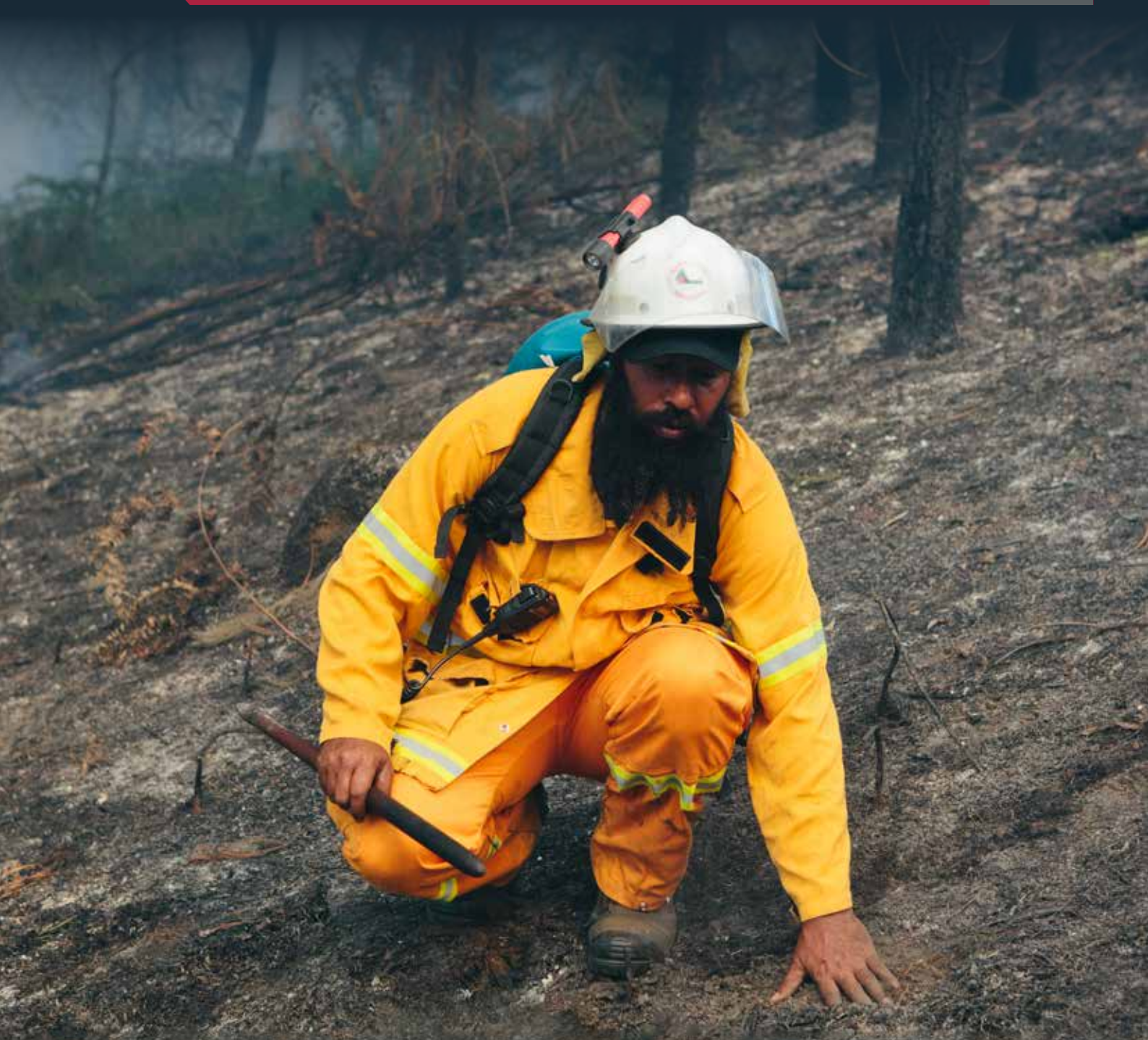


# RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE EDITION 32



**Cultural fire**  
Working with  
traditional owners

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Rural Fire Service volunteer and Firesticks Alliance member Leeton Lee feeling the cold earth after a cultural burn at Tamborine Mountain. Photo by Cam Neville.

**RESPONSE** is a bi-monthly magazine produced by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Contributions and feedback are welcome. The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions for brevity and clarity.

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# FOREWORDS



**GREG LEACH**  
**Commissioner**

## QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

We are entering a pivotal time of year, with our response to the 2020 bushfire season, Operation Quell, running at the same time as our COVID-19 operations. We also need to maintain our focus on preparations for the storm and cyclone season, which is just around the corner.

I recently released my Commissioner's Intent for QFES operations for the 2020-21 bushfire season. The outlook for the season is more favourable than the last two seasons, but there is still a risk of early, fast-moving grass fires.

The QFES State Bushfire Operational Plan was also released recently, which outlines the whole-of-government response arrangements for bushfire management in Queensland. The plan is available on the Gateway – I encourage you to familiarise yourself with this important information.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the record number of bushfire mitigation activities that have been carried out as part of Operation Cool Burn, which wraps-up on 31 August. Thanks to your fantastic efforts, we face this year's season well prepared, alongside key partners and our communities.

We have learnt a lot from the devastating fires we fought in 2018 and 2019, but this year we will face new challenges as we operate within the context of the pandemic.

Many of our people have been working for months to help manage the COVID-19 response, and we are coming into our usual operational period in the wake of much uncertainty and change.

This includes ongoing discussion at a national level. Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing and I recently represented QFES at hearings for the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. You can read more about the Commission on page 17.

QFES is doing our part to support the Queensland Government's savings and debt plan by ensuring our services operate efficiently. We remain focused on our core service delivery, which includes supporting the whole-of-government response to the pandemic.

If it's been a while since you took some leave, consider whether you need a break before we enter such a busy operational period.

You can't support your fellow Queenslanders without also looking after yourself, so please watch out for one another and do what you can to manage your well-being.



**MARK ROCHE**  
**Deputy Commissioner**

## READINESS AND RESPONSE SERVICES

The second half of 2020 sees some exciting additions to our Fire and Rescue Service fleet. The official handovers of the seven Combined Aerial Pumping Appliances (CAPAs) have commenced as part of the Fire and Rescue Service fleet replacement strategy to replace the Telescopic Aerial Pumper (TAP) appliances across the state.

