

AIES NSW Division



Upcoming Events

• Call for calendar items for 2011.

Does your agency have an upcoming field-day? Is there an interesting event that other members may need to hear about? Please send details with as much warding as possible so we can try to help spread the word.

Member contacts within emergency organisations are also sought to assist with facilitating formal site visits by Divisional members as ordinary meetings of the Division. The visits are aimed at assisting members in broadening their understanding of their own and other emergency organisations.

Members interested in assisting the Division Committee, including any articles for publishing here or in the National Journal are requested to contact the Registrar or President.

2011 Committee at a glance

committee.nsw@aies.net.au

President: David Hull MAIES

president.nsw@aies.net.au

Vice President: Stephen Anderson MAIES

vpresident.nsw@aies.net.au

Treasurer/Registrar: Stephen Sanson MAIES

treasurer.nsw@aies.net.au

registrar@aies.net.au

National Council Representative:

Peter Dixon MAIES

Other committee members:

Danny Fraticelli MAIES; Mick Wongung MAIES

Greetings – it has been a long time between issues ...

Welcome to this – our second newsletter – and to our new Committee for 2011.

Those who accepted nomination to the NSW Committee of AIES and were duly elected at our AGM on Monday 28th March 2011 were: Daniel Fraticelli (DEMO/Police); David Hull (SES); and Mick Wongung (SES/Griffith LEMC). Existing Committee members Peter Dixon (St John Ambulance); Stephen Anderson (RTA); and Stephen Sanson (SES) have commenced their second year of their term.

The AGM also had a presentation from Harold Wolpert, CEO, Avalias and the 2009 Young Volunteer Recipient; Michael Gieules. You would have read about Avalias in the last issue of NER. Michael is currently studying for exams in his year three of nursing and is hoping to have an article for us as soon as his study permits.

I am aware that in relation to emergency management and response experience of our membership, I am somewhat of a tyro, however I am hoping this year to “start the conversation” between our membership. There is an awful lot of experience in our collective that should be shared and used to contribute to improving the capacity and capability of our Emergency Services. Amongst the articles in this newsletter you will note that we are seeking your feedback on many issues, and asking for you to share some of your expertise or experiences.

I hope to make this newsletter more regular, but would appreciate your input. This issue has a lot of local focus on Cyclone Yasi and NSW floods (which are still happening!), but since this we have seen devastating earthquakes and tsunami with high levels of international multi-agency coordinated response – perhaps one of our membership may be able to get some commentary for all to read.

David Hull MAIES

“Where there’s muck”

Have you read the excellent article by NSW SES staffer Phil Campbell in the last Autumn 2011 AIES Journal? It’s a comprehensive overview of the media response to flooding in NSW. Could you write an article of similar quality? Past President “Lew” Lewis Hughes has presented the NSW AIES with a personal gift of \$100 to be awarded to the NSW AIES member who writes the best article published in the AIES journal over the twelve months following the March 2011 AGM – as judged by the NSW AIES Committee. So dust off those laptops, or pick up a pen ... “cos where there’s muck there’s brass”.

But waitthere’s morethe best article published in the AIES magazine from any State will receive a Parker Pen ... and the “bragging rights” of being “AIES Writer of the Year”



Out-going President's Report

The outgoing President, Steve Anderson, delivered the following report on 2010 at the Division's AGM at the end of May this year.

A difficult year on a personal level, leading to less time for my responsibilities as president. On a brighter note, those problems have been on the improve since Christmas, which has re-invigorated my efforts for the forth-coming year. Thank you to those members who sent our family your messages of support.

And what a year it will be, not long after this AGM I will be attending Adelaide for the Institutes National AGM and board meeting.

There are two resolutions for proposed changes to the Articles of Association that your Committee has discussed at some length. We have decided, pending on approval from the State AGM to ratify the change in the legal age of membership to be lowered from 21 to 18. However our Committee has decided to recommend to our AGM that the 2 and 4 year pre-requisite service minimums be retained.

I was invited and did attend a Vetab workshop on development and review of a part of the Public Safety Training Package.

The Institute has continued to support the young volunteer of the year award, this year being awarded to Thomas Walsh, a young CFA volunteer from country SA

We have been given a gift to award a prize of one hundred dollars, for the journal story of the year. Open to NSW members, the journal inclusion judged by the committee to be the best will be awarded the prize.

