fire season. Significant and widespread drought conditions throughout the State resulted in one of the worst and prolonged bushfire seasons experienced since European Settlement.

In the period July 2002 to February 2003 nearly 1.5 million hectares of the State was burnt, particularly in and around the Snowy Mountains.

Unprecedented levels of firefighting resources were deployed to combat the bushfires which included many thousands of the State's volunteer fire fighters. The Service's projected level of operating expenses and grants and contributions revenue is significantly above budget in 2002-03 reflecting this effort.

Total fire bans were declared on 97 days, thirteen of which were statewide, involving the deployment of up to 485 task forces on any day. The use of aerial firefighting resources was also significant.

In 2002-03, enhancements of \$9.4 million were provided, largely enabling the Rural Fire Service to;

- ◆ employ 35 additional district staff to enhance the Service's ability in fire control management;

- ◆ employ 18 staff to meet the Service's commitment in relation to the amendments to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and the Rural Fires Act;
- ◆ acquire a Geographical Information System; and
- ◆ increase grants to local councils.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Department of Rural Fire Service is an integral part of a complex bushfire management infrastructure comprising volunteer rural fire brigades, local government councils, land management agencies and other fire authorities.

In recent years the agency has focussed on replacing aged tankers and developing an appropriate management structure to minimise fire hazards and improve response to fire emergencies. These arrangements have proved successful in providing a cohesive emergency service and have assisted greatly in the Rural Fire Service's successful response to recent bush fire emergencies.

The Service is planning to relocate its headquarters from Rosehill to new premises at Homebush Bay in April 2004. A new Emergency Command Centre will be established at the new headquarters. The new command centre will incorporate state of the art fire meteorological and mapping technology.

2003-04 BUDGET

Total Expenses

Department of Rural Fire Service 2003-04 expenses are estimated at \$129.4 million, representing an increase of 2.9 percent over the 2002-03 Budget. This level of funding will allow the Rural Fire Service to:

- ◆ continue to purchase new and refurbished tankers for local brigades (\$26.9 million);
- ◆ fund maintenance and equipment grants to local brigades (\$30.2 million);
- ◆ continue subsidies to local brigades for brigade stations (\$3 million);
- ◆ establish a statewide Fire Mitigation Unit of 40 personnel to issue hazard reduction approval certificates and audit local hazard reduction work (\$3.9 million);

- ◆ continue to provide local councils with advice about appropriate bushfire safety measures for residential buildings and other developments in bushfire prone lands;
- ◆ upgrade the Fire Investigations Unit (\$0.3 million). This unit seeks to detect bushfire arson in collaboration with the police and the community via crime stoppers; and
- ◆ meet the recurrent costs of the relocation to Homebush Bay including relocation, make good, contingency and project management costs (\$1.6 million).

Additional funds have been made available to the Office for Emergency Services to:

- ◆ enable the State Emergency Management Committee to review arrangements for the protection of Critical Infrastructure (\$0.8 million); and
- ◆ increase grants to, the Volunteer Rescue Association (\$0.1 million), following on from last years additional funding of \$0.3 million, in further recognition of the significant contribution of volunteer rescue units.

Asset Acquisitions

The budget for the New South Wales Rural Fire Service's 2003-04 asset acquisition program of \$14.4 million includes provision for the following projects:

- ◆ acquisition of motor vehicles (\$7.5 million). This purchase will be partly offset from sales of motor vehicles (\$5.1 million);
- ◆ fitout of new headquarters at Homebush Bay (\$5.1 million);
- ◆ purchase of computers and other small items of equipment (\$1.5 million); and
- ◆ an allocation to the Office for Emergency Services to upgrade the State Emergency Operations Centre (\$0.3 million).

