

Blue Water Services Update

July 2020

As the Blue Water Review Working Group (BWR WG) engaged throughout 2019, nobody could have foreseen the very different world we would be faced with in 2020. The State and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), along with Blue Water Services, continue to operate in a significantly challenging environment having endured a significant bushfire season in 2019, both in terms of protecting Queenslanders as well as supporting interstate efforts and now with COVID-19.

The Blue Water work program is now being reviewed as the response to COVID-19 continues and the impacts evaluated. The Blue Water Submission remains under consideration whilst the impacts to the State budget and recovery priorities are determined.

Despite this, QFES and the Queensland Government continue to provide record levels of funding support to marine rescue services. QFES concluded its negotiations with both VMRAQ and AVCGA shortly after the release of the previous Communique in March and signed individual agreements with both organisations. The agreements continue the enduring State Government support for the sector with a combined total of \$4.5m committed to support the efforts of Blue Water volunteers to watch over the boating public and provide critical support to our State's Marine Search And Rescue (MSAR) capability.

Key performance outcomes remain:

- Supporting the provision of an effective MSAR and radio communications safety service;
- Fostering community awareness of safety issues in the Blue Water environment.

Ministerial and Staff movements

As many are aware, Minister Crawford has recently had his portfolio expanded to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Partnerships. He will continue to also serve as Minister for Fire and Emergency Services. More information about the announcement can be found here - <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2020/5/10/premier-delivers-new-look-cabinet-for-queenslanders-for-covid19-recovery>.

The QFES BWR team has also undergone recent changes:

- Matthew Thompson remains the Director of Blue Water Review, whilst assuming additional responsibilities in the Community Capability and Volunteerism Branch;
- Jade Keogh continues to support the management of the Blue Water Service Agreements;
- Keryn Malone has been seconded to the urgent priority of Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements;
- Julie Jowett has come on board as the Senior Project Officer from the QFES State Operational Coordination Branch;
- Keith Williams departed QFES and returned to VMRAQ to continue his role as their General Manager;
- A Principal Policy Officer will join the team in August.



Risk to Resource Assessment

In June 2020, QFES commissioned the development of a 'risk to resource' capability assessment methodology and program for the State. It will involve the piloting of a methodology at six locations, which are yet to be identified through a consultative process with key sector stakeholders. The assessment will seek to identify areas of high risk, enhance the data available for decision making and refine the allocation of resources across the blue water sector. The body of work is scheduled for delivery by December 2020.

Operational Status Reporting Initiative

Recently, the BWR team instigated a weekly reporting regime for the operational status of both AVCGA Flotillas and VMRAQ Squadrons. The reports contribute to a dashboard that contains a contemporary state-wide view of the radio watch capability being provided and the operational availability of MSAR vessels and crews. The dashboard is now available to the Executives of VMRAQ and AVCGA, the Queensland Police Service, the State Disaster Coordination Centre and QFES' State Operations Centre. This initiative will allow for enhanced awareness of the status of operational blue water capability for inclusion in disaster management planning as well as up to date details on how to access these resources. Further information is available via VMRAQ and AVCGA State Executives and the QFES Team.

Engagements

Regular readers of these communiques will recall the February-March 2020 edition stating that the BWR team was hitting the road. Initially some early engagements were held in the south east corner, with the intent to visit several locations in regional Queensland. Engagement sessions were held at a number of locations between Currumbin and Hervey Bay. These engagements were overwhelmingly positive experiences. It was a chance for volunteers to meet the BWR team and for the team to gain valuable insight into blue water operations and needs. During each of these sessions, questions were asked around vision for the future and those responses were collated to inform the future direction.



When COVID-19 emerged, travel ceased per Queensland Government directives and for the safety of volunteers. QFES considered several options, the initial preference being to continue engagements via technology and video conferencing. In the end, the BWR team felt there was so much insight to be gained from meeting people, seeing the facilities, operating environment and vessels, that engagements were best conducted face-to-face. Whilst travel restrictions across Queensland have eased, the risk of a second wave similar to what Victoria is experiencing is a real concern. So, for the time being engagements with the volunteer bases are on hold until further notice.

The BWR team would like to thank the members of each and every base they visited for the warm welcome extended to the team. The blue water sector certainly has some incredible volunteers who keep the community safe.

COVID-19 continues to challenge our communities and the sector. Per the previous Communique, we encourage you to continue to follow internal advice and guidelines issued by your organisation. You can still also refer to [Queensland Health COVID-19 Health Alert page](#) for the latest advice.

In the maritime context, you can also view and subscribe to Maritime Safety Queensland's (MSQ) regular COVID-19 updates at <https://www.msq.qld.gov.au/About-us/News-and-stories/Coronavirus>, which includes the latest advice on recreational boating.

Protect yourself and those around you by staying at home if you are unwell, practicing social distancing and maintaining your personal hygiene. Out on the water, please ensure you are regularly assessing the risk of exposure to yourself and your colleagues during self-activation and SAR activities. Together, we can continue to keep the transmission of COVID-19 to a minimum.

Thank you for your commitment through these challenging times and stay safe on the water!

Questions or comments? Email the Blue Water Review via BlueWaterReview@qfes.qld.gov.au