At the end of May, the institute will be represented at the National Volunteers Summit in Canberra. There will be 450 Volunteers in Emergency management and also volunteer managers from the Emergency Services sector, from all over Australia.

This will be the third summit of its type and this year coincides with the International year of the Volunteer +10 years. The theme 'The future is in our hands – Partnerships · Experiences · Solutions'. This year's focus is on the younger generation, and social networking tools, with information coming soon of participation in the conference, even if you can not attend

One of the most exciting items for this year will be one or two country meetings that will take place. Planning has commenced on a joint meeting for the south west of the state and one for the Central west. Our new committee will hopefully be taking this on as one of their priorities. Another initiative for our remote members will be that each of our future dinner meetings will be broadcasted on Skype. Be involved.

Finally, on a serious note, our committee needs your help. The Institute whilst remaining strong can not flourish without the help of its members. Please become involved, all offers of ideas and assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Stephen Anderson MAIES

“To everything turn, turn, turn”

Our Region has been shaken to the core with natural disasters – floods and cyclone Yasi in Queensland, floods in New South Wales and Victoria, an earthquake in New Zealand followed by an earthquake and tsunami in Japan. The term out-of-area assistance has taken on a whole new interstate and international meaning – with deployments of NSW Emergency Service personnel to Regional NSW, Queensland, Victoria, New Zealand and Japan. Several task forces each comprising 100 NSW SES Volunteers were deployed to Queensland for the floods and the aftermath of cyclone Yasi, while other individual Volunteers and smaller specialist SES groups travelled to Victoria and rural NSW.

NSW AIES Registrar David Hull was deployed with the SES to the flood response at Coonamble NSW in December 2010, while former co-opted committee member Bill Hoyles was deployed with the SES to the flood response in Lismore in January 2011.

Then spare a thought for Mark Constable –AIES member and officer with Civil Defence New Zealand. Mark was deployed to Christchurch soon after the earthquake struck.

It's certainly been “a time for every purpose under heaven”

Medical Tests

The NSW AIES Committee was made aware of some concerns regarding the nature and extent of “Medical Tests” conducted on NSW SES Volunteers prior to their deployment of to Queensland following cyclone Yasi. The primary concern is whether testing was adequate to remove unfit Volunteers and those with pre-existing medical conditions from deployment. The matter will be further discussed with the SES by their Volunteers Association as it is seen as a significant health and safety matter for SES Volunteers who did not self-select as unfit.

It is not helpful to the response effort if emergency services are busy attending to medical conditions of their peers rather than attending with full and efficient capacity to those who have been impacted by the emergency incident.

A frank exchange of views.

Is it time for a NSW emergency services mini summit to be organized by NSW AIES? Would we benefit from a frank exchange of views? Can we learn from shared experiences arising out of the Region's natural disasters and our various agency responses? What worked well? How can we improve in the future from a cross-agency perspective? What role does AIES have and what role should it have into the future? If a mini summit was to be organized for a day/ weekend between August and October 2011 would YOU attend? Would you even be able to assist in organising it? Email the committee (committee.nsw@aies.net.au) with your thoughts please. Remember: every journey starts with a single step.

“Well I’ve seen fire, and I’ve seen rain...”

Nowhere can the words of that song have applied more aptly than to the work of the NSW Rural Fire Service over the past few months. It’s been a challenging period with the RFS being involved with flood relief work alongside the SES in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. During December 2010 several hundred RFS Volunteers worked in flood affected inland areas of NSW. Initially the focus was on the Castlereagh area around Mendooran and Coonamble, but this then spread to Weddin, Wellington, Warrumbungle, Cootamundra, Coonamble, Harden and Young Shires. Parkes and Wagga Wagga was also affected.

The scale of the RFS operation was such that on 3rd December there were 106 NSW RFS personnel with 28 specialist vehicles deployed to assist with pumping, sandbagging, relocating people trapped by floodwater or searching for missing people. The RFS was also involved with other agencies in staffing the NSW Public Information Inquiry Centre [PIIC] at the NSW Police Centre in Surry Hills.

By 9th December the RFS response had grown to 343 NSW RFS personnel and 55 vehicles. The flooding continued over Christmas – and then in January 2011 the disastrous floods hit Queensland. On 10th January an RFS helicopter and crew was deployed to Toowoomba and rescued seven people stranded on roof tops on its first day. A second helicopter was requested and was deployed that afternoon.