CAPAs are now part of the fleet at ChermSIDE, Kemp Place, Wishart, Gladstone, Surfers Paradise, Mackay and Toowoomba, offering enhanced fire and rescue capabilities.

More detail on the CAPA fleet is on page 29.

QFES' firefighting capability will be further boosted with the commencement of the contracted Large Air Tanker (LAT) in early September, to support our ground crews during elevated activity over the 2020-21 fire season.

No doubt you have all seen vision of aerial firefighting and the impacts it can have on a bushfire, so the commencement of the LAT and its accompanying lead aircraft is very welcomed.

On a more sombre note, 23 June 2020 marked 20 years since the fatal Childers Palace Backpackers blaze, which claimed 15 lives.

This tragic fire sparked an overhaul of legislative requirements for budget accommodation buildings to meet relevant fire safety standards in Queensland.

As catastrophic as the Childers fire was, the magnitude of QFES' lessons learned was never more apparent than on 20 July 2020, when the fire at the Spotted Dog Tavern, Bundaberg destroyed the neighbouring Federal Backpackers.

I would like to acknowledge all responding QFES personnel, including responding Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service and Fire Investigation Unit teams, for their efforts at the height of the fire and the days that followed.

Read more about this incident on page 4.



**HON CRAIG CRAWFORD**  
**Minister**

## MINISTER FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Queenslanders are still coping with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but at the same time we need to prepare for the natural disasters the next few months will bring.

Queenslanders pride themselves on their resilience and readiness to face the challenges of living in this beautiful yet sometimes harsh state. It is our job to support our communities' preparedness.

It has been my pleasure over the past few months, with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, to start visiting QFES members and their families and supporters again. It's a privilege to talk to people about their passion for serving their communities, as well as any concerns about their stations, brigades and units.

As most of you know I have a background in emergency services, both as a paid staff member and a volunteer. I understand the work you do is difficult, and can at times be frustrating.

But the one thing that stands out for me as I travel around the state is how the three services within QFES work together to protect Queenslanders and support each other.

QFES has worked to bolster the capability of all three services by increasing resourcing, including frontline staff and equipment, while ensuring each service's identity and traditions are promoted and respected.

At appliance and equipment handovers and station openings, I have seen firsthand how much this increased capability means to staff and volunteers, as well as the communities they serve.

We saw the close and unique relationship between full-time, auxiliary and volunteer firefighters, along with State Emergency Service (SES) members, during last year's bushfire season. All three services worked together to support Queensland communities while QFES provided coordination, strategic oversight and guidance.

I am incredibly proud of the work you all do as individuals, as team members, and as part of the QFES family to ensure all three services continue to grow and work together to achieve the best result for Queensland.



Flames consumed the Federal Backpackers Hostel on the main road of Bundaberg. Photo by Queensland Police Service.

# Safety measures save the day

**When the Federal Backpackers Hostel in Bundaberg was engulfed in flames, the building's compliance with fire safety legislation helped make sure everyone got out safely.**

It was one of the biggest fires the area has seen in many years. Flames broke out in the adjacent Spotted Dog Tavern at around 11pm on Monday 20 July before spreading to the hostel, destroying both buildings.

All 62 staff and guests escaped unharmed, but it could have been a different story if fire safety measures hadn't been in place.

Wide Bay Burnett Superintendent Jeff Keating said the successful evacuation was thanks to updated legislation around fire safety in budget accommodation.

"In this kind of building you need early warning because there are large numbers of people who don't know each other and are potentially unfamiliar with the environment," Jeff said.

"The legislation states these kinds of premises have to have an early warning system so people can get out and FireCom is alerted.

"That's exactly what happened with this fire – QFES was alerted by the building's automatic alarm system, so we arrived as soon as possible, which is a terrific result."

The building's management and guests were already evacuating when QFES crews arrived, so they didn't have to help people escape at the height of the fire.

The legislation also mandates safety measures such as clear instructions and evacuation routes for guests, and staff being more aware of who is in the building.

"The backpackers originally only had an internal staircase for people to escape. The problem with that is, if the level below is on fire, you can't get past it," Jeff said.

"The management installed an external staircase, which was also a big factor in helping everyone escape safely."





All backpacker hostels are subject to annual compliance checks.

“Things could have been so much worse if the hostel didn’t have that alarm system and external staircase, and undergo regular inspections,” Jeff said.

“Bundaberg has many fruit pickers and young people passing through. There are several backpacker buildings, and the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) is very active in the community, making sure the legislation is being adhered to.

“They’ve built great relationships with the managers and owners of these buildings.

“It goes to show there are life-saving benefits to the modern requirements for this type of premises.”

### Fighting the blaze

QFES crews worked through the night, bringing the fire under control around 4 or 5am.

There were 40 firefighters on scene as the fire evolved. Eight FRS stations responded from neighbouring areas with 10 appliances, including an aerial appliance from Maroochydore.

Four Rural Fire Service volunteers from the Branyan Rural Fire Brigade also helped transport water to the scene with two appliances.

The crews searched the upper levels to make sure no one was left behind, but evacuated when the fire intensified.

“It’s an old building with brick external walls but a lot of timber internally – flooring, staircase, roof trusses,” Jeff said. “Once those started to burn, the heat transfer was enormous.

“Our firefighters were operating on a very dangerous site but no one was injured.

“Everyone did a terrific job, including the first responding officer in charge Trevor Duncan and Area Commander John Pappas.

“I’ve been fighting fires for nearly 40 years, and this is one of the biggest fires I’ve seen in the North Burnett area.”

QFES crews remained on scene the next day to dampen down hotspots.

Police established an exclusion zone overnight and closed several streets due to the risk of the 140-year-old building collapsing.

After assessing the building’s structural integrity, QFES and the Bundaberg Regional Council found it was severely damaged, and the façade was demolished.

### Community support

The hostel guests were sheltered in the nearby council-owned Civic Centre before being housed in alternative accommodation organised by Emergency Management Queensland, the council and the Queensland Police Service.

The council helped them recover their lost passports and other documentation via their consulates.

Meanwhile, the Local Disaster Management Group, including Lifeline Bundaberg and Red Cross Bundaberg, looked after the backpackers’ welfare and the community donated much-needed items.

### Anniversary of the Childers fire

The legislation that helped save lives in Bundaberg is the result of the 2000 Childers Palace Backpackers Hostel fire.

Fifteen people tragically lost their lives in the Childers fire, and regulatory changes for budget accommodation came into effect as a result.

