

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE EDITION 30



Making it through the pandemic together

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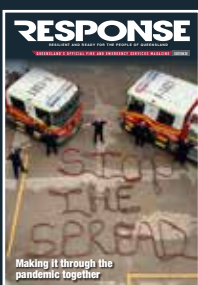


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Firefighters from Kemp Place Fire and Rescue Station urged the community to stop the spread of COVID-19.
Photo credit: A Shift, Kemp Place Fire and Rescue Station.

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Address: Response magazine, Communications, Engagement and Online Branch, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, GPO Box 1425, Brisbane, QLD, 4001
Editor: Jarryd Luke
Phone: 07 3635 3314
Email: Magazine.Editor@qfes.qld.gov.au
Advertising: Martyn Hewett
Email: mkhewett@bigpond.com
Graphic Design: Dexart Graphic Design
Email: dexartgraphicdesign@gmail.com

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FOREWORDS



GREG LEACH
Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

I have been with QFES for more than four months now, and in that short time, two unprecedented disasters – the bushfires and COVID-19 – have made us rethink our operations.

This pandemic has brought significant global changes, leaving many people feeling scared and overwhelmed. Just like we did with the bushfires, QFES will support the Queensland community to respond to and recover from this event.

While these are uncertain times, I know we will work together, demonstrating the professionalism and commitment I have seen across the regions.

Queensland is a vast state, and QFES is a trusted presence in our communities, which I believe is one of our greatest strengths.

Queenslanders look to us to provide a steady hand when situations like this occur. So, it is imperative that we do not underestimate the level of influence we have and respond with the reassurance people need.

While the wide-reaching impacts of this pandemic will challenge us, we must remember there are other challenges for us to overcome and opportunities for us to explore.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements gives us the opportunity to influence the national agenda about how we respond to the increasing and more severe bushfire threat. This will feed into our preparation for the next bushfire season, which we must ensure we are ready for.

The ever-present need to be prudent with managing our budget to deliver core services means we need to justify what we do. This is driving a body of work including a Positioning Paper, program improvement work and investing in data and information systems to make evidence-based decisions.

This work will be guided by Strategy 2030, which may sound a long way off, but we will need to take small steps, every day, to create the QFES we want to see in the future.

Together, we are working towards a harmonised QFES that informs and influences government, confidently leads policy development and delivers contemporary services. Strategy 2030 will guide us to achieving this.



ADAM STEVENSON
Acting Deputy Commissioner

STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

With COVID-19 causing such disruption across the world, it's more important than ever to plan for the future so we can continue providing world-class fire and rescue services to the people of Queensland.

Through Strategy 2030, we committed to strengthening QFES and the support we provide to Queensland communities.

As part of this, we are progressing two underpinning programs – Our Policy Positions and Our Decision-Making Model.

Our Policy Positions will guide QFES towards a sustainable future by providing role clarity for QFES, establishing clear and agreed departmental policy positions, informing opportunities for improvement and evaluating our ongoing performance.

The Policy Positions will also establish our baseline funding position, confirm our understanding of national and international learnings and inform our position on partnerships and interoperability.

Our Decision-Making Model will implement unified decision-making processes within QFES to ensure we have the right capability in the right place at the right time to deliver our core services.

To do this, we will link some key activities and business processes so leadership decisions can be made more robustly based on evidence, data, risk and capability, and can be funded and implemented effectively.

This work is currently in the early stages of planning. The work will integrate the efforts of key areas we have formed in recent years such as analytics, capability management, investment and financial management, prioritisation and planning, performance, governance, and evaluation and improvement.

We are also preparing for the future by contributing to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disasters Arrangements.

The Commission is reviewing how we prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters so when the next bushfire season starts, we will be ready for it.

With COVID-19 causing so much uncertainty in the lead-up to the next season, we will all need to work together to support the community through the challenges ahead.



HON CRAIG CRAWFORD
Minister

MINISTER FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

The reality is, we're now living in unprecedented times with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing the whole world to its knees and impacting all of us in unimaginable ways. Hard to believe a virus has forced the nation to change the way we do things in our work, home and social lives.

Having said this, I want to acknowledge the men and women of QFES who have made themselves flexible for an indefinite period. A lot of you are working from home, working longer than usual, while others remain on the frontline risking their health and lives to keep the community safe.

I couldn't be prouder of how all of you have gone above and beyond your work duties. It's a tough ask, given no one knows how long these measures will last in order for us to flatten and wipe out Coronavirus.

The pandemic response isn't just limited to health sector workers. It's had a flow-on effect on QFES, police and ambulance personnel. SES personnel helping out at polling booths, for example, during the local government elections last month was a common sight. Police officers screening the border with New South Wales, preventing non-residents from entering the state to avoid spreading Coronavirus, is another example.

QFES firefighters, followed by SES members, also worked alongside police officers screening nearly 30 000 passengers at Cairns, Brisbane and Gold Coast Airports. These measures were put in place to prevent the virus infecting Queenslanders far and wide – especially our senior citizens living in remote, regional and rural areas.

I'm aware of the criticism this has received but my argument is that airport travellers are more likely to obey a uniformed officer who approaches them, than a plain-clothed civilian. By law, it's still within the scope of a firefighter's job.

The last thing we want is for QFES personnel to be remembered for sitting on their hands while nurses, doctors, paramedics and police officers among others led the charge on the Coronavirus frontlines. We're not going to kick the virus to the curb alone. We need to do it together. Keep up the incredible work you're all doing.

Standing strong against COVID-19

As COVID-19 continues to spread, we are facing the challenges head-on, driven by the role we play in reassuring the community we will get through this together.

With the recent bushfires still fresh in our memories, we are now confronted with a worldwide emergency.

While we aren't battling flames or floodwaters, the impacts of COVID-19 are causing fear and anxiety in communities who are once again looking to QFES to steady the ship.

Commissioner Greg Leach said QFES was playing a key role in supporting and reassuring the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have always been there for the community when disaster strikes, and now we are ready to support them in other ways during this new threat," Mr Leach said.

"The situation is changing so quickly that being flexible is our only option.

"Our staff and volunteers have adapted by attending incidents and performing roles they would not normally do, because at this time, our definition of normal no longer applies."

Mr Leach said the safety of QFES personnel was the key priority when devising response operations.

"Our Pandemic Planning Taskforce is putting measures in place to ensure our personnel are working in safe conditions that allow them to continue to provide effective services to the community," Mr Leach said.

"We are implementing business continuity plans and working with staff to offer a range of flexible work arrangements as required.

"This situation is changing on a daily basis, so providing the most up-to-date information is crucial to keeping our people informed.

"We have created a dedicated section on our intranet and update it daily to respond to the latest announcements and any questions we receive."

Mr Leach thanked everyone at QFES for doing their bit by following hygiene guidelines and maintaining physical distancing to stop the spread of infection.

"It's easy to underestimate how much of a domino effect one person can have, but by following simple rules, you can protect the people around you," Mr Leach said.

"We can't yet fathom the full impact of this pandemic, but it's up to all of us to support each other, and our community, to get through this.

"We need to be mindful of our actions because at times like these, Queenslanders look to us to demonstrate leadership, professionalism and compassion."



SES volunteers in Cairns delivered essential supplies to Meals on Wheels in March.



Supporting each other through the pandemic

The global pandemic COVID-19 has disrupted our lives. It's important to acknowledge this and also look at the ways we can help ourselves, our colleagues, family and friends stay safe and well as we deal with a rapidly evolving situation.

Know the facts

Always go to trusted sources for good quality information on the latest news about the pandemic situation in Australia.

Queensland has a dedicated COVID-19 site with all the latest facts and figures to help you navigate the situation.

