

Jenny Aitchison

Minister for Regional Transport and Roads



Media Release

Boost for firefighting around the Macleay

Tuesday, 6 June 2023

Firefighters are now much better placed to manage fires in the Kempsey Macleay area following the installation of 22,500-litre water tanks at the Paddys Rest and Barrys Creek Pacific Highway rest areas.

The successful installation of the tanks was funded through the St Vincent de Paul Society's (NSW) Bushfire Recovery and Community Development Program, with support from the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and Transport for NSW, which offered to house the water tanks within the two rest areas.

A further tank is already in place at the Clybucca northbound rest area, having been installed in 2020, and is the result of multi-agency collaboration via the Local Emergency Management Committee.

Regional Transport and Roads Minister Jenny Aitchison said it was good Transport for NSW was able to provide support for the installation of these potentially life- and property-saving tanks.

"We were very pleased to be able to offer some space in these rest areas to help with vital firefighting efforts," Ms Aitchison said.

"I was in this area after the devastating 2019/20 fires and spoke with the locals about the importance of a whole of government approach to assistance in natural disasters.

"Early forecasts are already pointing to a challenging 2023/24 bushfire season, so the installation of these water tanks is timely."

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW community development coordinator for the Kempsey LGA, Chontell Shore, said the highway was a critical containment point for fires in the district.

"Easy access to water can make a huge difference in transit time for appliances while fighting bushfires or for use in fighting vehicle fires, especially large truck fires that are also common on the freeway," Ms Shore said.

"One of the most common observations while working closely with bushfire affected communities during the past four years was the lack of easy access to water during the 2019 fires."

Bellbrook Rural Fire Brigade captain and fellow community development coordinator for St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, Adam Hall, said being able to access water quickly could make the difference between holding a containment line or losing it.

"These tanks will be a welcome addition to firefighting arsenal in the area," Mr Hall said.

Rural Fire Service Lower North Coast Zone district manager, Superintendent Liz Ferris, said the project was beneficial to the NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers and the community by increasing the availability of water supply for incidents on the Pacific Highway and surrounding areas.

“The tank locations along the major transport route provide easier access to RFS volunteers without having to locate water sources on local farms or dams,” Superintendent Ferris said.

“This ensures our volunteers can safely and quickly extinguish fires without extended turnaround times for water supply.

“The RFS is pleased to have been able to collaborate with TfNSW, FRNSW and St Vincent de Paul Society NSW on this project to deliver the dedicated water sources along the Pacific Highway for use by both fire agencies for incidents.”

Fire and Rescue NSW Regional North 1 zone commander, Superintendent Rodney Chetwynd, said his organisation was “very pleased” to see the initiative come to fruition.

“With the new highways bypassing major towns, water supply has always been a concern for firefighters,” Superintendent Chetwynd said.

“The installation of these supply facilities has given our officers a valuable asset when developing their incident plans.

“In previous years we have faced natural disasters where we have helped the RFS and SES as well as attending transport accidents, with some involving hazardous materials along the highways.

“Through our multi-agency reviews and discussion of the ideas at the Local Emergency Management Committees, the need has been identified.”