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MEDIA RELEASE

BARONGAROOK VOLUNTEERS RECOGNISED FOR THEIR SERVICE

Barongarook Fire Brigade might be a relatively small group of volunteers but their influence has been felt far and wide.

On Sunday the brigade held its annual medal presentation in Colac, celebrating nearly 75 years of service to the Barongarook and Victorian communities.

CFA Acting Chief Executive Officer Gavin Freeman presented National Medals to four dedicated long serving Barongarook volunteer fire fighters, Barry Ackerley, Martin Dow, George O'Dwyer, and Graham Benallack, who also received a CFA Life Membership. Service awards were received by Mike Evans (30 years), Lena Johnstone (25 years), Ken O'Brian (25 years), current captain Brad Langdon (20 years), Greg Smith (10 years) and Ken Hay (five years).

Mr Freeman complimented the brigade on its extensive community service, responding to hundreds of local fires including Ash Wednesday (1983), Wye River - Jamieson Track (2015) and South West Complex (2018), and major campaign fires in NSW, eastern Victoria, north eastern Victoria, Kinglake and Bunyip. He also noted Barongarook's involvement in the introduction of Class A foam onto CFA tankers, its long history of fire prevention and fuel modification works, and its involvement with senior and junior rural competitions.

The brigade has also been active in community safety, vegetation management and fire protection activities including recent community awareness days.

Captain Brad Langdon said the brigade's role and the contribution of volunteers was now more important than ever.

"We're quite busy and support into Colac to help and our area is becoming more urbanised. The urban sprawl is pushing out into our local area and we're quite busy supporting into Colac," he said.

Captain Langdon said the medals were well deserved, recognising dedicated service to the brigade and CFA.

"The National Medals are not something that's done lightly; the recipients really have to deserve the medals. We look at their years of service and what they've brought to the brigade."

He paid particular tribute to Graham Benallack who served several terms as captain and is currently in a lieutenant role and part of the brigade management team.

“He has a huge amount of knowledge and is still very active. H’s been around the brigade since he was a kid; he grew up around the station because his father was a dairy farmer across the road.”

Barongarook Fire Brigade is 100 per cent volunteer and based on Colac-Lavers Hill Road. It is also actively involved in strike team support locally and to surrounding areas such as Ballarat, Little River, Geelong, Terang and more. It has 23 fully trained firefighters - including seven young women - and 10 support personnel.

Volunteer fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford says volunteers are the cornerstone of local communities and their experience and willingness to drop everything to provide vital surge capacity to communities in need makes a huge contribution to the safety and response capacity of CFA and the protection of Victoria.

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