The site has a self-assessment quiz and the latest updates on the current status of the pandemic in Queensland, including contact tracing information, and covers topics such as prevention, travel advice and pandemic preparation. They are also publishing a regular "everything you need to know" blog.

www.qfes.qld.gov.au | 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

Other trusted sources include the World Health Organisation website (WHO) and the Australian Government website. See the breakout box on the next page for website addresses.

There is a lot of information being posted on social media and some news sites. While most people mean well when posting this information much of it spreads myths and misinformation, and is best avoided.

Keep things in perspective

There is no doubt this is a serious situation, and when we're under stress it is easy to jump straight to the worst-case scenario.

To combat this, the Australian Psychological Society (APS) suggests asking yourself:

Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome? While we expect the number of COVID-19 cases will rise over time, with everyone practising good hygiene and physical distancing we can minimise the risk and help keep ourselves, our families and friends safe.

Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be? Remember, illness due to coronavirus infection is usually mild and most people recover without needing specialised treatment.

Am I underestimating my ability to cope? Sometimes thinking about how you would cope, even if the worst were to happen, can help you put things into perspective.

The best action you can take is to be cautious and calm: follow government directives and medical advice, and practise good hygiene habits.

Limit your media exposure

It's important to be informed but equally important not to become overwhelmed by news and information about the pandemic.

If you're finding it hard to switch off Queensland Health suggests setting yourself reasonable limits to accessing the news:

- Start the day by reading a book or going for a walk, rather than checking the news or social media feeds.
- Avoid checking the news before going to bed, especially on your phone or TV.
- Set a limit on how many times you check the news each day, and how long you spend reading about the issue.

- Delete your social media apps, turn off notifications or download an app that helps you limit social media use.
- When you do check the news, put aside time to read good news stories too.

Managing health and wellbeing

The disruption to our normal daily lives means it's even more important to look after our mental health and wellbeing. There are simple things everyone can do to make sure we're staying on top of things at work and at home.

The APS recommends getting exercise, eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water, getting rest and relaxation and a good night's sleep and avoiding using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to deal with stresses.

It's important to stay connected with family and friends, too. If you can't be with others in the same physical space use your phone and internet to spend time with them. Some of your usual social groups might be offering virtual catch-ups using video calls.

Get support when you need it

In these unusual times it's okay and normal to feel a bit anxious, worried, frustrated or any other emotions you might have. If you need extra support, reach out for help.

QFES' Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) offers a range of counselling and support options for QFES members and their families, including a 24-hour phone counselling service and the Peer Support Network. All FESSN services are free and confidential.

There are other resources to help you too, particularly if you're worried about how the pandemic will affect your finances. The Australian Government Moneysmart website has information and support on managing finances through the pandemic including problems paying your mortgage, problems paying bills or fines, urgent help with money and financial counselling resources.

You can also call the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007 for advice about free financial counselling.



Useful websites

Latest news and updates

Queensland Government
www.covid19.qld.gov.au

Queensland Health
www.qld.gov.au/health

Australian Government Health
www.health.gov.au/covid-19

World Health Organisation
www.who.int

Mental health and wellbeing

FESSN
www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fessn

Beyond Blue
www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline
www.lifeline.org.au

Red Cross
www.redcross.org.au

Financial support

Moneysmart
www.moneysmart.gov.au

National Debt Helpline
www.ndh.org.au



People showed their support for the staff and volunteers who responded to the bushfires.

Tickertape parade honours our emergency services

Brisbane City was the scene of much cheering, flag-waving and confetti-blasting in March, as QFES staff and volunteers marched through the streets, alongside other first responders and support organisations, in the Bushfire Relief Tickertape Parade.

About 150 QFES staff and volunteers walked down George and Adelaide Streets for the parade, organised by the Brisbane City Council Lord Mayor's Office.

They were joined by representatives from other government agencies and community organisations, including the Australian Red Cross, HQ Plantations, Lifeline, Queensland Parks and Wildlife, the Rescue Collective, RSPCA, Salvation Army, Australian Defence Force, Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force.

Commissioner Greg Leach said it was wonderful to see so many people come out to say thank you to our emergency service workers for their hard work and sacrifices.

"This is a great recognition of their efforts," Mr Leach said.

"Many QFES members volunteer to serve their local communities and many of them have given up weeks and weeks to fight the bushfires.

"So we say thank you to them, thank you to all the support agencies, and thank you to the people of Brisbane for coming out to recognise our people."

Inspector Mark Burchard said participating in the parade on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) was a fantastic experience.

"The people who came to the parade recognised the work everyone in QFES had put in during the bushfires and the storm season," Mark said.

"Everyone was happy and excited to be recognised by the city of Brisbane for the work they'd done within their local areas."

The parade ended with a ceremony in King George Square where Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner thanked all emergency services staff and volunteers for their hard work.

Cr Schrinner presented the Keys to the City to Mark along with Rural Fire Service (RFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers Lisa Camus and Paul Cantarella, with the trio receiving the keys on behalf of all the organisations who participated in the parade.

"I felt humbled to receive the keys on behalf of everyone who supported the bushfire response – I'm only one person out of thousands," Mark said.

"As FRS staff members, we don't expect to be recognised. This is a job we do day in, day out.

"At the end of the day, if we walk away from a job and someone says well done, that's good enough for us.

"But it was great to see recognition for the volunteers – for the hard work they've put in and the sacrifices they've made for their community."

Read more about Lisa Camus and Paul Cantarella's work with the RFS and SES on page 28.



QFES volunteers at the start of the tickertape parade in Brisbane.



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Swiftwater training hones rescue skills

Swiftwater Rescue crews from the Brisbane Region honed their skills in February as part of annual training to maintain their readiness for the severe weather season.

Over four days of training, 75 swiftwater technicians and operators practised swiftwater swimming and technical skills in the Spillway Common at Wivenhoe Dam.

Technical Rescue Training Officer Darren Phease said they built up their skills in swimming aggressively against the current or with a tethered swimmer, rigging ropes, freeing trapped feet, paddling and flipping the Inflatable Work Platform.

“The sessions also included team training scenarios to enhance the crews’ ability to rescue people trapped on a vehicle after being washed off a causeway, or caught against a tree in swiftwater,” Darren said.

“Unfortunately, despite intensive QFES public awareness campaigns, these are very real scenarios that our crews respond to on a regular basis.

“Several crews were deployed to assist other regions with swiftwater responses during the training period, which shows just how important it is for them to continuously hone their skills.

“Wivenhoe Dam isn’t as challenging as the Tully River, which is the home of our swiftwater training, but it’s an excellent venue.

“It provides good water flow for skills maintenance and realistic training in a controlled environment.

“We thank the Wivenhoe Dam and SEQ Water for their ongoing support to conduct this essential training and look forward to continuing this relationship into the future.”



Rescue using the Inflatable Work Platform.



Aggressive Swimming.



Paddling the Inflatable Work Platform.



Inflatable Work Platform Flip Drill.



Wet weather hits Queensland

After such a prolonged and intense bushfire season, the severe weather season has come as a relief to many, but it has also brought damaging flash floods.

When the Balonne River peaked, SES flood boat operators from the Lockyer Valley joined their colleagues in St George to transport urgent medical and food supplies to the community.

Rain heralded a welcome reprieve for many parts of Queensland at the start of this year after the landscape had sweltered under drought conditions for so long.

The rain was a mixed blessing, with flash floods inundating some parts of Queensland including Dalby, Jandowae and Warra.

Meanwhile, Queensland's south-east coast experienced heavy swells and strong winds after tropical cyclone Uesi travelled straight over Lord Howe Island.

