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Southern superstars sparkle at 2024 WAFES Awards

A Marine Rescue group from Esperance that saved five people from shark infested waters and an SES volunteer from Perth who reloaded Large Air Tankers over a relentless bushfire season were among those from southern WA honoured at this year's Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services (WAFES) Awards.

The annual WAFES Awards celebrate the inspirational achievements of emergency services volunteers and staff who made an invaluable contribution to their community over the last year.

Fifteen awards were presented across three categories – individual, team and youth – at a gala dinner in Perth on Saturday night to recognise excellence in firefighting, emergency management, Marine Rescue and the State Emergency Service (SES).

Volunteers and staff from the Perth metropolitan area shone with six awards while the Great Southern and Upper Great Southern each received one award.

Swan SES' Danny Jeater won the Peter Keillor Award for his valuable leadership skills over bushfire season, managing a team of SES volunteers who were responsible for reloading Large Air Tankers with fire retardant so they could make drop after drop on some of the summer's biggest bushfires.

Recognised for her role finding temporary accommodation and support for displaced residents in the aftermath of the 2023 Kimberley floods, DFES Land and Buildings Executive Manager Kathleen Colgate won the DFES Corporate Staff Individual Achievement Award.

A Marine Rescue group from Esperance was handed the Marine Rescue Team Achievement Award for bravely saving five people who became stranded off the coast of Alexander Bay after their boat was damaged by a shark.



Bassendean SES' Gary Littlewood and Maxine Burrell were honoured with the State Emergency Service Team Achievement Award for creating a standardised equipment list that all units can use while on deployment across the State.

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm AFSM said southern WA experienced one of its hottest and driest summers on record last season, offering little respite for firefighters and support services.

“What I love about our emergency services family in WA is everyone chips in when a major incident or series of concurrent incidents stretches our resourcing,” he said.

“Almost every service was involved in bringing the devastating Wanneroo bushfire under control in November, saving about 280 homes from its path of destruction.

“So many of our staff and volunteers have a remarkable willingness to help when times are tough and deserve every award and plaudit that comes their way.”

SOUTHERN WA WINNERS

Marine Rescue Team Achievement Award

Marine Rescue Esperance, Great Southern

The rescue of five people on board a small vessel missing off Alexander Bay, 100km east of Esperance, was hampered by strong winds, which meant it took four hours fighting against oncoming swell for the crew of rescue vessel Volunteer IV to find them. The skipper did a brilliant job maintaining a suitable speed to get to the location as soon as possible while maintaining crew safety. The moonless night was so dark rescuers heard the men in the boat talking before they could see them. After administering first aid, the crew returned the men and their shark-damaged boat to Esperance safely, about seven hours after the first call.

Murray Lang Bush Fire Service Award

Anthony Mort

Cuballing/Popanyinning Bush Fire Brigade, Upper Great Southern

Anthony ‘Morty’ Mort’s commitment to Cuballing BFB has been transformative. He has revitalised recruitment, championed training and helped the brigade evolve into a professional and cohesive unit. As Chief Bushfire Control Officer for the Shire of Cuballing,



Morty's influence became instrumental in the provision of essential fire safety infrastructure, including sheds and trucks and strategically placed emergency-use water tanks. His efforts to enhance collaboration between town and rural brigades and establish efficient systems for direct firefighting and mop-up operations have reduced volunteer fatigue and strengthened the partnership with DFES personnel. Recently, his leadership has been crucial in navigating a series of challenging fires, suspected to be the result of arson.

Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service Individual Achievement Award

Tom Kusters

Lancelin Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service

During more than 13 years of tireless service, Tom has focused on enhancing the readiness of his team, ensuring they deliver effective emergency responses across Wanneroo and Gingin. His leadership has been instrumental in fostering a cohesive and proficient brigade capable of handling a wide range of emergencies. He has represented Australia twice as part of firefighting efforts in Canada, earning acclaim for his collaborative approach and leadership. Tom has responded to more than 500 incidents, emphasising safety, training and mental health support for his team. Tom's contributions exemplify the vital role of volunteer firefighters in regional communities, embodying a commitment to service that extends well beyond local boundaries.

Peter Keillor Award (SES)

Danny Jeater

Swan State Emergency Service, Middle Swan

Danny developed and ran Exercise Walyunga, a multi-agency exercise to test the response and management of a mass casualty emergency. His ability to coordinate and collaborate with multiple agencies ensured seamless communication and efficient response strategies during this simulated emergency scenario. He has also demonstrated exemplary skills in managing and leading the North East Large Air Tanker (LAT) SES Reloader Team when it was brought together on very short notice. His meticulous planning, coordination and organisation has ensured the LAT Reloader Team is equipped with the necessary resources and information to respond swiftly.

Career Fire and Rescue Service Individual Achievement Award

Mark Papadopoff

Station Officer, Butler Fire Station



With 30 years of service under his belt, Mark has demonstrated loyalty and dedication. For over a decade, he was chair of the Fire and Rescue Occupational Safety and Health Committee which was instrumental in shaping safety protocols and fostering a culture of wellbeing. He played a pivotal role in the Working at Heights Project Advisory Team, working to improve safety protocols for tasks involving elevated positions. His passion for safety, tireless efforts and an ability to drive meaningful change have already left an indelible mark on DFES.

State Emergency Service Team Achievement Award

Gary Littlewood and Maxine Burrell, Bassendean State Emergency Service

Gary Littlewood and Maxine Burrell's work on the development of a Standard Equipment List for SES General Rescue Utilities (GRU) when they are deployed regionally now forms the foundation of standard equipment lists throughout the SES fleet. The need for a standardised list was first identified during Tropical Cyclone Ilsa in 2023 when six GRUs were deployed to the Pilbara. During the incident, the lack of consistency in on-board equipment was discovered. Gary and Maxine collaborated with other SES units to settle on a list of equipment that would become standard in vehicles and trailers. This has taken the guesswork out of trying to get vehicles ready for deployment at short notice.

DFES Corporate Staff Individual Achievement Award

Kathleen Colgate

Land and Buildings Executive Manager, Cockburn Central

Showcasing remarkable acumen and a tireless work ethic in the aftermath of the Kimberley floods, Kathleen's role in managing and maintaining DFES property assets suddenly and unexpectedly expanded to include the coordination of temporary and leased accommodation for key workers and displaced community members. This required liaison and coordinating with companies, other agencies and providers to ensure those affected by the floods received the best support. Her leadership skills and a willingness to assist across the entire agency are further highlighted by her empathetic communication style and supportive nature, coupled with an emotional intelligence when assessing situations. A can-do attitude and high-level multitasking abilities are an inspiration to her team.

DFES Staff Team Achievement Award

Asset Design and Fleet Delivery, Cockburn Central

This 13-strong team is charged with improving existing or delivering new operational assets. It has overcome numerous challenges, such as global supply-chain issues, and worked on



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special projects to improve communication, firefighter safety, off-road mobility and investigations to solve complicated problems in the manufacture of trucks, fleet-related equipment and personal protective clothing (PPC). During the height of the pandemic, the team could only deliver 30 trucks but were able to rebound to deliver 122 in 2022, followed with commissioning a further 81 trucks in 2023. The team was also able to deliver new generation structural firefighting PPC across the State, after working through worldwide shortages of material and minor components.

Photos and vision of the award winners are available for download [here](#), along with vision of some major incidents from the 2023-2024 high-threat period.