PRESS RELEASE

THE ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALASIA

PRESENTATION OF THE 2018 CLARKE GOLD MEDAL

at Government House
Canberra
at 10.00am
on Thursday 4 April 2019

The Clarke Medal is an award of The Royal Humane Society of Australasia. It is the Society’s highest award for the most outstanding case of bravery considered during the year. The 2018 Clarke Gold Medal will be presented by the Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (retd) to:

Constable Zachary Brian Rolfe

who went to the rescue of two people whose car had been washed off a causeway on the Hugh River, 50km wsw of Alice Springs on 27 December 2016..

Media Opportunities: Photos/vision of the presentation of the Clarke Gold Medal – Media must register to attend no later than 4:00pm Wednesday 3 April Photo ID will be required.

Contact: Sue Cutler (03) 9650 3233/0400 441 467
To receive the 2018 Clarke Gold Medal:

ZACHARY BRIAN ROLFE, constable of police, aged 25 years, of Alice Springs, NT,
in going to the rescue of two people whose car had been washed off a causeway on the Hugh
River, 50km wsw of Alice Springs on 27 December 2016.

A man and a woman were driving south from Katherine to Alice Springs. At the time central
Australia had received record rainfall and waterways including creeks and rivers were in
heavy flood with numerous flood warnings issued.

At 1.00pm they reached the Hugh River crossing and saw a number of cars parked on either
side of the river. The man started to drive across the flood waters which were estimated to be
approximately 200m in width. As the vehicle was driven across it became impacted by the
floodwater and was washed off the roadway and into the swirling water. The vehicle started
to fill with water and was turned upside down. Both the man and woman managed to escape
from the vehicle via a rear passenger door. The woman grabbed the spare wheel cover and
used it as a form of flotation and was washed away downstream approximately 7kms. The
man was washed towards a small tree in the middle of the flood waters which he immediately
grabbed onto.

Acting Sgt Jamieson, Constable Rolfe and other police were alerted to the incident and drove
50kms from Alice Springs to the Hugh River/Larapinta Drive causeway. Other police on the
scene had commenced to search for the occupants and the vehicle. Due to the remote
location digital communications were essentially non-existent. Mobile phones and police
radios were not operating and communication was limited to hand and verbal exchanges.

Acting Sgt Jamieson as the senior commander at the scene took control and she noted that the
man was in the middle of the floodwaters and that the woman was missing and had obviously
been washed further downstream.

Acting Sgt Jamieson was then notified that the NT Emergency Services would not able to
attend as they had been cut off by floodwaters. The man was becoming increasingly cold and
weak and Acting Sgt Jamieson decided that she would have to attempt to rescue him from the
floodwaters. Constable Rolfe and Mr Priestley who had been in one of the other vehicles
unable to cross the river volunteered to help with the rescue of the man.

They entered the floodwaters taking a 30m rope with them and swam about 50m to reach a
small sand bank nearer to the man. They tried to communicate with him but he did not speak
English.

Mr Priestley walked out to the north end of the sand bank and threw the rope to the man who
on the second attempt managed to grab it and tied the rope around himself under his armpits.
He was then instructed to let go of the tree branch and with the help of the current they pulled
him onto the small island/sandbank. A/Sgt Jamieson and Mr Priestley then helped the man
back to the bank to safety.
Acting Sgt Jamieson then asked Constable Rolfe to swim back to the bank of the flooded river to search further downstream for the missing woman.

Constable Rolfe walked and at times waded on the edge of the river and his feet became quite badly cut from the rocks. He walked for about 5km calling out the woman’s name and eventually heard a faint response and saw her on the opposite bank.

The river was 150m wide and Constable Rolfe moved 200m upstream before entering the river so that the current would take him down to the woman. Constable Rolfe swam about half way across the river holding onto partially submerged trees for a short time to have a rest. He then had to swim the last 40m through the current and managed to grab a tree and felt some rocks under his feet and gradually pulled himself up onto the other side of the river near the woman.

Constable Rolfe and the woman started to walk back across the rocks and at times had to wade/swim through the water with the woman grabbing hold of Constable Rolfe around the neck and clinging to his back for some 40m while he swam through the river. They walked 4-5kms which took 60-80 minutes to the original embarkation point where they were reunited with the rest of the rescue team.

(Please note that Acting Sgt Jamieson and Mr Priestley were awarded the Silver Medal of The Royal Humane Society of Australasia)

ZACHARY BRIAN ROLFE

2018 CLARKE GOLD MEDAL