QFES' severe weather operations began in November 2019 under the name Operation Dovetail, running simultaneously with Operation Redux until the bushfire season ended in late January.

State Emergency Service (SES) Director Rob Boniwell said the wet weather completely mitigated the bushfire risk and was good news for many farmers in remote areas.

"The wet weather reached not just coastal areas, but inland locations such as the Gulf

Country, Warrego, Maranoa and the Central Highlands, replenishing waterways and catchments that hadn't seen rain in years," Mr Boniwell said.

QFES staff and volunteers were out in force across the state, rescuing people from floodwaters, managing incidents and helping the community clean up and recover.

The SES responded to more than 2500 requests for assistance from the public, including people affected by the floods, between 1 February and 16 March, as well as supporting land searches, road crash rescues, traffic management, re-supply, patient retrieval and vertical rescue.

When the Tweed Valley was affected by floods at the end of February, QFES deployed SES teams to support our New South Wales colleagues.

Chief Superintendent Lance Duncan agreed it had been a quiet start to the severe weather season, with most of the flooding

concentrated in the South Eastern, South Western and Central Regions.

He said Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) swiftwater technicians assisted several people stuck in their cars after driving on flooded roadways.

"The main challenge faced by our swiftwater technicians is that some members of the community are still not listening to the message of If It's Flooded Forget It," Lance said.

"People need to heed QFES' warnings and back it up when faced with floodwater.

"This year several cars have been washed away because people made the wrong choice.

"It's incredibly dangerous, and it puts our swiftwater technicians in danger as well.

"We had such a devastating bushfire season this year, but we're rescuing more people from water than from the fires."



Acting Superintendent John Pappas experienced this first-hand. He led two FRS crews from Sarina and Mackay to rescue a mother and daughter after their car flipped off a back road at night.

“Their 4WD was submerged and they were clinging to a tree in the water,” John said.

“FRS, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Ambulance Service and local bystanders were trying to help them.

“They are very lucky. It was dark, we could hear the people in the water calling out, but it took some time to find them.

“Two Level 2 swiftwater technicians entered the water, with Level 1 technicians and QPS assisting on the bank.

“Once we’d gotten the mother and daughter to dry land, they told us the water on the road was deeper than they’d thought. They were surprised by how quickly they’d lost control.”

Station Officer Karl Nihot from Nerang Fire and Rescue Station has also helped pull people from the floodwaters. His team helped two QPS officers who were isolated by a flooded causeway.

“The QPS officers had been searching all night at the end of Tallebudgera Valley for a missing bushwalker, but when they returned to their vehicle, rising floodwaters had cut them off,” Karl said.

“We conducted a Dynamic Risk Assessment and decided to use a Wade Technique with an improvised stabilisation line.

“The situation was changing rapidly and the relatively low risk rescue suddenly had the potential to become very dangerous.

“Heavy rain was falling and we were near the catchment area, so the water levels rose rapidly. That exposed us to a risk downstream: a barbed wire and mesh fence.

“We refer to this as a strainer – getting trapped in one with a large flow in the watercourse is exceptionally dangerous, so we had to remove the QPS officers immediately.

“Two swiftwater technicians recovered them one at a time, working safely and efficiently.

“I had never worked with the swiftwater technicians before, but no matter where you are deployed, everyone fits seamlessly into place, enabling QFES to provide a world-class service to the public. It is a very rewarding part of my career.”

Once the severe weather season is over, QFES’ operational focus will shift to the upcoming bushfire season preparations with Operation Coolburn.

“This is now our business as usual,” Mr Boniwell said.

“The time to rest, train, recuperate and build capability between seasons is disappearing. We’ll be building capability in the field.”



RFS volunteers cleaned up in St George after floodwaters subsided.



A swiftwater rescue in Sarina. Photo by John Pappas.



Even QFES’ youngest fans know If It’s Flooded, Forget It.

Champions for women recognised at IWD awards

QFES staff and volunteers gathered together at the Public Safety and Associated Agencies International Women's Day event on Friday 6 March to celebrate women's achievements in the public safety arena.

The annual combined event for public safety brings together members of QFES, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Public Safety Business Agency (PSBA), Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) and Inspector-General Emergency Management (IGEM) to celebrate International Women's Day while raising funds for charity.

This year's major beneficiary was Drought Angels, an organisation that supports rural families and communities during natural disasters.

Held at the Royal International Convention Centre, the event incorporated a local theme that encouraged women to Be Brave, Be True, Be You.

The day was focused around authenticity and bravery and this was evident in the stories of the incredible keynote speakers.

Attendees were inspired by manager of the Federal Court of Australia for Northern Territory and former serving QPS Officer,

Helen Rose, who shared her story of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and recovery.

Equally extraordinary was Diane Ames, who spoke about her family's journey after her husband became a quadruple amputee due to a life-threatening infection.

The awards presented at the event were indicative of the International Women's Day (IWD) global theme #eachforequal and showed that equality is everyone's responsibility.

Commissioner Greg Leach said the award recipients' behaviours exemplified the message that championing women is a role for everyone and each of us must take responsibility to act for equality.

"It is important to recognise those who play an active role in supporting, promoting and improving the standing of women in QFES," Mr Leach said.



Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing with award recipients Helen Jakeman, Lauren Schodel, Andrew Short, Barbara Zandona-Gehan, Patricia Smith on behalf of Christine Whitby and Tanya Wittman.

“The award recipients have shown outstanding leadership and we thank them for the difference they make every day to women in our organisation.

“It is the result of collective efforts that will bring forth the most change.”

Winner of the Outstanding Female Leader for the Rural Fire Service (RFS) was Tirroan Rural Fire Brigade’s Christine Whitby who said her role as a Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) was important for regional areas.

“The community appreciates having a local contact, someone who is there to share important safety information and support them in person,” she said.

“Every conversation is an opportunity to promote the work of the RFS and it’s pleasing to see an increasing number of women and girls interested in joining the service.

“Services like ours are critically important to regional areas so we also work with other emergency services in the region to create interest at a grassroots level.”

The Outstanding Female Leader for the Fire and Rescue Service was awarded to Firecom Manager Lauren Schodel.

In her 19 years of service Lauren has seen extraordinary change in the way QFES supports women.

“Capability is more important than gender, so we should empower young women to choose a career direction in QFES that suits them,” she said.

“Being supported in my career, by people who champion women, has meant I’ve been able to forge a fulfilling career with QFES, and now I have the opportunity to give that support to others.”

Acting Director Fleet and Capital Works Barbara Zandona-Gehan, who won the Outstanding Female Leader for Corporate Support/Administration, said she felt extremely privileged to be recognised.

“I work in a typically male-dominated area of the organisation, but the focus has always been on who can get the job done,” she said.

“I’m excited about the transformational change we’re seeing every day.

“The biggest change I’ve seen in recent years is the shift around acceptance and that gender doesn’t necessarily determine suitability for a role.”

State Emergency Service Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short, who received the Mentor of the Year award, said it was nice to know he was making a real difference.

“I see mentoring as a way to help others and contribute to cultural change,” he said.

“Mentoring can help with decision making, navigating challenging situations, behaviour change and taking action.”

Others recognised on the day included Tanya Wittman from South Western Region, who was awarded Outstanding Female Leader – State Emergency Service, for continually empowering women through the development of the ‘Empowering Women in Orange’ initiative.

RFS volunteer Helen Jakeman won the Champion of Change award for her outstanding leadership in the advancement of women within the volunteer membership of the RFS.



The event celebrated the theme of *Be Brave, Be True, Be You*.



Graduates from Recruit Course 108 in December 2019.

100 new firefighters support regional communities

By June 2020, 100 new Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) officers will be allocated to stations across regional Queensland.

