

PRESIDENT'S REPORT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017

The year July 2016 to June 2017 has been exceptionally busy with a total of nine base camps being established across Australia as a result of serious fires, cyclones and floods.

FIRES

With fires near Goulburn NSW and in and around the Birchip area in Victoria, base camps were set up at Bungendore NSW and Birchip Vic at the start of February 2017.

A major bushfire known as the Sir Ivan fire mid-way through February 2017 saw base camps being established at Dunedoo and Cassilis, to the east of Dubbo. This fire destroyed 35 houses, 130 outbuildings and burnt through more than 50,000 hectares of rich grazing and farmland. More than 5,000 kilometres of fencing was destroyed. Calls for help from businesses and the community around these fires were astronomical, with many offers of fencing materials, cash donations, accommodation and volunteers. Our Cassilis base camp closed at the end of June 2017 but our Dunedoo camp stayed open until end of September 2017. A big thank you to Brian Carr and Lawrie Dawson for their enormous efforts at these two camps.

To assist those affected by the Sir Ivan fire, Blazeaid authorised the spending of \$300,000 of its funds on fencing materials. This considerable contribution to help the farmers together with our on-going assistance in this area for a lot longer than first anticipated has certainly helped in a major way in this fire affected area.

FLOODS

As a result of floods in the WA region of Ravensthorpe and Lake King, Blazeaid set up a base camp at each location. Considerable fencing and work was done in these two areas which proved very valuable for those communities.

CYCLONE

Cyclone Debbie caused massive damage in Queensland, not only to infrastructure but also from flooding which destroyed a considerable amount of rural fencing. Blazeaid established three base camps in April 2017, Beaudesert/Rathdowney, Clarke Creek and Bororen.

OTHER WORK

We are also very conscious of the fact that the whole community suffers when disasters strike and it's not only the farmers that need support. Blazeaid volunteers also carried out community work such as giving the war memorial a facelift for Anzac day with weeding, pruning and painting; fencing and gate repairs to the two churches in town; cleaning out gutters and downpipes at one church; and re-straining the fence around the showground.

COWS FOR CAMBODIA

During the year several Blazeaid volunteers travelled to Cambodia, at their own expense, to help the charity 'Cows for Cambodia' to build fences. These volunteers are returning to Cambodia towards the end of the year to finish off the project. While in Cambodia, the volunteers taught the local people how to build and clear fences to give them the ability to be able to do this work for themselves.

GOVERNMENT GENERAL AWARDS AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove In May 2017 presented Blazeaid volunteers with Certificate for their outstanding work and dedication to Blazeaid. The recipients were: Brian and Christine Carr, Barry and Bev Thompson (absent), Dennis and Helene Livingston, Wendy Cope, Mary Howarth, John Lillico, Laurie Dawson, Jainee Lale, Dave and Glenys Adby, Malcolm and Victoria McIntosh (absent), Janis Hobbs, Bruce Hudson, Greg Duncan and Christine and John Male. This event was held during National Volunteer Week and was such a wonderful occasion and my sincere thanks go to Sir Peter Cosgrove and his wife Mrs Cosgrove for such an honourable and fantastic gathering, which was such a well deserved award to our wonderful volunteers.

In summary. The magnificent work done by our BlazeAid volunteers during the 2016 - 2017 year is evident in our statistics. A total of 1,949 volunteers performed 19,088 days of work on 704 different properties. A total of 1,966km of damaged fencing was cleared and the volunteers assisted in rebuilding 955km of new fencing. These figures are an increase on the previous year.

Volunteers. Our greatest asset is our volunteers. Without the dedication, passion and commitment of these wonderful people, most of whom are semi-skilled, retired grey nomads, we could never achieve such a magnificent outcome. Their willingness to work in sometimes unpleasant conditions and to be away from their own families and friends is truly amazing. It is also amazing how many of our volunteers return year after year to help out in various states of Australia. It is truly a BlazeAid family with many reunions of friendly volunteers occurring at our many base camps.

There are many other volunteers that assist BlazeAid behind the scenes with a variety of tasks including those who tow trailers and equipment for use at a base camp; and those wonderful organisations such as service clubs, church groups, sporting clubs, community groups and many others who cater for our evening meals. Without these people we would find it very difficult to achieve our goals. A very big thank you.

Co-ordinators. The success of our base camps is due to the skills of our volunteer co-ordinators. These people work very long hours, 7 days a week for several months at a time and make sure our resources, both human and materiel are used to the best advantage to assist property owners to rebuild their lives. The co-ordinators who have run base camps over the past 12 months are almost too numerous to name individually. My heart-felt thanks goes out to these co-ordinators because without them, we could not possibly achieve our goals.

Trailers & Equipment. To ensure BlazeAid can remain combat ready, during the year we spent over \$165,000 on new trailers and over \$181,000 purchasing equipment to stock the trailers. Our trailers and equipment are securely stored in all states across Australia which will ensure a quick response should we receive future requests for assistance following natural disasters. The only other trailers that need restocking are the Victorian trailers, which is currently in hand.

The ABC. As in past years, the ABC has again been a very big supporter of BlazeAid right across their network of Local ABC radio stations throughout Australia. A special thank you to Ian (Macca) McNamara and Lee Kelly from Australia All Over, and Ian Mannix and many others at the ABC who have supported us. The attendance of many volunteers can be directly attributed to the ABC who spread the word to inform both prospective volunteers and the general community where BlazeAid has set up. During the year, *Macca* visited the Dunedoo base camp. His visit was really appreciated by the volunteers.

FRRR. Again this year, we have welcomed and appreciate the support from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, a Philanthropic organisation. FRRR not only support BlazeAid but also many small rural and regional communities that have suffered from natural disasters, or perhaps being disadvantaged due to their size or isolation.

BlazeAid Committee. A special thank you to the Committee members who have contributed so much this year. Without their tireless efforts, BlazeAid would not be the exceptional organisation that it is.

The success of BlazeAid is a culmination of so many contributions by so many people. The administration needs of the organisation are many and requires an ongoing presence by very competent people; the volunteers who attend our base camps and so readily give their time; the co-ordinators who do a magnificent job of running the base camps; members of the community who cook for us; people who donate to BlazeAid to allow us to continue our operations; and people who volunteer to tow trailers to all corners of Australia. The list is endless.

I would like to mention my lovely wife, Rhonda. Rhonda's support, patience, devotion wisdom and advice.

Special mention to Barry and Darrel for their exceptional work with organising trailers and equipment. To Brian for his endless contribution and help throughout the year, and to Debbie Buttler.

When disaster strikes, it affects people in different ways but the one common thread is their need to return to their pre-disaster lifestyle. BlazeAid helps to rebuild their lives and gives them a sense of direction.

The outstanding contributions by so many dedicated people is the reason why BlazeAid has been such a success.

Kevin Butler

President

