

[Delivered by the Official Secretary, David Hughes, as the Governor's Representative]

**AFTERNOON TEA TO MARK THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
TASMANIA STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE**

REMARKS BY

**HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FRIDAY 29 MAY 2026

Good afternoon, everyone and welcome to Government House for this afternoon tea to mark the 50th anniversary of the Tasmania State Emergency Service.

May I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose land we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky, and waters.

As you know, the SES has its origins in the Civil Defence Legion during the Second World War. The Legion was disbanded after the war. However, in the 1960s, Civil Defence changed its focus to responding to natural disasters.

The Tasmania State Emergency Service was established by the *State Emergency Service Act 1976*, bringing together volunteers from across the State under a single, coordinated framework for disaster response.

Today, the SES has more than 770 volunteers across 38 units, from Smithton in the north-west to Huonville in the south, from the east coast to the highlands.¹ These volunteers devote many hours each year in training, maintaining equipment and attending callouts. This is all done while holding jobs, raising families, and living their lives. They all willingly respond when the phone rings or message arrives.

¹ <https://www.police.tas.gov.au/uploads/DPFEM-Annual-Report-2024-25-ACCESSIBLE.pdf> accessed 13 May 26

Over fifty years, the SES has responded to significant natural disasters, from the catastrophic floods of 1988 in the Derwent Valley, the storm damage of the early 2000s, and more recently, increasing severe weather events. In these events, SES volunteers were among the first on the ground and the last to leave.

This service also asks much of families. Behind volunteers are partners who cover the bedtime routine, a parent who waits up, children who learn from a young age that sometimes dinner gets cold because someone's emergency comes first. Their support deserves our thanks today as well.

The SES has grown and adapted over the last 50 years. The introduction of the *Emergency Management Act 2006*² strengthened coordination with partner agencies including Tasmania Police, Tasmania Fire Service, and Ambulance Tasmania.

The SES has embraced new technology, new training frameworks, and new contributions to road crash rescue and flood boat operations.

For half a century, SES members have turned out in the dark, in the rain, in the chaos of a disaster. The Tasmania SES is made up of a teacher from Devonport, a farmer from Bothwell, a retiree from Launceston, all are protecting their community with their time, their effort and, on some nights, their safety.

So today, on behalf of every Tasmanian, I say thank you to the volunteers, past and present and to the staff who support you. You have, over fifty years, made our island safer, stronger, and better.

May I wish you all the best for the next fifty years.

Now, please, enjoy your afternoon tea.

² <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2006-012> accessed 13 May 26