Regional communities from far northern to south western Queensland were hit hard by the horrific bushfires at the end of last year. People lost homes and businesses, watching on as the landscape around them was destroyed.

Now extra FRS firefighters are being deployed to help support these communities prepare for fires in the future.

Assistant Commissioner, FRS Neil Gallant said the firefighters would be at the station full-time to engage with the public, evaluate issues in the area, carry out building inspections and work with the community to build resilience.

“The new staff will work in locations that can support operations and volunteers in bushfire-prone areas, such as Coolum, which was the epicentre of the Peregian Springs fires last year, and Yeppoon, which was close to the devastating Cobraball fires,” Mr Gallant said.

Since 2018, 62 of the new 100 firefighters have been delivered through a combination of internal transfers, conversion of existing over-established positions and new recruits.

In March, a further 29 positions were allocated to eight regional communities.

The new positions will allow several stations to enhance their service delivery models. Some of them will transition from an auxiliary station to having a five-day permanent day shift, while others will move from a five-day permanent day shift to a seven-day permanent day shift model.

“Nothing beats having people at the station to provide immediate responses to emergencies,” Mr Gallant said.

“At auxiliary stations, there was no-one physically there between incidents. But now we will have firefighters at the station ready to respond immediately to fires or other emergencies.

“Auxiliary firefighters remain a crucial part of our response to emergencies.

“We are not reducing the capability of our auxiliary firefighters – we are adding permanent firefighters to provide extra support.

“These new firefighters will also be able to answer community enquiries about

hazard reduction burns and preparing for bushfires.

“They will provide immediate assistance, particularly during peak times when the community is threatened by fire or flood.”

Like the State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service, the FRS now has a state-based directorate responsible for strategic oversight and guidance for consistency across the state.

Mr Gallant said the FRS Directorate that was established last year will provide support to all FRS personnel at a state level.

“The directorate emphasises our focus on supporting the FRS throughout Queensland. Alongside the SES and RFS directorates, this will ensure all three services are equally supported,” Mr Gallant said.

All allocated permanent roles are expected to be on shift by November 2020, with the remaining roles to be allocated by June 2020, barring any delays from the situation with COVID-19.

QFES Royal Commission taskforce established

QFES has established a taskforce to respond to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

In the spring and summer of 2019-20 Australia experienced one of its worst bushfire seasons in recent history. Fires started in Queensland in September on an unprecedented scale both in size and intensity. As 2019 drew to a close and the new year began further bushfires ignited in other states, all of which were on a scale never experienced before.

There was increasing commentary in the media, politics and by subject matter experts regarding the cause of the fires. There was also considerable focus on the response provided, particularly from a national perspective.

A Royal Commission of Inquiry into the 2019/20 bushfires, sometimes referred to as the Bushfires Royal Commission, was established in February 2020 in response to the unprecedented fire season.

Air Chief Marshal Mark Donald Binskin AC (Retired) (Commission Chair), the Honourable Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC and Professor Andrew Macintosh were appointed as Royal Commissioners.

The Commission will examine coordination, preparedness for, response to and recovery from disasters as well as improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions and mitigating the impact of natural disasters.

The inquiry will also consider the legal framework for Commonwealth involvement in responding to national emergencies.

To meet the expected demands of the Royal Commission, a QFES taskforce has been established. Queensland will most likely be the first jurisdiction to be examined simply because the fires began in this state.

Executive Director Organisational Engagement Troy Davies has been appointed Taskforce Commander and will lead a team of eight staff with key roles in data management, inquiry, policy and performance and engagement.

The taskforce will operate under the guidance of a taskforce steering group that reports directly to the Commissioner.

The Commission accepted public submissions on the 2019-20 bushfire season up until 17 April 2020 to inform its work.

It is expected a report of the results and recommendations will be released no later than 31 August 2020.





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The SES supported air base operations at Kybong, Gympie during the bushfire season.

SES supports air operations

With QFES using more than double the amount of aircraft this bushfire season than in previous years, State Emergency Service (SES) members supported aerial firefighting by replenishing aircraft with fuel and foam solution and getting them back in the air as quickly as possible.

From the Toowoomba airbase to frontline airbases such as Applethorpe, SES members kept our fleet running smoothly by supporting air base operations.

QFES deployed more than 40 aircraft across the state, including a 737 Large Air Tanker from New South Wales, a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter contracted from the United States and military aircraft for mapping major bushfires.

It was vital for the SES to get the aircraft back in the sky quickly because, with the drought conditions, fires were burning faster than ever before.

SES Director Rob Boniwell said the SES had substantially increased their support of bushfire operations.

“We not only support air base operations, but logistics, staging and incident management teams,” Mr Boniwell said.

“When the SES supports air operations, we enable and empower firefighting crews from the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and Fire

and Rescue Service (FRS) for duty on the incident ground, which is what they’re trained for.”

Operational Capability Officer Dean Vink, who was involved in Airbase Operations at Kybong near Gympie and Bundaberg during the recent fire season, said SES members played a vital role in preparing aircraft.

“SES provide members that are qualified in the Air Base Operator (ABO) function, which includes the safe marshalling of the aircraft and filling it with water and foam mix,” Dean said.

“We are also responsible for the welfare of pilots and flight crews, general safety and Foreign Object Damage checks, recording and management of consumable resources (foam), flight following information and passenger movements/manifests.

“The hot and noisy conditions on the tarmac can be challenging. We also need to maintain our situational awareness of aircraft movements.

“ABO gives SES members the satisfaction of contributing to bushfire events that are far removed from SES core business of storm and flood response.”

Dean has a long history of working with aircraft, having joined the Royal Australian Air Force after he completed school and working as a ground crew member and supervisor/trainer at the Sunshine Coast Airport.

“I have always had an interest in aircraft and aviation, and I enjoy the team work and supporting QFES in the fire fight when required,” he said.

SES members and staff undertake formal accredited training in Air Base Operations and Air Base Management, and demand for the training is increasing. Once their training is complete, they work at air bases with trained RFS personnel.

“It’s great to see the interoperability between the services working together to achieve the same outcome,” Dean said.

Data Science leads the way

The Analytics Team at QFES Futures has employed two data scientists to find meaning in our data and help guide decisions.

“We need data on this” is an all too familiar phrase heard by the Analytics Team. While reporting on past events has its place, analysing the data to aid decision-making is more important than ever.

Director of QFES Futures Nicole Lott said the new data scientists had broad skillsets that combine data mining, statistics, coding and machine learning with business acumen.

“Everyone has seen the emergence of big data in recent years, but to truly unlock its power, you need to be able to turn that data into actionable insights,” Nicole said.

“This capability has opened up new avenues to solve complex problems with custom-built data models and visualisations.”

The data scientists have been developing a range of demand forecasting tools and models for capital and fleet investment planning, as well as a forecasting model to predict future firefighter recruitment needs.

They create powerful visualisations using free, open-source software and a cloud computing environment that can handle large amounts of data.

More recently, the team crunched the numbers to help QFES prepare for the impact of COVID-19.

The data scientists analysed leave data to gain insights into what leave typically looks like across QFES. They then used the data to model projections of staff absenteeism related to infections and self-quarantine.

This informed QFES’ resource planning and allocation during the uncertain times caused by COVID-19.

“While the team is already very busy, we have only scratched the surface in how we can use data science across QFES,” Nicole said.

“The work the team has already produced shows how much better QFES can plan for the future when powerful modelling informs our decision making.

“Strategy 2030 is all about understanding and adapting to the future needs of Queensland communities.

“Using advanced and predictive analytics techniques is vital to ensure our services align with demand, risk and need.”