“Part of the reason why the Childers fire evolved the way it did was because there wasn’t early warning or an external staircase,” Jeff said.

“Twenty years on from the Childers fire, a lot has changed and the FRS has been extremely active.”

The anniversary of the Childers fire was commemorated across the country on 23 June as people remembered the lives lost and honoured first responders.

Bundaberg Regional Council opened the Childers Palace memorial building for people to pay their respects.

Mayor Jack Dempsey laid a wreath with Deputy Mayor Bill Trevor and Chief Executive Steve Johnston.



QFES crews worked through the night to control the blaze. Photo by Queensland Ambulance Service.



Fire safety legislation for budget accommodation helped make sure no one was harmed. Photo by Queensland Ambulance Service.



All 62 staff and guests escaped without injury.

# Managing the pandemic

**COVID-19 restrictions may have eased in some parts of the country, but the State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC) is still working hard to manage logistics and planning for Queensland's response to the pandemic.**

The SDCC has been at STAND UP since February and QFES members are working tirelessly to manage operations on a scale never seen before.

Working with our whole-of-government partners, the SDCC has been managing accommodation arrangements, catering and transport for people in quarantine, and coordinating the movement of personnel to support border restrictions across the state.

Chief Superintendent Rob Boniwell said the biggest challenge was developing new systems and processes to manage the volume of accommodation engagements.

"In the past we've managed significant numbers of people moving around the state for events such as floods, but nothing on this scale," Rob said. "Since the start of the pandemic in late January 2020, Queensland has had approximately 20,000 people in quarantine accommodation and this number continues to grow.

"With tourism dropping off due to the border restrictions, there are also more empty hotel rooms, so we've had more interactions with the hospitality industry.

"We work closely with the Queensland Police Service, who are responsible for compliance and security, making sure people comply with quarantine requirements and behave appropriately."

The Emergency Management Planning Team have also been helping Queensland Health and other agencies develop their strategic plans for COVID-19.

The other challenge for the team in the SDCC has been sustaining operations over such a long time, particularly with no clear end to the pandemic in sight.

They worked through the summer bushfires before the pandemic began. More than five months later, the teams are exploring options to help manage fatigue.

"We have developed a strategic concept of operations with a multi-tiered approach, looking at business sustainability in terms of the SDCC, the State Operations Centre (SOC), Regional Operations Centres (ROC) and Incident Control Centres (ICC), and in frontline operations as well.

"We're in this for the long haul – it's a marathon, not a sprint."

With the bushfire season just started and the severe weather season to follow, the question is how to run multiple operations at the same time.

"The SDCC has run multiple events in the past, but nothing on the scale of COVID-19," Rob said.

"We encourage QFES directors, managers and senior leaders to enable their staff to come into the SDCC and support frontline operations.

"We're all in this together. We're here to keep our community safe, and one of the best ways our staff can do that is by being involved in the frontline as part of a secondary role to support operations."

Rob said he was proud of the way everyone had gone about their business professionally and interacted with other agencies, enhancing QFES' reputation.

"This team has always gone above and beyond expectations, working hard to get the job done when it needed to happen," he said.

"In some cases, our volunteers have lost their jobs, and yet they still make themselves available for frontline service delivery, which is a truly tremendous effort.

"Some of our auxiliary firefighters have also lost their primary employment, so we have enabled them to support frontline operations and give our volunteer members a break."

For more information about supporting SDCC frontline operations, email the team at [EMexercisettraining@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:EMexercisettraining@qfes.qld.gov.au).



The SDCC has been stood up since February.



QFES has managed quarantine accommodation for more than 13 900 people since the start of the pandemic.





# Our experiences during COVID-19

It's hard to believe how much has changed since the start of the year, including the way we work. QFES held a survey in June to better understand our individual and shared experiences of working during the pandemic.

The survey results tell us our workforce showed great resilience and collaboration to overcome the challenges we faced at the peak of the pandemic.

Across QFES, we adapted our communication methods, workloads and remote working arrangements to continue delivering vital emergency services for Queensland.

Listening to our workforce and implementing your feedback is crucial for QFES to continue to become more resilient, sustainable and adaptable.

The insights from the workforce survey will help QFES plan how we continue to stay safe as we return to our workplaces and new ways of working.

## Insights

The survey showed many people found working remotely productive, with 56 per cent saying their productivity increased.

Encouragingly, 92 per cent of QFES members said they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them when they're working remotely, and 83 per cent indicated they would be interested in continuing to work remotely.

Looking forward, the overwhelming majority (96 per cent) said they understand what is expected of them in maintaining a healthy and safe environment in their workplace.

You can read the full results on the workforce surveys page on the Gateway.

## Next steps

QFES will check in with our workforce again in September with the annual workforce survey.

For the first time, the Working for Queensland and Volunteering for Queensland surveys will run side-by-side, so QFES can hear everyone's views at the same time.

Our shared experiences at work should be positive ones, so this survey is another opportunity for us to have a conversation about what we are proud of and where we need to improve.

The anonymous survey will be held from 1-21 September, and the results will be available by December.

QFES will then hold presentations, planning workshops and focus groups around the state to start conversations about the results and determine the actions that need to be taken.

## Our experiences



● STRONGLY AGREE / AGREE
 ● NEITHER
 ● STRONGLY DISAGREE / DISAGREE



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# Preparing for bushfire season

As we move from the final phase of Operation Cool Burn (OCB) into the bushfire season itself, it's time to take stock and consider what OCB has achieved.

After the intense season last year, Australians are more aware than ever of the risks of bushfires.

This was identified in the Commissioner's Intent for OCB, and QFES and our partners have been working hard to minimise key risks.

Executive Manager of Bushfire Mitigation James Haig said it was too early to say exactly how well Queensland had prepared for the bushfire season, because OCB was ongoing and activity reports were still coming in from our partners.

However, QFES members across the state have achieved some major wins.

"This year, a total of 56 Area Fire Management Groups (AFMGs) prepared Bushfire Risk Mitigation Plans, which is more than ever before," James said.

"These plans were all forwarded to Local Disaster Management Groups to improve their visibility.

"More than 700 risk mitigation activities were planned and QFES and our partners have already delivered a record number of these.

"We would obviously love to complete 100 per cent of them, but a variety of factors will always make this impossible, especially weather and operational issues."