Meanwhile back in NSW further flooding caused the PIIC to be reactivated, and RFS personnel again joined other emergency services in staffing the call centre. By this time the State Air Desk was deploying 17 aircraft a day across Northern NSW and Queensland. On 15th January attention turned to Brisbane after a request was received from authorities in Queensland for assistance with flood recovery. At the same time crews were dispatched to assist with flooding in Victoria particularly sandbagging in and around Echuca.

On 16th January there were two RFS strike teams of five appliances with 53 personnel [supported by 6 command and liaison personnel] deployed to Brisbane, and 45 RFS personnel in nine vehicles deployed to Echuca.

And so it went on – a massive response to rain by the rural fire service – in support of the NSW SES.

[A diary of events can be found in “The Bushfire Bulletin” Vol.33 No.1. 2011 pp 4 -8 from which the above summary has been extracted].

Five NSW AIES focus points for 2011

At the AGM Danny Fraticelli briefed members present on the distilling of the items of action received from feedback on our recent survey “

There are over thirty points that the Committee are seeking to be clarified and distilled to 5 key focal issues. Emails have been sent out to all members with the survey for their input. Your participation in this process is valuable to the Institute. The first

step is to rank all the issues much like voting federally “below the line”. Once your returns are collated, a second list will be sent out asking you to rank the 10 most pressing to achieve the final five,

The Committee has pledged their commitment to addressing each of these points in the coming months to ensure that the NSW AIES remains a viable and relevant branch of the national Australian Institute of Emergency Services.

A total of 210 St John Ambulance volunteers provided on-ground support to flood victims in Queensland.

Following a request from St John (QLD) for additional support and resources, volunteers were deployed from ACT, NSW, SA,

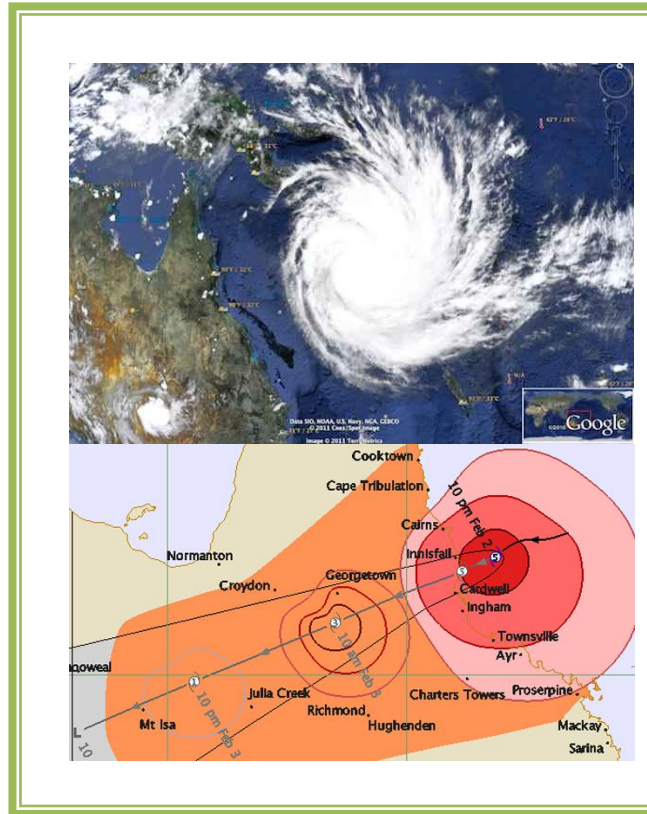
TAS, VIC and WA. The volunteers assisted the community by providing first aid at relief centres and clean up locations. 25 volunteers from NSW were deployed in three teams.

The first team flew to Brisbane and Ipswich on 13 January 2011. The team included First Responders, Advanced Responders, healthcare professionals, communication specialists and incident command staff. They joined 50 St John (QLD) volunteers already on site.

The volunteers worked 12 hour rotating shifts and treated about 100 casualties each day. Services ranged from treating minor cuts and scrapes through to providing advice to the elderly on taking their medication at relief centres. Mobile teams were also dispatched to various sites where first aid care was provided to house owners, other volunteers, military personnel and workers for injuries including infection from dirty wounds and trauma.

The second deployment from NSW was sent on 16 January which included five patient retrieval vehicles, three incident controllers and ten clinical members to provide additional first aid support through the recovery phase. A further four vehicles were sent to Queensland in response to the medical needs in affected areas.