A visualisation of demand severity in Queensland for capital and fleet investment planning.



Beyond the call of duty

Peer Support Officers work quietly behind the scenes to help any QFES member who is in need of a listening ear or practical support. Each March, during PSO Week, we thank them all and honour their outstanding achievements with the PSO of the Year Award.

QFES Peer Support Officers (PSOs) are a group of dedicated volunteers who provide support to colleagues going through hard times.

Throughout 2019, QFES PSOs provided more than 4175 hours of support, to almost 1500 members, by following up after critical incidents, providing information sessions on mental health, and assisting colleagues with work or personal challenges.

QFES' annual PSO Week celebrations recognise the valuable role of all 162 PSOs across the state, and highlight those who have provided outstanding services.

This year's Olga Wilson QFES PSO of the Year Award went to Guiseppe 'Joe' Torrisi from Far Northern Region.

Joe said he was surprised by the honour.

"It felt awesome but I couldn't believe it," the PSO veteran of 23 years said.

Peer Support Program coordinator Robyn Kirby said Joe received a record number of nominations from his colleagues for his outstanding efforts over his decades of PSO service.

"Joe is well-known around the state for his compassion, resilience and dedication to helping others through a wide range of challenging experiences," Robyn said.

"Joe's colleagues described him as 'a selfless, humble man who continually sacrifices for others'. He strives to ensure that staff and volunteers from all branches of QFES are provided with high level support," she said.

Joe wouldn't have it any other way.

"I love being a PSO and I'm there when I'm needed, day and night, no matter the issue and I don't expect any rewards for it. I wouldn't be a PSO if I didn't care about my work mates," he said.

Joe knows how important the PSO role is after reaching out to one himself after a traumatic incident.

"I listen very carefully to what they say, I ensure they are comfortable talking to me



Peer Support Officers at the PSO Week celebration in Brisbane.

and they have a hundred per cent trust in me.

"I can chat face-to-face or on the phone to listen to any issues they may have, or just ask a simple 'How are you?' I also hold support sessions with crews who have attended a traumatic incident."

Joe said PSOs were important to QFES because they help people to feel looked after and to return to work, even linking them with additional support, for example

if counselling is needed, or if they're working in another region.

"We have a great PSO network in our region and throughout our state. Our counsellors and the FESSN team are fantastic. I am very proud of our team," Joe said.

If you would like to contact a PSO for a confidential chat you can find their contact details at: qfes.qld.gov/fessn/ or call the FESSN office on 1300 309 508.

Nominee trophy recipients

Melissa Webb	RFS Volunteer Brisbane
Brendan Jones	SES Volunteer North Coast
Scott Castree	Station Officer North Coast
Allan Carlson	Senior Firefighter Northern Region
Jennifer Werbeloff	SES and RFS Volunteer Northern Region
Lyn Roveglia	FRS Staff and RFS Volunteer Northern Region

Each nominee was acknowledged for their outstanding service in supporting colleagues within their regions.





NORTH COAST REGION



Community workshops increase preparedness

In response to community concern over the recent bushfires, the North Coast Region conducted workshops to help the community learn more about how to prepare for the unexpected.

On 24 February a crowd of 130 attended a workshop in Mapleton-Flaxton to hear more about local fire and storm/flood risk, disaster arrangements and how they could better prepare for emergencies.

The local RFS Brigade and the Local Community Emergency group promoted the event. Regional Community Engagement Officer Julie Bruynius and Bushfire Safety Officer Andrew Marnie presented along with Sunshine Coast Regional Council. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service answered questions and the council gave out resources and prizes from their Get Ready program.

The Golden Beach and Pelican Waters Community Association also hosted a workshop for residents who had questions about fire safety, evacuation and where to get information. Julie and RFS and SES volunteer Aram Ross co-presented on the steps to prepare for emergency events and A/Area Commander Caloundra Jon Webb advised on previous fire events and specific streets of concern.



Recognising Peer Support Officers

Peer Support Officers (PSOs) in the North Coast Region attended a presentation in early March hosted by Assistant Commissioner North Coast Region Gary McCormack at Hervey Bay.

The event celebrated the PSOs' tireless efforts to support their peers. Scott Castree received this year's Olga Wilson Award nominee trophy.

ARTEP recruit course at Caloundra

Earlier this year ten recruits from the region underwent a two-week, live-in Auxiliary Recruit Training and Education Program (ARTEP) course at Caloundra.

The Course Manager Kim Gray, and trainers Greg Albury, Ron Mitchell, Paul Mardon and Gas Fire Unit Operator Merv Bonnell, as well as shadow trainers Ken Lavender and Brian Westlake, provided guidance to the participants.

Recruit Karl De Wet said the ARTEP course was both challenging and exciting.

“What I didn't expect was the awareness that if a firefighter occupies a seat in an appliance, they have the responsibility to be the best they possibly can be because seconds can make a life changing difference to a situation,” Karl said.

“If one is not the best they can be, then it is better to give their seat to someone who is prepared, because lives are at stake.”



New trailers for SES

SES groups received three new trailers in a handover ceremony at the Maroochydore SES Group in March.

The Premier of Queensland Annastacia Palaszczuk and Minister Crawford handed over storm trailers to the Caloundra SES Group and Maleny SES Group and a traffic control trailer to the Maroochydore SES Group, worth about \$58 000 in total.





BRISBANE REGION



Search and rescue training

SES members from across the Brisbane Region learned the intricacies of Search and Rescue (SAR) during the recent SES SAR course. The course was organised by the Region Training Team and facilitated by Jim Whitehead, QPS Senior Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator (SARMC) and State SAR Training Coordinator.

The course was held in the recently built Arana Hills SES building, part of the Moreton Bay unit. The course usually takes seven days, but was shortened to five days because all the participants

had previously completed SES courses in Map Reading and Navigation, Briefings and Debriefings and Land Search.

The course was delivered via a mix of case studies, desk top exercises, group discussions and a knowledge-based assessment. The content covered a wide range of topics including lost person behaviour, timeframes for life expectancy, environmental factors and managing searches.

The participants can now apply their knowledge by helping manage and coordinate future searches across the region.



Deception Bay joint training exercise

The crew from Deception Bay Fire and Rescue Station coordinated a joint scenario-based exercise, alongside Narangba Rural Fire Brigade and the Deception Bay SES, to explore each service within QFES and further understand each other's capabilities.

The exercise used the SES Depot and its facilities, and featured a scenario where RFS volunteers attended a grass fire threatening a shed, which escalated into a structural fire.

Deception Bay auxiliary firefighters performed search and rescue and extinguished the fire inside the building. The SES were tasked with patient triage and care, as well as providing additional support with lighting.

The night was deemed a success, with the auxiliary firefighters showing the SES members internal search and rescue techniques and offering explanations of firefighting capabilities.

A boost for flood boat capability

The Brisbane Region SES conducted a competency maintenance activity for 28 flood boat operators with nine vessels to boost operational capability for flood response across the region.

They used Bulimba's HMAS Morten naval base as the staging area to minimise the impact on public areas.

The operators were assigned to crews and vessels they would not normally operate, giving them the opportunity to inspect the vessels and equipment and gain practical experience with the different vessel types.

The regional approach to competency maintenance ensured the required activities were carried out consistently and allowed for operators, who may have been out of competency for more than 12 months, to be observed and signed off by a current trainer.





SOUTH EASTERN REGION

Rural Fire Brigade training day at Dreamworld

Following the recent bushfires, Wasp Creek Rural Fire Brigade approached Dreamworld to hold an education session for volunteers about how to assist wildlife during bushfires.