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

The State Emergency Service (SES) is a volunteer based organisation dedicated to providing timely assistance in times of natural or man-made incidents or emergencies. While its main responsibilities reflect its role as the combat agency for floods and storms, the SES is also the major provider of land and inland water search and rescue throughout the State. Additionally, the SES provides significant support to NSW Police, the Rural Fire Service and other emergency services in a wide range of emergency situations. Currently there are around 9,000 SES volunteers responding to 30,000 incidents per year.

EXPENDITURE TRENDS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The SES has received significant funding increases over the past five financial years.

Since 1999-2000, funding provided to the SES has increased from \$17.4 million to \$32.7 million representing an increase of 88 percent. This additional funding has enabled the SES to address major priorities in the area of rescue equipment, improve protective clothing for all 9,000 volunteers, provide nationally recognised competency based training, purchase and maintain communication equipment, construct new division headquarters, and employ paid divisional controllers, learning and development officers, flood planners and public education officers.

Additional funding in 2002-03 included:

- ◆ \$0.8 million to meet day to day expenses of SES volunteer units;
- ◆ \$0.3 million for vaccination of all SES volunteers against Hepatitis B;
- ◆ \$0.3 million for the upgrade and maintenance of radio communications equipment; and
- ◆ \$0.1 million for employment of two additional part-time divisional controllers.

Total funding of \$2.6 million was used to purchase protective clothing and personal protective equipment. This ensured each volunteer was provided with world class protective clothing that conformed to Occupational Health and Safety standards for safety and visibility.

An amount of \$0.3 million was allocated for the supply and installation of computers to each SES volunteer unit. The 2002-03 financial year was the final year of a three year \$0.8 million Government election promise for the installation of a computer in every volunteer unit.

In 2002-03 funds totalling \$2.4 million were provided for the purchase of radio equipment. The Lachlan, Lower Hunter, Murrumbidgee and Richmond Tweed Divisions received new radio systems.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The State Emergency Service will continue to improve its capability to deal with floods, storms, tempests and other incidents and emergencies.

This will be achieved through developing public communication and flood planning programs to ensure that communities at risk are aware of the nature of the risks and how to protect themselves and their property.

State Emergency Service volunteers will continue to be trained in emergency operation and rescue procedures which are of world class standard. The volunteers are also provided with protective clothing and equipment that meet Occupational Health and Safety requirements. These factors are essential in providing the community with a combat agency that will assist them during flood, storm and tempest operations.

2003-04 BUDGET

Total Expenses

The State Emergency Service's total expenses for 2003-04 are projected to be \$28.5 million.

Additional funding of \$0.2 million has been provided to meet day to day operating costs of SES Volunteer Units, increasing the program to \$1 million for 2003-04. This will benefit all 231 Volunteer Units located across New South Wales and reduce the need for volunteers to utilise their own time in fund raising activities.

The Rescue Vehicle Subsidy program will receive \$0.8 million. The funding will be used in partnership with local councils to purchase fifty modern, well equipped rescue vehicles.

An amount of \$0.6 million has been allocated for paging transmission and maintenance expenses incurred by the SES. Paging, in conjunction with radios and mobile telephones, provides the communication link essential for volunteers to conduct operational activities.

The SES component of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Floodplain Management project has been provided \$0.8 million. The project has improved public awareness, flood warning systems and SES flood response capability in the Hawkesbury-Nepean area.

Additional funding of \$0.2 million will be used to increase the number of hours worked by part-time divisional controllers as part of the Paid Divisional Controllers program.

Asset Acquisitions

In 2003-04 the total capital acquisition program is estimated at \$4.3 million.

Funding will continue for the provision of rescue equipment and radio systems, with \$2.2 million being allocated to install new radio systems in divisions as well as maintaining a repair pool for all radios across New South Wales.

An amount of \$1.3 million will be used to continue to purchase essential rescue equipment, including road rescue equipment, flood rescue boats, emergency lighting, vertical rescue equipment and rescue call out systems.

Volunteer units, division headquarters and state headquarters will receive \$0.2 million to purchase paging hardware and paging facilities to assist during emergency operations.