Article provided by **Ursula Mannion**,
St John Ambulance Australia (NSW)



Flooded by the media

Diary of a media flood.

Sunday 9th January was arrival day. At 1100 I arrived at Regional Headquarters and had an opportunity to gain local knowledge of the area, the river systems, the previous history of flooding, the current situation, the likely forecast, local media, on site essentials [location of desk, phone, lunch room etc.] and accommodation.

On Monday 10th January I commenced active duty at 0700 as media officer – with the first phone call for a background briefing being received from local radio at 0710. Our internal daily briefings were scheduled for each morning around 0730 and a situation report was prepared for 0900.

That first phone call preceded the daily briefing and sit-rep, and saw my first use of the phrase “Sorry - I am not able to answer that at this time but I will find out and I will get back to you as soon as possible – do you have a deadline?” This was to become my mantra in my first hours as OAAA media officer – with the request always noted, followed up and a call-back made with the requested information. The situation was complicated by the presence of so many OAAA personnel in the Regional Office – none of whom had the local knowledge required to answer some of the media queries [eg “Now - what’s the name of that bridge just down from Kyogle that got flooded in 1976 – what is the current flood height, what was the flood height recorded in 1976, and how many people were isolated at the time?”]

A log of media calls was kept – with contact name and number noted as well as the nature of the query if a call back was required. Of course as the deployment progressed certain media contacts became familiar, a relationship with some reporters was established, and local knowledge improved – to the point where the mantra was needed less frequently.

On that first day there were 30 media contacts between 0700 and 1900 [with some reporters making up to five calls

per day]. These were with ABC Radio, Prime TV, Radio 2LM/ZZZ, Ch9 Gold Coast TV, Northern Star Newspaper, NBN TV, Ch7 TV, ABC North Coast, ABC News Radio, Courier Newspaper, and SES State HQ media.

The outcome was several live interviews on ABC Radio and three TV interviews – with Prime, NBN and Ch 7. Each of the interviews was arranged by the media officer and conducted by the daytime Operations Controller.



When the Richmond Tweed SES Region was threatened by the same rain storm that decimated Queensland in January 2011, there was early deployment of 31 Volunteers from all parts of NSW to fulfill specialist roles. One of these was my deployment as media officer from Canada Bay to Regional HQ at Lismore. This is an account of the media response for the duration of that deployment - originally planned for Sunday 9th to Saturday 15th January but subsequently shortened to end on Thursday 13th January 2011.

Deployment to a new area is a challenge, especially when it occurs at short notice and there is little opportunity for pre-reading and no hand-over from a previous incumbent. An absence of local knowledge about anything is somewhat problematic!

The role of a Volunteer media officer is to liaise with the media at a local level, provide information [or access to someone who can give information], and adhere to SES media policy in so doing. It is important to establish at the earliest opportunity in an OAAA deployment just who will do what with which media, when and where.

In the case of Richmond Tweed the daytime Operations Controller [a local] decided quite properly that he would handle ABC radio contacts [ABC being the designated Emergency Channel] and that he would also front the cameras for any TV interviews. The Volunteer media officer’s role would be to set up the ABC radio and TV interviews, and handle any other radio and newspaper requests.

There were numerous other radio and newspaper interviews directly with the media officer. This arrangement was generally received well – except for one local reporter who was used to having direct contact with the man-in-charge and resented being diverted to a media handler. Eventually the Operations Controller offered to take these calls if he was specifically requested by name for comment – and this seemed to satisfy the reporter that there was no “secret political agenda”.

As the flood threat progressed the media interest intensified. On the second day there were 43 media contacts between 0700 and 2030 – the extended media hours being requested by the night-time Operations Controller to meet demand experienced the previous day.

Contacts on the second day were with Ch7, Radio 2LM/ZZZ, Prime TV, Ch9, NBN, Courier Newspaper, Northern Star Newspaper, Inner West Courier [Sydney], ABC North Coast, ABC FM Gold Coast, 2SM Sydney, CFM Radio, ABC, Australian Newspaper, Grafton Radio 2GF/FM104.7, and SES State HQ media.