Neighbouring brigades from Ormeau, Rocky Point and Coomera Valley also attended the session on 15 February 2020. The interactive wildlife presentation demonstrated the safest ways to handle koalas and other wildlife. Dreamworld included a meet and greet with two amazing tiger cubs.

Everyone came away with a better understanding of what to do when they come across injured wildlife in the bush.



SES lend a hand to local farmers

Members from the Logan SES Unit recently took off the orange uniform and put on their farming clothes.

During the tragic bushfire events of September and November Logan SES, along with other SES units in the South Eastern Region, provided operational support to firefighters on the ground, including operations, logistics, transportation and staging.

When the immediate fire danger was over, and the full extent of the devastation was realised, many of the Logan SES members wanted to help even more. With the support of Logan City Council and Somerset Regional Council, a plan was formulated where members could help regional farmers with general labour for a day.

On Saturday 22 February, 44 willing members from Logan SES, along with colleagues from Somerset SES, travelled to Esk where they were dispatched to help out nine local farmers.

The SES members rolled up and disposed of kilometres of barbed wire from fences that had been destroyed, dismantled small structures damaged by the fires, and placed new water tanks.

They returned to base camp following a hard day's work scratched, tired and dirty but extremely happy with their efforts.

Rathdowney Combined Facility opening

The Rathdowney Combined Facility was officially opened by Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Craig Crawford in February.

The \$1.7 million facility is now home to Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue Service crews.

The opening was celebrated with the local community over a barbeque lunch that followed the official ceremony.

Auxiliary Captain Matthew Arkinstall said he and his crew appreciated the new station and realised they were the envy of many other older stations around the district.

Matthew expressed his thanks to the family members of the auxiliary brigade, who helped move all the gear across to the new station in one night, to Inspector Craig Lashman who supervised most of the building progress and to Firefighter Tony Salisbury who was appointed to liaise with the builders and help resolve issues during construction.



“I would also like to acknowledge the input and support from Neil Reid and Chris Robinson prior to their retirements, and also Inspector Kerry Cumner and Station Office Peter Gyory who provided valuable support at the local level,” Matthew said.

The ceremony also included the official handover of a new storm damage trailer to the Scenic Rim SES Unit.



SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Warwick father and son join forces

It was a proud moment when a father and son from Warwick Fire and Rescue Station worked together for the first time to put out a shed fire.

Mark Sullivan, a senior firefighter of nearly 30 years and his son Ben Sullivan, an auxiliary firefighter of three months, entered the structure together with a case 1 high pressure hose. It was the first time Ben had been to a structure fire, but they quickly brought it under control.



A successful rescue on Australia Day

When a bushwalker lost their footing in the Queen Mary Falls National Park this Australia Day, in a hard-to-reach area with no reception, QFES members were there to help.

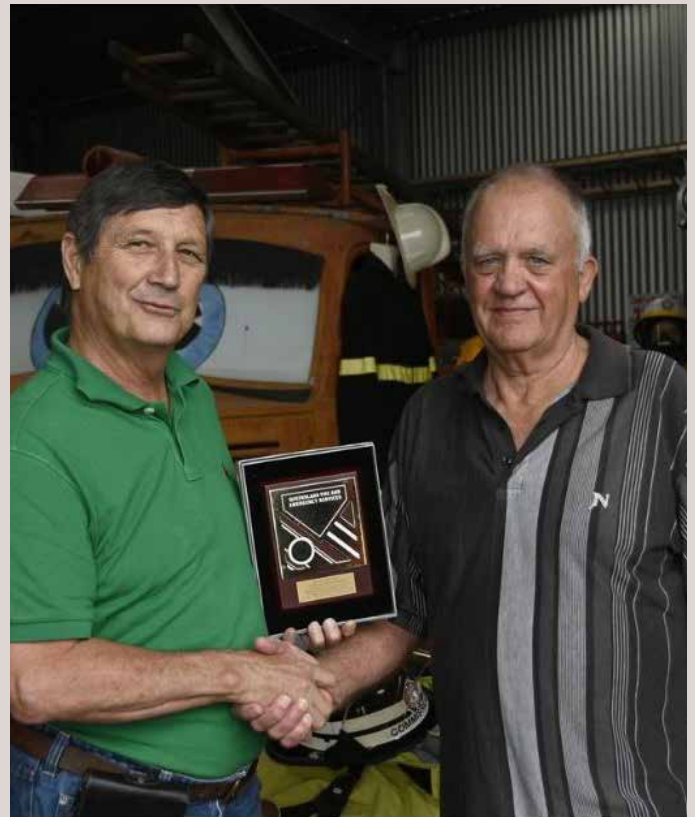
Once Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) were alerted to the bushwalker's location, they requested auxiliary firefighters from Killarney Fire and Rescue Service and the Warwick State Emergency Service (SES) Group to assist with the heavy lifting.

The Warwick SES Group has a lot of experience working with QAS to extract injured people from the mountainous area surrounding Killarney and other parts of the Southern Downs.

Knowing how difficult the location was to traverse, the Warwick SES Group deployed with their trusty Ferno Australia Mule wheeled stretcher carrier and essential supplies.

The auxiliary firefighters had undertaken similar jobs previously but learnt the benefit of using the Mule in these types of jobs.

The successful rescue was particularly rewarding for one of the volunteers, Kevin, as this was his first operational deployment since joining the SES.



Former QFES Commissioner visits historical society

It was a pretty ambitious project to fill a cavernous shed with a trove of local fire brigade history, but now the Toowoomba Fire Brigade Historical Society is looking to build a second one.

The original plan was to house several restored fire engines used by the Toowoomba Fire Brigade since its inception in the 1800s, but it has only grown from there.

The society took delivery of another special collection of artefacts provided by the former QFES Commissioner Lee Johnson, including a complete set of turnout uniforms, which were donated to the museum.

Mr Johnson also used the presentation as a fitting opportunity to recognise former Millmerran and Toowoomba Fire Auxiliary member Neville McCabe for his service from 1976 to 2011.



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FAR NORTHERN REGION

Heavy rescue training day

Western Command conducted a heavy rescue training day in early March using a new heavy rescue trailer.

Operational crews and auxiliary firefighters from Mareeba and Atherton practised lifting a bogie double trailer off a smaller vehicle, using the new trailer's low-pressure airbag system, in conjunction with the 50-tonne hydraulic jack system. They also practised using a plasma cutter to cut through metal.

While the vehicles were being lifted, the crews used the trailer's Powershore hydraulic system, along with cribbing, to support the loads.

The heavy rescue trailer will be used throughout the region to support frontline appliances at road crash rescues involving heavy vehicles or complex entrapments.

There has been an increase of heavy vehicle traffic in the region, particularly because the enhanced Peninsular Development Road has improved access inland and further north for heavy vehicles and tourism. This increases the risks of road crashes within these isolated areas.

The trailer will be especially useful for supporting remote responses along the Peninsular Development Road in conjunction with remote SES resources with road crash rescue capacities.



Celebrating 37 years of service

QFES members gathered in early March to celebrate Firefighter Greg Rebetzke's last day after 37 years of service.

Commissioner Greg Leach, Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche and Far Northern Region Assistant Commissioner Michelle Young joined the celebration at Smithfield Fire and Rescue Station and presented Greg with a plaque and certificates.

Red bench for Cairns

QFES members attended a morning tea in March to celebrate the unveiling of a Red Bench at Access Community Housing in Cairns.

The Red Bench was installed as part of the Red Rose Foundation's Red Bench Project, which builds permanent

reminders that domestic violence occurs within all of our communities.

The Red Bench provides a place to sit, reflect on this important issue and have a conversation.