QFES members also had to manage the challenges of COVID-19, which created difficulties in AFMG communications as well as delivering the activities themselves.



A hazard reduction burn conducted at Woodgate in April.

"With all this going on, planning a record number of activities is ambitious, but the objective of OCB is to protect our communities and surely this warrants us aiming high," James said.

He said the final number of completed activities would take time to confirm with our partners.

"The excellent work of regions needs to be acknowledged given these challenges.

"At this stage the seasonal outlook is far more positive than in 2018 or 2019," James said.

"Our Predictive Services Unit modelling and reports from on the ground, plus the

Bureau of Meteorology outlook, suggest we have localised areas of above normal potential rather than the large parts of Queensland identified before 2018 and 2019.

"This improved outlook for a more 'normal' season does not mean no risk, and QFES still expects bushfires to occur.

"It is vital we reach out to our communities and urge all Queenslanders to be prepared and not to be complacent. We will have fires, so family and home preparation are critical in mitigating any impacts."

James said a particular area of concern already reported by regions and brigades was the build-up of grass fuels after rains earlier in the year.

"Some recent follow-up has provided temporary relief, but frosts in July accelerated the remaining curing, which is estimated at about 90 per cent in many areas.

"This issue is exacerbated by reduced stocking rates on many farms following long-term drought, so there is less cattle to eat the grass.

"That means we should be ready for fast-running grass fires."

James thanked all QFES staff and volunteers who had contributed to OCB.

"Let's finish OCB with a sprint and stay safe as we move through the 2020 bushfire season," he said.



All services worked harmoniously together during a hazard reduction burn at Shanty Creek, Mareeba.

# Embracing cultural fire

After a devastating summer of bushfires, there has been much discussion about how traditional land management practices using ancient fire knowledge could help manage or prevent such fires ravaging the nation again.

Areas across Queensland have been working with traditional owners to explore the use of Indigenous burning methods.

The Lockyer Valley Regional Council recently announced a cultural fire management program, and the Toowoomba Regional Council invited the Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Rangers Corporation to its prescribed burns as part of Operation Cool Burn.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements is also investigating ways in which the traditional land and fire management practices of Indigenous Australians could improve Australia's resilience to natural disasters.

QFES recently partnered with traditional owners to support cultural burns on Tamborine Mountain and Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).

## Cultural fire returns to Tamborine Mountain

The Tamborine Mountain Rural Fire Brigade recently became the first in south-east Queensland to work with traditional owners to change its fire practices.

Leeton Lee, a Thunghutti, Bundjalung and Mualgal man and volunteer firefighter with the brigade, aims to bring awareness to why applying the right fire is important and implement change to current burning practices by working with traditional owners.

The brigade's First Officer Greg Lincoln decided to change the way the brigade conducts burns, and tasked Leeton with landscape burn planning.

Greg said, "The turning point for me was after reading Victor Steffensen's new book *Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia*, and numerous conversations with Leeton."

Leeton has been working with cultural fire for the past few years as a member of the Firesticks Alliance to regain the ancient knowledge of reading the land and applying the right fire to the right country.

He said Firesticks Alliance has also been working with community to apply the knowledge.

"We have heard stories and seen documentation of early explorers' notes

and physical evidence of fire being used to manage the landscape for thousands of years as part of the First Peoples' ongoing interaction and connection with the land," Leeton said.

"It's important to acknowledge the teachers who passed this knowledge on.

"I have learnt and am still learning from Victor Steffensen and other fire practitioners within Firesticks, but this knowledge of reading country comes from the north from Kuku Thaypan Elders Dr George and Dr Musgrave.

"The knowledge itself is in the land."

On 6 June 2020, under the cultural authority of Wangerriburra elders Uncle Steve Watson and Aunty Ruby Sims, Tamborine Mountain saw the first cultural fire on the land in recent years.

After a welcome to country by Uncle Steve, Leeton explained to his fellow firefighters about sick landscapes and how this burn would be a historical moment for the mountain.

He explained that life and property extended beyond structures and people.



Russell Smith, firefighter and Pitjantjatjara man, prepares to place fire on the ground. Photo by Cam Neville.



Leeton Lee briefing firefighters before the burn. Photo by Cam Neville.





*The state's first all-women planned burn on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).*

"The land is our life and property, this is our foods, medicines, tools, materials and it is all connected," Leeton told firefighters on the day.

"The animals large and small will have time to escape and you will have lots of time for conversation. This site has not seen fire for 20 years."

Throughout the day the firefighters stood around conversing and watching spiders, crickets, beetles and lizards crawl past their boots to safety as the fire trickled down the five-hectare slope.

The fire left patches unburnt and cleared out some thick areas of molasses grass, lantana and 20 years of built-up fuel.

The firefighters didn't use driptorches and only used a small amount of water to cool some trees.

Second Officer John Heydon said the burn achieved all the desired outcomes.

"The accumulated understory was burnt clean, trees were largely unaffected and wildlife was able to move freely to safety," John said.

"In comparison to previous practice, the cultural burning was conducted at a less intensive pace, yet still achieved the aim."

The operation was an outstanding success, introducing the brigade's new recruits to hazard reduction burning and giving the established firefighters valuable insight into a proven alternative method.

### All-women planned burn on Minjerribah

Queensland's first all-women planned burn was held on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in June.

The burn took place around Bummiera (Brown Lake), a culturally significant ceremonial place of the Quandamooka people.

Quandamooka Yoolooburabee Aboriginal Corporation and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers, many of whom are Quandamooka women, coordinated the burn with support from the Rural Fire Service (RFS), Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and Seqwater.

Female firefighters from North Stradbroke Island's auxiliary stations – Dunwich, Amity Point and Point Lookout – were invited to participate.

Captain of Dunwich Fire and Rescue Station Trina Roberts said, "Bummiera is known to the traditional owners as a women's place, so to be invited to be part of this cultural burn was special.

"Due to recent rains, the burn was slow going, but a great experience for all involved and the first time for several new recruits involved with hazard reduction burns."

The burn successfully reduced underlying fuels while allowing culturally significant flora to recover. It is planned to be an annual activity.



*The burn was held at Bummiera (Brown Lake), a women's place for the Quandamooka people.*



*The burn was an interagency effort between the Quandamooka Yoolooburabee Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, FRS, RFS and Seqwater.*



# Queen's Birthday Honours

Six QFES members have been recognised with some of the nation's highest honours for their dedication and service to the community.