And then the media interest in Richmond Tweed subsided as the Richmond Tweed threat decreased, Grafton in

Nambucca Region was hit and the devastation in Queensland became even more apparent. On the third day there were only 19 media contacts between 0700 and 1500. These were mostly “wrap-up” calls from ABC North Coast, Radio 2LM/ZZZ, Prime TV, Ch9 Gold Coast, Northern Star Newspaper and SES State HQ media. The media interest then dried-up completely

At 1500 the Operations Controller asked the media officer to write up a summary of the last few days and send it off to the

local newspapers [subsequently published as “Dodging a Bullet” in the Northern Star newspaper in Lismore, and the Burwood Scene in Inner West Sydney]

Nature of media calls

During the deployment the requests received from the media were mostly for information and interviews about the current situation, the likely impact of potential flooding, sites for photographs [preferably of SES Volunteers sandbagging], and some requests to get a ride on a helicopter for aerial still photos and TV film footage.

[The media officer was able to make arrangements for a Prime TV reporter and cameraman to hitch a lift on an SES chopper performing a resupply, and for an SES member to take aerial still photos for use by the Northern Star newspaper].

Flood bulletins were regularly sent to the media, and when it became apparent that one township needed partial evacuation and some homes would be flooded the media was actively notified in a ring-around by the media officer.

There was one extremely unusual request passed to the media officer – the producer of a German reality TV show “I’m a Celebrity, Get me out of Here” seeking advice on whether to evacuate their 200 cast and crew from a location that was only accessible by crossing three causeways. This was passed to the media officer because it was a TV show making the request. They were advised to self-evacuate.

The most amusing call was from the Inner West Courier in Sydney – asking if anyone from the Canada Bay Unit had flown to help with the Queensland floods. I said “No – but I am in Lismore with the NSW floods” – and so they interviewed me.

On what was to become the final day of my deployment there was only one media call in the morning, and so I was offered the opportunity to return to my family that afternoon – two days early. On my departure I left a summary of the media calls, names and contact phone numbers of reporters at the Regional HQ for the next OAAA media deployment to Lismore – to better facilitate a response to the next media flood.

Postscript.

On arrival back in Sydney dressed in orange I was offered a place near the front of the taxi queue by a well-wisher who thanked me for the job I had been doing. My “thank you” letter to him was published in the Sydney Morning Herald.

Bill Hoyles MAIES

NSW Registrar gets feet wet ...

It has been an amazing summer season of events and, like most associated with Emergency Services, I have been keeping a keen ear to the media and many other sources reading and observing events unfolding as incidents snowball to campaigns, and activities evolve from response to recovery. There are times that I am frustrated that I cannot get out and help due to family and work commitments and other times where, with a moment of honesty, I am selfishly relieved I cannot.

On 1 December 2009, I was tasked as part of a flood boat crew to assist Coonamble SES Unit. This was the second time in 12 months that our Sydney metropolitan SES Unit has been called to assist with flood response to this small town between Walgett and Dubbo on the Castlereagh River. After picking up our swift-water rescue tech, who quickly acquired the nickname of “Bait”, we headed over the Blue Mountains toward darkening and greying skies of the central west.

A quick overnight in Dubbo and breakfast with a crew from Broken Hill we checked in with Macquarie Region HQ to see if the road was open and then headed north via a look at the Macquarie River lapping the side of the Newell Highway Bridge in Dubbo. We realised our Broken Hill colleagues were in for an interesting time as they were tasked to stay behind.

Glimpses of the Castlereagh as we headed north showed a very full and fast flowing river. Normally the river flows upside-down under its course sandy river bed. We arrived mid afternoon on the Thursday and were warmly greeted by the Coonamble Unit. They had been working long hard hours and like most units, they have many members who were backing up from the SES duties to do their RFS duties. Needless to say they were relieved to see us and a second flood-boat arrive as the river was rising and there was a possible evacuation order for the eastern half of the town. The River was over 4metres above the bed and some pretty impressive hydraulic action was observed as the river is one of the fastest inland rivers when in flood.

We quickly familiarised ourselves with the town and then met our new best friend – the sandbagging machine – sitting proudly next to a large pile of Castlereagh sand in the council compound. A few small jobs that afternoon to prepare houses known to be at risk with sand-bag lines and then it was get some rest as a flood-peak was making its way at pace down from the Warrumbungle Ranges.

At 2am the phones rang – “We need sandbags now!”. The river was rising and Council were working frantically to secure the stormwater drains on the eastern half of the town and needing sandbags. After a couple of solid hours and about four

Things to remember when deployed out of area:

- ❖ Be prepared for the possibility to stay a little longer than planned as conditions can change.
- ❖ Spend time to listen to your hosts.
- ❖ Remember that you are a guest of the local unit and are representing them in their local community.
- ❖ You should always value local knowledge and experience .
- ❖ You are there to help, so be active in your assistance.

refills of the double hopper bagging machine we knew we were here to help.