NORTHERN REGION

Stadium opens in Townsville

Around 18 000 Townsville locals chanced the rain to get a firsthand look at the new Queensland Country Bank Stadium.

QFES was invited to participate in the open day in February and staff and volunteers took the opportunity to engage with the enthusiastic crowd, as well as scope out the new facility for themselves.

The Stadium is a fantastic addition to the City of Townsville and North Queensland, with many locals pinning their hopes on it becoming a fortress for the North Queensland Cowboys.



Commissioner's visit

Commissioner Greg Leach had a full itinerary when he visited the Northern Region in late February.

The Commissioner wasted no time in getting out and meeting staff and volunteers across the region. His visit included trips to Ingham Fire and Rescue Station, Townsville SES and a tour of Townsville's facilities and surrounds.

The Commissioner also met with more than 100 staff and volunteers who joined the Assistant Commissioner Northern Region Steve Barber for a barbeque at the Northern Region Operations, Training and Support Complex.





CENTRAL REGION

Enhancing meaningful engagement in Central Region

The Regional Community Engagement Network (RCEN) is working closely with our people to build awareness of the QFES Engagement Strategy and Regional Engagement Plan priorities.

Enhancing Engagement workshops are being held throughout the region to empower QFES members to build capable and connected communities through effective engagement.

The aim of the sessions is to listen to our people to uncover potential barriers to engagement, understand our community's perception of risk and identify future engagement and educational requirements.



Acting Brigade Training and Support Officer Marie Weisse said, "We had a very productive and energising meeting. So positive in fact that those present have requested we hold the Volunteer Community Educator meeting on a monthly basis."

Enhancing Engagement is just one project identified by the Central Region RCEN as an engagement priority for 2020 to help the community prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from the impacts of fire and emergency events.

Other priorities include supporting the implementation of the QFES Engagement Plan and bushfire recovery activities, as well as supporting operations and providing our people with tools to lead meaningful engagement in a coordinated manner.



Improving Livingstone's bushfire response

The Livingstone Shire Council has secured a federal grant of \$1 million and is channelling the funds towards seven priority projects.

The council hosted a workshop with 13 Rural Fire Brigades and 17 Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade Officers to discuss priorities for their

local areas following last November's Cobraball bushfire disaster. Each brigade was given the opportunity to suggest ideas to improve their response capabilities.

Regional Manager for RFS Central Region Brian Smith said, "The seven projects focus around road upgrades within the area to improve access and safety of our crews and as a bonus the projects will bring jobs into the area as well."





Lisa Camus (centre) and Paul Cantarella (right) received the keys to the city on behalf of all staff and volunteers who contributed to the recent bushfire response.

Camaraderie is key

Long-serving QFES volunteers Lisa Camus and Paul Cantarella accepted the keys to the City of Brisbane on behalf of all volunteers at last month's tickertape parade.

Partners Lisa Camus and Paul Cantarella both volunteer for the State Emergency Service (SES) and Rural Fire Service (RFS). Lisa was chosen for the honour by the Brisbane Lord Mayor's Office from nominees across 25 organisations involved in fighting and recovering from last year's Queensland bushfires.

Lisa said she was shocked to have been chosen to accept the keys.

"When RFS Assistant Commissioner John Bolger told me I'd been selected, I was confused about why I'd been chosen," she said.

"There were so many great people involved during the fires and who have done great things. I feel like just a tiny piece of the puzzle."

Lisa, from the Closeburn Rural Fire Brigade north-west of Brisbane, joined the SES in 2013 and the RFS in 2014.

She fought more than 15 fires across south-east Queensland during the recent bushfire season, including the Peregrine fire and the Moreton Island fires, and was battling the Canungra fire the day before Binna Burra Lodge burnt down.

Where did it all start for Lisa?

"It was Paul's idea," Lisa laughed.

"He asked if I wanted to join the SES and I had to ask him what the SES was. I had been living in my own little world because we'd never been impacted by any disasters.

"I'd had four children under four in my younger years and always wanted to volunteer but never had the time so this was my first opportunity, and it was great. I like being outdoors and I like helping people."

The couple then joined Brisbane Unit 'Metro' Group together in mid-2013. In 2016

they also joined the Glasshouse Mountains SES Group under a special arrangement to assist with vertical rescues in the local area.

But Paul upped the ante when he asked Lisa about also joining the local RFS.

"I grew up in Victoria and my dad was in the RFS so I knew I wanted to get involved," she said.

While Lisa doesn't consider herself as a long-term volunteer compared to the years of service of her SES and RFS friends, she said there is nothing as rewarding as helping people in their time of need.

"In quieter operational periods the mates and camaraderie are key but I also think if you can align the desire to help the community with activities you genuinely enjoy then it makes it easy to maintain a high level of commitment.



"I discovered early that I enjoy practical, outdoor and often high-risk functions like firefighting, flood boat operations, chainsaw work, working at heights, climbing and rescue – all of which require a lot of ongoing training that keep you busy, focused and interested."

Lisa said another inspiration to volunteer in the SES and RFS was the people she meets who leave a lasting impact.

"During the Townsville floods last year, I was the team leader of a Working Safely at Heights team and we arrived to help an older lady who had reported water leaking into her kitchen," she recalled.

"The land around her home was still inundated with water, the house was very old and in need of a lot of work, and there wasn't one leak but many.

"There was a lot of must and mould inside from the humidity and dampness, to the point it was a little difficult to breathe, the kitchen ceiling had partially collapsed and there were personal belongings everywhere.

"The job was as much about the care of the person as the leak.

There's nothing as rewarding as helping people in their time of need.

"The team tarped the roof, helped move some of the at-risk belongings, and gave the lady some ideas to help with the air quality, as well as general support, hugs and organising a chaplain to provide some broader assistance.

"The lady was so grateful for our help, you could see the weight of her worry ease throughout the day as we worked.

"It was a day full of emotion and by the time we finished up we knew without any doubt we had made a real difference to this lovely lady's life."

Lisa is a Program and Project Manager currently working under contract to QFES at Kedron as the Program Manager responsible for implementing IGEM reviews, including the 2018 Bushfire Review and the 2019 Monsoon Trough Rainfall Flood Review.



About 150 QFES staff and volunteers walked through the streets of Brisbane for the parade.

Community engagement takes centre stage

Regional Community Engagement Officers (RCEO) from across the state came together in Brisbane for two-and-a-half days to discuss regional and individual challenges they face in their role and share solutions.

Inspector Darren Welsh, Manager of the Community Engagement Unit, and Leah Hornibrook, Acting Director of the Community Capability and Volunteerism Branch, facilitated the annual workshop from 10 to 12 March.

Darren said the workshop would lead to ongoing improvements in collaborative cross-agency engagement with the community, particularly in the areas of prevention and preparedness.

“These annual workshops are an opportunity for the RCEOs to see what the State Community Engagement Unit do behind the scenes with regards to support, planning, budget tracking and management, strategic planning and management of the Roads, Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) and Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) programs,” Darren said.

“We also discussed the Action Report that was developed as a result of the recommendations of the Community Engagement Draft Review.

“The Action Report will assist the Community Engagement Unit and RCEOs with where we go from here strategically and help us find the best way to collaborate across the agencies to enhance community prevention and preparedness.

“This year our Smoke Alarm Engagement Officer Jenny Olmos joined us and we had

a great discussion about how all the RCEOs could assist the challenging role ahead for Jenny.”

The RCEOs heard from some excellent guest speakers from across the organisation, as well as key stakeholders.

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing reinforced the importance of the RCEO role and all agencies working together on community engagement, and congratulated the RCEO team on their hard work and dedication.

Assistant Commissioner Emergency Management and Community Capability Joanne Greenfield discussed working across agencies, community engagement and a collaborative evidence-based approach.