## A champion of diversity

Michelle Young was awarded an Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) for her commitment to diversity and inclusion over 24 years with QFES.

The AFSM recognises distinguished service by paid and volunteer members of Australian Fire Services.

Ms Young most recently served as Assistant Commissioner Far Northern Region until moving on from QFES in June to serve as Deputy Commissioner Fire Safety at Fire Rescue Victoria.

Ms Young said working with the people of QFES was the best part of her time with the department.

"QFES is made up of amazing, talented people," she said. "I'm proud of all the good work we've done to build the diversity and inclusiveness of QFES.

"We've come a long way from when I started 25 years ago, as one of the first permanent female firefighters, to the really warm and welcoming organisation QFES is today.

"It's so important for fire services to reflect the communities they serve. The more diverse we are, the more people can see us."

Her passion for inclusion led her to create the 'Ignite the Leader Within' program, which inspires both men and women to seek promotion through QFES.

"It's been rewarding to assist people and help them move through the organisation.

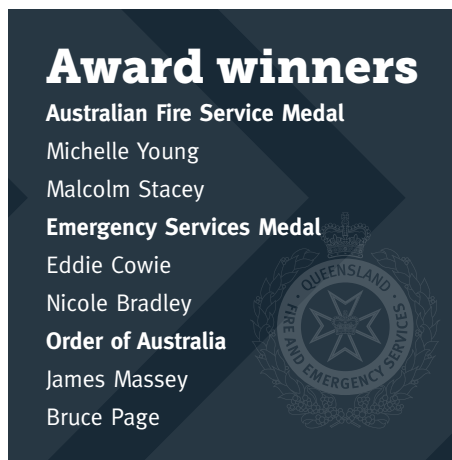


Nicole Bradley was recognised with an ESM for her dedication and exceptional leadership to the Townsville/Thuringowa SES Group.

"I really enjoy being able to build people up by seeing the potential in them that they don't see.

"I like to call it activating people. You watch them blossom."

She acknowledged her mentors DC Mark Roche and AC John Cawcutt for assisting her through her journey.



"They've been completely supportive of me and encouraged me to try new things and step out of my comfort zone. They always believed in me."

## Leading the way in communications

Malcolm Stacey, First Officer at Gladfield Maryvale Rural Fire Brigade, was recognised with an AFSM for his innovation and dedication to the Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Since joining QFES in 2002, Malcolm



Malcolm Stacey was recognised with an AFSM for his innovation and dedication to the RFS.

has helped improve communications by developing two '91' communications vehicles that support information sharing and command and control at incidents.

"The vehicles are 4WD utes with a canopy on the back that holds repeaters, digital radios, VHF's, satellite phones and internet capability," he said.

"They've helped us keep people safe at a lot of firegrounds."

Malcolm has also encouraged the development of volunteer firefighters and support crews through interstate training and competitions.

"I was very proud when one of our appliances went down to the NSW Region North Exercise back in 2016 and was awarded the prize for best crew, out of more than 60 appliances.

"They are the only Queensland crew to have received that trophy.

"My brigade is close to the NSW border, so we've fought a lot of fires interstate and in different brigade areas. You meet a lot of good operators."

He has exposed crews to new skills and experiences, allowing them to excel and become future leaders.

"It makes all the difference on the fireground," he said. "You can tell when crews are well trained, and it has a ripple effect on others at the fire.

"Last year's bushfires burnt a lot of our brigade area. I was proud we turned out both appliances on several occasions, day and night, and we kept going.

"I'd like to thank my brigade and my wife. Sometimes I'm not at home very often, and she has to do everything I would normally give her a hand to do."

## Steadfast dedication to the SES

The Emergency Services Medal (ESM) recognises distinguished service by members of emergency services across Australia, and people who are involved in emergency management, training or education.

Central Region State Emergency Service (SES) Local Controller Eddie Cowie was awarded an ESM for his dedication to operational excellence with the





Rockhampton SES Unit for more than 33 years.

“On my 16th birthday, I marched down to the SES building after school to start my training,” Eddie said.

“My family were planning a birthday party for me that night, but I told them I was going to the SES instead.”

Eddie has been the Local Controller for responses to cyclones, storms, floods and fires. He coordinated the fire support for the evacuation of Gracemere in 2018 and managed 15 000 calls for assistance during Cyclone Marcia in 2015.

“I’ve been a Local Controller for 11 years, and for 10 of those we’ve been in either a response or recovery phase,” he said.

“During the 2010/11 floods, we performed several floodboat rescues and ferried thousands of people across the floodplain in Rockhampton, including babies who were born prematurely and bodies that had to be delivered to an undertaker.

“For people who chose to stay in their homes, we provided a lifeline of food, medicine and supplies.

“After the flood, people we’d rescued came up to us and said they couldn’t thank us enough, so they joined the SES and volunteered their own time.”

Eddie developed the Our Community Collective project to create stronger connections between local community groups so they could come together during disasters to support emergency service and disaster management teams.

“The project allows us to network these groups together and better understand what they represent and what resources they have so we can better coordinate them in preparation times and support them to become more resilient themselves.”

### A true leader

Northern Region SES Group Leader Nicole Bradley was recognised with an ESM for her dedication and exceptional leadership to the Townsville/Thuringowa SES Group.

An SES member in Queensland since 2004 and Group Leader since 2015, Nicole said she felt humbled and privileged to receive the recognition.

“The achievements of my Group are the result of a lot of dedication, effort and support from a lot of people over many years,” Nicole said.

“When I originally joined in Derby, WA, it was a social activity to help me meet people in the town I had started working in and see a bit of the country.



*Eddie Cowie was awarded an ESM for his dedication to operational excellence with the Rockhampton SES Unit for more than 33 years.*



*Michelle Young was awarded an AFSM for her continued dedication and commitment to diversity and inclusion.*

“As I moved around, SES was the first thing I looked up when I arrived in each new town.”

Nicole has organised cross-training between groups of SES and RFS volunteers and the Fire and Rescue Service to optimise their ability to work together during emergencies.

She has also been instrumental in introducing digital technologies into SES practices to improve response times during disaster operations.

“It’s an incredible feeling to know you’ve been able to help a ‘stranger’ when things aren’t going so well for them,” she said.

“I’ve made lifelong friends and had opportunities and experiences I would never have had if I wasn’t volunteering.