We had a transport across one of the back feeder creeks which gave us a chance to get our feet wet and this was the start. The river was holding at its peak of near 5.3m and flowing very fast. Large hydraulics were boiling up near the bridge linking both sides of town. The water was surprisingly clean of debris thanks to earlier floods in January 2010, but this also meant that it was flowing faster than normal. Then the call came – two people had jumped into the river from the bridge. It was a rapid response including our mate “Bait” jumping into a rescue-helicopter to chase them down-stream. Fortunately the helicopter chase was not required as both had made it to a nearby tributary and out of the water where police and ambulance rescue attended to them.

The flood events of late November 2010 in central western NSW was the start of over 64 consecutive days of operations where the NSW SES had taken over 55,000 calls for assistance, attended to over 12,000 properties and had on average 11 aircraft in the air every day in response to the floods. The air operation is now the largest sustained emergency air response in NSW.

As a second river peak was recorded at Gilgandra the roads were closed and an evacuation order was issued for eastern Coonamble. Community Services set up accommodation at the race-course as the town prepared. Fortunately the river broke-out both sides up-stream and circled around the town but unfortunately our “three day tour” on the SS Minnow was now extended as we were marooned on an inland sea. The river stayed up for a few days as we undertook more sand bagging and a couple of roof jobs. Saturday afternoon the town started getting brown-outs as a large branch and weed had wrapped up a powerline 8kms up stream. Working with Country Energy, we deployed a floodboat to clear the line. To give a good impression of the pace of the river, it took over 2 hours on full throttle to get up to the incident site but after clearing the line they were back at the launch site in under 20 minutes.

The roads were still closed so most of the work we did was transports across the back creeks. This was great experience as in-between jobs we honed our improvised launching and boat handling skills through the trees in the fast-flowing creeks. We cleared the flood indicators which were still at the 1.8m mark while the Castlereagh remained around 5.2m.

We also had to drag a dead and very “ripe” horse that was snagged in some trees near the eastern levy bank and posing a health risk.

The road was due to be opened on Wednesday so we had a lovely farewell dinner with some of the Coonamble Unit on the Tuesday night. As the mains were being cleared we had an emergency call – “car with one occupant trapped in floodwater on the highway” - so it was a very quick change and coordinated emergency response from Macquarie Region

HQ with Coonamble’s high clearance truck, our vehicle and flood-boat heading north while the Walgett unit headed south to meet us at the incident. Fortunately the driver had made it to a rest area, but had completely flooded the engine of their car. Shaken, the driver was taken to Walgett while we returned back through the floodwater to Coonamble. The next day the road to Dubbo was opened and we said our farewells as our relief crews established themselves.

Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service has successful open day

Sunday 27 March saw the annual open day for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Base near La Perouse Sydney. Visitors were able to see the workings of the helicopter base as well as inspect the rescue vehicles and speak with officers from Federal Police; NSW Police Rescue, Highway Patrol, Bomb Squad, and Dog Squad; NSW Fire and Rescue; Maritime Rescue NSW; NSW State Emergency Service; NSW Rural Fire Service; Ambulance NSW; and Surf Lifesaving Australia, along with the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service.



Banner Photo Page 1: Jamberoo Pass: September 2005

This historical photo on page 1 is significant as it shows the activation of the State Health Plan – with Police, Ambulance, SES, RFS, Westpac Helicopter, Lloyds NSW Ambulance Helicopter, Fire Brigade, and a doctor activated by the Medical Retrieval Unit.

Unfortunately two people died at the scene and one later in hospital. Wollongong Hospital Emergency Dept was readied for casualties of which there were 23 [from memory] but because of the activation of the State Health Plan none of the casualties went to local hospitals but all to Sydney hospitals. This in turn created problems for DVR for police. As well as the aircraft in the photo I believe there were also fixed wings activated to Albion Park Airport to transport casualties. The activation of the State Health Plan was made because the initial report was of a tourist bus (which means up to 50 casualties). The plan was subsequently deactivated when it was confirmed that the accident in fact involved a mini coach with 23 on board.

*photo and background provided by
Dave Waples MAIES*