The RCEOs also worked with Associate Professor Kim Johnson from Queensland University of Technology and Dr Barbara Ryan from University of Southern Queensland on mapping approaches to community engagement for preparedness in Australia.

Author, blogger, lecturer and founder of the Emotional Fitness program, Cynthia Morton, shared her emotional fitness tips.

South Eastern Region RCEO Hailey Hayes said being able to come together was invaluable for the RCEOs.

“Despite being dispersed across the state, the RCEO cohort is a tight-knit group and we work very closely with the State Community Engagement Unit,” Hailey said.

“We connect on Teams and email regularly, but I really value the rare opportunities we get to come together and collaborate face-to-face.

“One of the key things I took away from the workshop was having a greater understanding of the Government Advertising and Communication Committee (GACC) process.

“When the seasonal QFES campaigns are launched throughout the year, RCEOs work closely with the community to promote the campaign and reinforce key messages.

“Having the Communications Team come and talk to us about the GACC process, the complexities and how it influences our campaigns was really valuable.”

Hailey said the RCEOs also learnt about a new community engagement model that has been developed in Australia specifically for disaster preparedness.

“I’m interested in exploring the model further and seeing how I can incorporate the approach into the community engagement work we do at QFES,” she said.



Mapping approaches with Dr Barbara Ryan and Associate Professor Kim Johnson.



Leah Hornibrook led a session on values and shared purpose.



Engaging with the deaf community

QFES volunteers and staff are working with the deaf community to help them better prepare for emergencies.

More than 700 people from far-north to south-east Queensland, and everywhere in between, gathered at the Brisbane Deaf Festival, and QFES was there to connect with the deaf community.

Firefighter and Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) Tony Thompson from Dunmora Rural Fire Brigade, who has a hearing impairment, ran the stall at Mt Gravatt Showgrounds along with fellow firefighter and VCE Julie Anderson from Curra Rural Fire Brigade.

The Deaf Festival is a bi-annual celebration of the deaf community's language, culture, heritage and achievements. Along with QFES, there were stalls showcasing deaf people's skills, businesses, clubs, crafts and arts.

People shared stories and insights with Tony and Julie about their experiences during bushfires and other emergencies.

Tony said emergencies and disasters can more challenging for the deaf community because it's harder for them to get information about what's happening.

"They're usually limited to online channels like Facebook, and are often reliant on other people," Tony said.

"I spoke to one lady from Peregian who was up at 3am trying to find out what was happening with the fire there.

"Our goal is to support them to be more independent. We handed out preparedness resources including the Get Ready guide and Going Bush, and ran one-on-one Prepare Act Survive (PAS) sessions."

People at the festival also asked Tony and Julie about becoming RFS volunteers, and about smoke alarms and warning systems.

"They had a lot of questions about the technical aspects of smoke alarms and how to operate them," Tony said.

QFES funds a Smoke Alarm Subsidy Scheme managed by Deaf Services Queensland, which covers most of the cost of smoke alarms for deaf or hearing-impaired people. The smoke alarms include a flashing light and vibrating pad.

"I liked running the stall because I'm passionate about supporting people with a disability to get the information they need during disasters," Tony said. "I've made it a mission."

Tony, Julie and Sunshine Coast Regional Community Engagement Officer Julie Bruynius plan to run a workshop for the Sunshine Coast deaf community, with an all-agency approach of "Get Ready" for all natural disasters.

Future workshops have also been proposed for the Maryborough, Cairns and Gold Coast deaf communities.



Tony Thompson (left) and Julie Anderson (right) at the Brisbane Deaf Festival.



The QFES stall at Mt Gravatt Showgrounds.



Auxiliary firefighters from Caloundra took part in the World's Greatest Shave to support a colleague who was receiving chemotherapy and got a day release from hospital to join them. The team raised \$11 443 for the Leukaemia Foundation.



Members of the QFES Media and Communications teams visited the School of Fire and Emergency Services Training to step into a firefighter's shoes and experience a live fire.



Crews from Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station were called to Enoggera Reservoir to help free a young magpie caught in a tree by its leg. They delivered the magpie safely into the hands of the RSPCA.



QFES hosted a stall at the Brisbane Home Show to talk to the community about fire safety, smoke alarms and how to prepare their homes for a disaster.



Auxiliary firefighter recruits graduated at Dunwich, Stradbroke Island in March.



Logan SES flood boat operators refreshed their skills at their annual swim and water skills test.



On National Pet Day, we celebrated the loyal canine companions of our Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams, who respond to disasters such as earthquakes, explosions, landslides and cyclones.



Auxiliary firefighters from Cairns and Malanda completed their Pump Operations Course in March.



During his tour of the regions, Commissioner Greg Leach was welcomed to Woodford Fire and Rescue Station by local SES and RFS volunteers and auxiliary firefighters.



This Valentine's Day, RFS couple Craig and Liane celebrated 20 years of volunteering.



Club Mooloolaba ran a fundraising event on Australia Day with RFS brigades on the Sunshine Coast as the beneficiary.



FRS officers from Airlie Beach completed a General Aviation Firefighting course at the School of Fire and Emergency Services Training, including a practical scenario with aeroplane propellers.



Members from Ipswich SES Unit collected about 700kg of rubbish on Clean Up Australia Day.

Trial supports people with autism

Firefighters in Gladstone are trialling a trauma kit that includes a range of tools to help them better support people with autism in emergency situations.

People with autism can be severely affected by emergency incidents.

They may become non-verbal under stress, run towards water or back into unsafe structures, have unusual pain responses, have difficulty following directions, respond negatively to being approached and/or become distressed by bright lights and loud noises.

That's why Firefighter Jonathan Sutton helped assemble the trial autism trauma kits. He consulted with Autism Queensland and was partly inspired by a similar initiative started by a firefighter in the US.

"The initiative received a positive response online from people with family members with autism," Jonathan said.

"I thought it could really benefit our relationship with the community and improve our ability to deliver services to people who are often overlooked.

"First responders often don't consider peoples' different reactions because we're focused on immediate issues like fires or injuries.

"This trauma kit is another tool to help us do our job better. Having it on the truck might prompt people to think about it more."

The kit contains visual and aural protection, communication aids and sensory objects commonly used by people with autism and caregivers to help them calm down and communicate more effectively.

These include earmuffs, sunglasses, stress balls, bendable animals, putty, water snake, whiteboard, markers and a laminated picture communications board.

Inspector Noel King from Gladstone Command said improving service delivery for individuals with autism aligns with the QFES Statement of Cultural Intent and will

be highly appreciated by people in the community who have children or family living with autism.

"There are approximately 800 people with autism in the Gladstone response area, a large proportion of whom are children," Mr King said.

"Research indicates emergency services personnel are not well trained or equipped to deal with people with autism at incidents.

"These kits are not currently carried by police, ambulance or fire crews in the Gladstone area and we are not aware of any similar kits being used by other fire and rescue departments in Australia.

"If this trial is successful, I would like to see these kits become part of every first response fire appliance in QFES.

"It is a natural progression from the trauma teddies that were introduced a number of years ago and have been so successful."



A Gladstone firefighter with the trial trauma kit.

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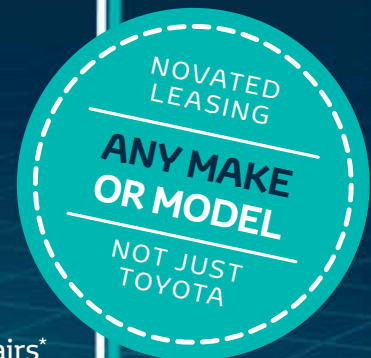
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