“I have been trained, supported, encouraged and mentored by some wonderful people during my time as a volunteer and it’s always been my aim to provide that same support and encouragement to others who join our team, to help them become the best they can be.

“Our members are by far our most valuable asset – without them, there is no SES! I believe we have to make it satisfying and rewarding for our members to keep them coming back and we need to value their life experiences.”

### Service to the community

Firefighters James Massey and Bruce Page received the Order of Australia.

James was honoured for his 47 years of service to the community, beginning with the Liston Rural Fire Brigade in 1973.

His roles within QFES have included First Officer of the Sugarloaf Rural Fire Brigade and Secretary, Deputy Group Officer and Treasurer of the Stanthorpe Combined Group.

Bruce was recognised for his service to the communities of Peachester and Beerwah, including as a member of the Peachester Rural Fire Brigade.

He was a Founding Member, Chairman and Inaugural First Officer of the Brigade from 1977 to 2014 and currently serves as Fire Warden.

# The BURNING QUESTION

In June, QFES released *The Burning Question*, a short documentary that tells the story of bushfire mitigation in Queensland.

Produced by the Strategic Content Services team, *The Burning Question* highlights the fantastic work undertaken by QFES personnel, working with our partners and stakeholders across all levels of government and within Queensland communities during Operation Cool Burn.

The documentary explains the practices and strategies of bushfire mitigation, weather and climate factors that govern their implementation, traditional and emerging burning practices and

what Queenslanders can do to combat bushfire risk on their own land.

*The Burning Question* calls on experts from QFES, the Bureau of Meteorology, Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and the Inspector General of Emergency Management.

As Operation Cool Burn mitigation activities continue across the state, check out *The Burning Question* on QFES' social media or on the website.

## Live broadcasting from disasters

**The Strategic Content Services team has installed a new tool – the Dejero live broadcasting system – to ease the pressures on their producers while filming at the scene of disasters.**

They face a lot of challenges, from the fluid nature of disaster events and dangerous conditions such as smoke and heat, to gaining safe access to deployment sites.

Producers will generally spend hours filming content in difficult circumstances, before returning to Kedron to begin editing, often missing broadcast news deadlines.

The Dejero system consists of a small transmitter that attaches to a camera and instantly sends footage, allowing high-definition video content to be received at Kedron in real time, saving hours of time and effort.

The Dejero technology manages data load by using multiple cellular, Wi-Fi and ethernet signals. This is standard practice across news and broadcasting agencies

globally, but a first for a Queensland Government department.

The Strategic Content Services team implemented the technology in partnership with PSBA Frontline and Digital Services business support team, led by Account Manager Arlene Fernandez, with input from cybersecurity.

“As we embarked on this journey there were technical concerns around network constraints, bandwidth, cyber security and a curiosity as to what it would take to make this solution work in our exceptionally complex and highly secure environment,” Arlene explained.

With Arlene’s help, the team navigated the challenges by testing the solution with a Proof of Technology and completing a cyber security threat and risk assessment.

“We now look forward to seeing how this technology enables the provision of enhanced, vital messaging and multimedia support to QFES, its partner agencies and the whole of government,” Arlene said.



*The Dejero live broadcasting system saves time for producers filming on the scene of emergencies.*



# Drone program expanded

**QFES is rolling out 20 new drones across the state to support frontline personnel, almost doubling the size of QFES' drone program.**

QFES is pioneering the use of drones at natural disasters and emergencies, with 25 drones already in operation.

The new drones will be sent to Brisbane, South Eastern, Central and North Coast regions, as well as the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART).

Commissioner Greg Leach said QFES expanded the drone program after successfully trialling the drones in vertical rescues, land searches and joint operations with the Queensland Police Service.

"Personnel will be able to use the drones to remotely retrieve vital intelligence at an incident, which will be particularly effective where access by foot is restricted or vision is limited," Mr Leach said.

"These drones will act like another set of eyes and provide quality information to rescuers, allowing them to help those in need when they need it most."

Air Operations Executive Manager Martin Gibson said the new drones bolstered QFES' capability in the regions.

"Some regions already have drones, but now the other regions can start working with drones and incorporating this new technology," Martin said.

The drones have several new features that will be useful in many scenarios.

"One of the new models, the SwellPro SplashDrone, is water resistant, so it can fly through rain and even survive being submerged in water, which is particularly useful during floods," he said.

Another model, the Mavic 2 Enterprise, is equipped with thermal cameras, along with spotlights and strobe lights for increased visibility during land searches.

"These drones also have a speaker for communicating with people during emergencies," he said.

"You can speak into the controller to record a message and play it through the drone.

"If someone is trapped on a cliff or stuck on top of a car in a flood, you can use the drone to reassure them help is on the way."

Then there's the Matrice 210, a powerful drone that can carry large cameras, including a high-resolution thermal camera and an optical camera with a much greater zoom.

"It can read a licence plate on a car from two or three kilometres away," Martin said.

"The thermal cameras are useful for both land searches and bushfires.

"With a fire you're dealing with much higher temperatures, so you can adjust the camera's thermal footprint to avoid whiting out the camera with the intense heat. If you're looking for a person in bushland, you can lower the range to human body heat."

QFES personnel must obtain a remote pilot licence from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and then undergo further training before being authorised to fly drones for QFES.

The drones will be integrated further into QFES operations once personnel have completed their pilot training.



From left to right: Assistant Commissioner Neil Gallant, Commissioner Greg Leach, Chief Superintendent Brad Commens and Air Operations Executive Manager Martin Gibson.



QFES will distribute 20 new drones across Queensland.

