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VicForests' staff recognised for services to fire fighting

Two VicForests' staff from the Central Highlands have been recognised for their long-standing commitment to bushfire fighting in Victoria.

VicForests' Foresters, Peter Scales and Stuart O'Brien, were acknowledged at a recent ceremony to commemorate their efforts which include fighting the Black Saturday fires.

Mr O'Brien, who received a National Medal for Service '1st Clasp' at the ceremony to recognise 25 years of service, said mateship is a huge part of the fire fighting experience.

"The fire fighting community are like a family," he said.

"Whether you're from a forestry background, Department of Sustainability and Environment, National Parks or even volunteer servicemen and women, when you step out on to the line together to fight a fire you share a common goal.

"My time in fire fighting started right back in the late '70s and early '80s around Bright, and has included roles fighting many of the bigger fires we've seen in Victoria since then.

"It is a difficult task and you go through some hard times, but you end up making some fantastic friendships along the way," Mr O'Brien said.

Peter Scales, VicForests' Forester – Operations Planning, received 'The National Medal for Service' after spending the past 20 years involved in various fire fighting roles

"It was an honour to receive this award alongside many long-serving and dedicated officers," Mr Scales said.

"Fire fighting can be very daunting at times, particularly when working on the big fires we have seen in Victoria in 2003, 2006/07 and, of course, the Black Saturday fire in 2009.

"However, being part of a larger team means everyone chips in to do their bit and working with the other Networked Emergency Organisation (NEO) fire fighters allows you to learn from the knowledge and experience of others.

"The contribution of VicForests' contractors is also vital. Their expertise in difficult forest terrain and ability to create tracks and fire breaks is the lifeblood of the overall fire fighting effort," he said.

Two other VicForests' staff based in Gippsland, Peter Jenkins and Rod Walker, were also recognised for their contribution to fire fighting in another ceremony earlier in June.

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