

National Emergency Services Memorial

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Fire and emergency services are part of the civil defence and fabric of Australian community and in a changing climate with more extreme natural hazards, their role is of increasing importance.

We have almost 300,000 emergency services workers in Australia and New Zealand. When empowered collectively, together with other organisations and with communities, we have an impressive capacity to be resilient.

The National Emergency Services Memorial was opened in July 2004 by the then Prime Minister The Honourable John Howard OM AC in honour of the thousands of people who have served in Australia's emergency services organisations. 'Emergency services' is used as a collective description for a wide range of services provided by agencies during incidents and emergencies and includes career and volunteer workers.

In May 2018, a memorial wall was unveiled on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra. The wall displays the names of emergency services personnel who have died performing their duty and it honours their commitment to keeping communities safe. The wall was jointly funded by the Commonwealth of Australia and AFAC, the National Council for fire and emergency services in Australia and New Zealand.

Memorials are important in all cultures. The National Emergency Services Memorial provides a place for remembrance and quiet reflection for families, colleagues and visitors. The memorial demonstrates a maturing in how we value and acknowledge emergency workers as a wider part of Australian and New Zealand societies. For many years, remembrance, recognition and commemoration have been held in jurisdictions, agencies as well as locally. Specific tragic events, such as floods, fires and cyclones also generate acknowledgement. All of this is incredibly important, but so too is a wider belonging and a sense of being a part of an international community through links with New Zealand and even further afield as we increasingly share resources around the globe.

There is also ritual associated with memorial. An annual service is held at the National Emergency Services Memorial in May each year to remember those who have died in the line of duty. This year, it was held on 1 May 2019. The service was quiet, welcoming and inclusive.

His Excellency, General The Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) AK MC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, presented AFAC memorial medallions to the families of those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. This year, 23 names were inscribed on to the memorial wall taking the total acknowledged on the wall to 528.

The service provided recognition for those who have served and those that have died while seeking to protect communities from fire, flood cyclone and other emergencies. The service provided time to respect and reflect on those that have died serving their community and to support those families there on the day that have relatives identified on the wall. This year, following the tragic shootings in Christchurch, respect and compassion was also expressed for all who have suffered and support for the fire and emergency service personnel who supported the community in Christchurch on that terrible afternoon in March 2019.



The annual memorial service at the National Emergency Service Memorial in May 2019, Canberra.

Image: AFAC