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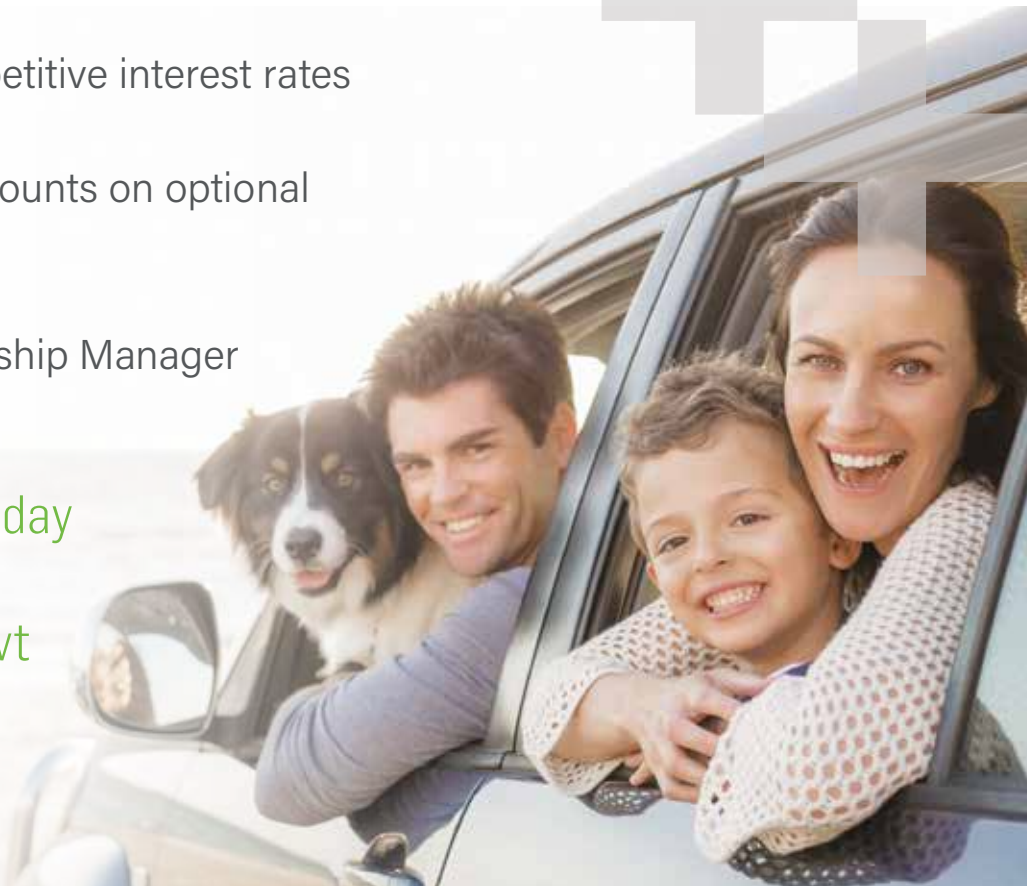


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# QFES contributes to Royal Commission

**QFES participated in discussions during the second block of hearings, which focused on hazard risk reduction measures to mitigate the impact of bushfires, as well as Indigenous land and fire management practices.**

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing, who represented QFES at the second round of hearings, said it was an opportunity for QFES to provide context for the 2019 bushfires.

“The Commission has also sent a series of written questions to the department, and we have provided detailed information about how we do our business and why we do it that way,” Mr Wassing said.

“We’ve reflected on things we think worked well or the Commission might want to look at.”

The Commission also investigated the ways in which Australia could achieve greater national coordination and accountability through common national standards, rulemaking, reporting and data sharing with respect to key preparedness and resilience responsibilities.

Other key topics included communications and warnings, building codes, and road and transport infrastructure.

Mr Wassing said the discussions would help QFES identify good practice and lessons to be learnt.

“Often Royal Commissions can be seen as an investigative process, but for us this is an opportunity to embrace important changes,” he said.

“We will match up the Commission’s recommendations with our own lessons identified, along with the Inspector-General Emergency Management’s recommendations, the Queensland Audit Office report and interstate reviews.

“When we package all that together it will give us a whole series of opportunities for us to look at a transformation agenda for change, not just a transactional one to deal with individual recommendations.”

Mr Wassing acknowledged the hard work of the Royal Commission Taskforce.

“The amount of work they’ve done within short time frames has been to an outstanding quality and standard,” he said.

“They have done a fantastic job supporting the Commissioner and myself to go into hearings as prepared as we can be.”

The Commission’s final report was due to be handed down on 31 August, but the Commission has been extended by two months due to COVID-19, taking its reporting deadline to 28 October.

Mr Wassing said there will be a lot of interest when the Commission hands down its findings, but it’s important to remember Queensland’s bushfire season will have already started by then.

“For QFES, it won’t be a matter of trying to immediately react to any recommendations,” he said.

“They will be considered through the appropriate process and, along with all the other lessons identified, we will integrate them into our changes and methodology moving forward.

“We’re not going to just suddenly react in the middle of a bushfire season, because that can create risk.

“Having said that, it’s always important to see if any learnings can be applied to other disasters. There might be things that come out of the bushfire season that we can apply to disaster management for the severe weather season.”

Mr Wassing also acknowledged the contributions of firefighter John Stalker from Samford Rural Fire Brigade and General Manager of the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland Justin Choveaux, who discussed issues such as training competencies, availability of equipment and radio communications.

“Thank you to the many other members of the community, emergency service organisations, Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service, who have also provided input into the hearings,” Mr Wassing said. “It has been a real team effort.”





Hundreds of RFS volunteers gathered at the Mudgeeraba Showgrounds.

# Building skills on the Gold Coast

The annual Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade Group Exercise brought hundreds of Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers together at the Mudgeeraba Showgrounds in August to test all the skills they've learnt over the past 12 months.

About 230 volunteers and 52 appliances took part, including 15 RFS brigades from the Gold Coast, several brigades from surrounding areas and a strike team from the northern region of New South Wales.

Fittingly, the event was held on 1 August, the official first day of the fire season for Queensland.

The training focused on core skills such as first aid, communications and turnover drills. Brigades also practised working with portable dams, pumps and aircraft.

Commissioner Greg Leach said it was fantastic to see such a great turnout of volunteers.

"We've been very busy with operations over the past few years, and today is all about testing our preparedness and readiness for whatever we might face in the future," Mr Leach said.

"Thank you to the organising committee for doing such an amazing job with putting this event together."

### For the community

Operations Officer and Deputy Group Officer, Wayne Teece, said it was fantastic to see so many volunteers giving up their Saturday to come along.

"They give up every Tuesday night for training and here they are on a Saturday

building up their skills and knowledge," Wayne said.

"It's a big day for them to be away from their families, but they are devoted to preserving and protecting their community."

Wayne said the event included different exercises each year to keep the day challenging.

"The members also get to meet other brigades and find out more about the incredible amount of resources in our area.

"Managing such a large exercise tests the capabilities of our Incident Management Team. In 2018 we organised the event with nine people, but this year we had 58.





## Getting their hands dirty

Incident Controller and Group Officer Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade Group, Sam Eitz, said the event was the only one of its kind in the state.

The event started three years ago as a relatively small exercise, grew significantly in its second year and has now reached capacity.

