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NEWS RELEASE

Burdekin volunteer firefighter receives round of applause

Invicta Mill boilermaker Ian Sutcliffe walked into a spontaneous round of applause when he landed at Townsville Airport after fighting bushfires in New South Wales.

The Wilmar employee was among 18 volunteer rural firefighters from the Townsville region who assisted with firefighting efforts near Tumberumba, 480km south-west of Sydney.

“When we stepped off the plane at Townsville Airport, a local man recognised one of the team members, and called for a big round of applause for the guys flying in from fighting bushfires down south.

“The next thing I know, there are people all through the airport who are clapping and thanking us, and we’re also being greeted by some of the top brass from Rural Fire Service Queensland.”

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing and Fire and Rescue Service Townsville Area Director Michael Thomson were among the senior officers who welcomed the volunteer firefighters back to North Queensland.

Mr Sutcliffe, the First Officer for Mount Kelly Rural Fire Brigade in the Burdekin, has volunteered with the rural fire service for more than 20 years.

He said he spent three days helping out at the rural New South Wales town of Tumberumba.

“I was in a group with other North Queensland volunteers putting out any spot fires in bushland close to the town,” he said.

“What struck me was just how bad the devastation was and the world of hurt that some people were in. There’s just nothing they could have done about it,” he said.

Mr Sutcliffe is a Burdekin cane harvester operator who works as a boilermaker at Wilmar’s Invicta Mill during the maintenance season.

“I’m glad I was able to get the time off work, get down there and help out with the firefighting effort,” Mr Sutcliffe said.

“I have to thank Wilmar for not only letting me leave during the busy maintenance season, but also for continuing to pay me my full wages while I was down there. It’s quite generous.”

Wilmar is supportive of employees who volunteer with emergency organisations such as the State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service, covering their wage or salary for up to 38 hours per year.

ENDS

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From left: Round Mountain Rural Fire Brigade Third Officer Michael Quinlan who led the strike team at Tumberumba, volunteer firefighter Ian Sutcliffe, Rural Fire Service Townsville Area Director Michael Thomson and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing at Townsville Airport.



Volunteer firefighter Ian Sutcliffe on his return home from helping with the firefighting effort in New South Wales. Mr Sutcliffe is First Officer for Mount Kelly Rural Fire Brigade.



Rural Fire Service Townsville Area Director Michael Thomson (right) picks up volunteer firefighter Ian Sutcliffe (left) at the Townsville Airport.