“We had more brigades wanting to send trucks but we couldn’t fit them all,” Sam said.

“The event gives volunteers the opportunity to put their skills into practice, in a controlled environment, before fire season.

“When fires start, or floods and storms strike, they’ll have the confidence to go out and use those skills.

“Our more experienced members can take on strike team leader or sector commander positions, while new members can hone their skills.”

He said this was the first year the event had featured a helicopter as part of aircraft training.

“More and more we’re using aircraft in operations,” he said. “A lot of people have

worked with them, but didn’t know what to do.

“The helicopter helped volunteers build their air awareness and find out how they can work better with aircraft and share information with the pilots.”

## New vehicles for the Gold Coast

Gold Coast City Councillor Darren Taylor also officially handed over two new vehicles to the Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade Group at the event, including a bulk water tanker and a command vehicle.

Funded by the Gold Coast City Council, the vehicles have already proven to be a fantastic asset for the community.

“The command vehicle has been on various taskforce deployments to assist with the command of incidents, while the bulk water tanker has become a critical part of our operational preparedness,” Wayne said.

“We have already used the bulk water tanker at road traffic crashes and house fires, as well as the bushfires at Boonah and Beechmont.”

The Commissioner also handed over a new state-funded Ford Ranger Light Attack appliance to Mudgeeraba Rural Fire Brigade First Officer Bec Powell.

## Collaboration

The Incident Management Team worked with a range of organisations to make the event a success.

Nurses from the Gold Coast University Hospital Triage Unit volunteered their time to assist with the first aid training, while Police and Community Youth Club cadets from Cedar Creek Wolffdene acted as patients with mock injuries.

The Mudgeeraba Lions Club and the Rapid Relief Team provided catering, and the Firefighter Cancer Foundation raised awareness with the crews. Paradise First Aid provided a staff member to assist with any first aid on the day.

Volunteer Community Educators handed out information to the public about preparing for bushfire season and managing home fire safety during winter.

Wayne thanked the Incident Management Team and everyone who helped develop the event.

“Today we can see all our work has been totally worth it, with everybody smiling and enjoying the day,” he said.



Participants enjoyed the opportunity to meet with other brigades.



Volunteers trained with using portable pumps, hoses and a portable dam to fight a fire.



Crews simulated being caught in a fire as part of a burnover drill.



Commissioner Greg Leach thanked the organising committee for developing the event.



Police and Community Youth Club cadets from Cedar Creek Wolffdene acted as patients for first aid training.



# NORTH COAST REGION



## Community gratitude on display

During and after the Peregrian Springs and surrounding fires late last year, North Coast Region received boxes and boxes of thank you cards and letters from the community, including local schools.

Talented FireCom Officer Sonya Weymouth has put in a lot of her own time to put together display boards filled with the letters and cards.

One large board will be placed in Coolum Fire and Rescue Station, another at the Kunda Park complex and two smaller ones at FireCom.

Sonya is currently making display books with the remaining cards and letters so they don't get forgotten.

Sonya said she had thoroughly enjoyed putting together the thank you boards for QFES.

"I have read the most amazing and grateful letters from both members of the public and schools in the Peregrian Springs district affected by last year's fires," she said.

"From teachers who have championed our firefighters to inspire leadership and development in their senior students to the prep students who learnt about the importance of emergency services.

"I can honestly say I have read them all and the ones I chose for the displays were chosen because of their genuine messages of gratitude, and drawings that depicted how young people see our courageous QFES team."

## The Patch SES podcast

Acting State Emergency Service (SES) Local Controller for Noosa, Aram Ross, is hosting a new SES podcast called The Patch, where he and his guests discuss a range of interesting topics for the SES membership and others.

For each episode, Aram interviews a guest speaker who gives insight into different subjects from disaster management to search and rescue.

## Bundaberg SES flood boat action

Bundaberg State Emergency Service (SES) were recently called out to two incidents requiring flood boat support.

At the first incident, they assisted the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in rescuing two teenagers who got caught on a small island in the Burnett River.

While fishing, the boys didn't realise the tide had come in and the gully they'd walked across had become impassable.

The SES flood boat crew safely retrieved the two stranded boys, with the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), QPS and parents waiting at the boat ramp for their return.

The team consisted of two coxswains, Luke Harding and Cory Pignatelli, with assistance provided by Byron Walton.

The Bundaberg SES were again called to assist in the search and rescue of a 56-year-old woman who had fallen off the Burnett Bridge.

Volunteers responded swiftly, providing three flood boats and a Search and Rescue Officer in under 30 minutes, and worked with swift water rescue to search the Burnett River.

The missing lady was located within 15 minutes safe and well, and was transported back to the boat ramp and assessed by QAS before being transported to Bundaberg Base Hospital.

The cooperation and coordination between SES and the Fire and Rescue Service was a prime example of services working together for the best possible outcome for the safety of our community.



Guests to date have included Emergency Management Coordinator Peter Harkin talking about emergency management and pandemics, Dr Bernie Scully discussing mental health and wellbeing, and Senior Sergeant Jim Whitehead discussing search and rescue.

Based on listener feedback, season two will feature some improvements and a new guest list including members from the volunteer workforce.

The Patch can be found on PodBean, Google Podcasts, Spotify and Facebook by searching "The Patch Queensland SES Podcast".





# BRISBANE REGION



## Cargo ship response

QFES was called to assist after an international cargo ship, the APL England, encountered rough seas and subsequently lost 40 containers overboard while en route to Melbourne.

Many other containers were damaged and had to be carefully removed once the ship was safely docked.

QFES personnel provided emergency response, coordination and technical expertise over two weeks while the containers were being removed.

Acting Inspector Barrie Dunn said, "There were a large number of damaged containers, containing a wide range of products that

did not fall overboard but were hanging over both sides of the ship.

"Engineering work (hot works) had to be performed on the ship to provide anchor points to allow containers to be secured in preparation for lifting. Hot works also had to be done to cut containers free from each other, posing a fire risk.

"One fire occurred due to hot works and was quickly extinguished by onsite QFES crews."

Mr Dunn and Inspector Damien Thomas worked in conjunction with BA Hazmat teams, Scientific Branch and key stakeholders to ensure the safe and systematic removal of the containers.

## Preparing for bushfire season

QFES members in Brisbane Region have spent the past few months busily preparing for the upcoming bushfire season through community engagement and hazard reduction burns.

In support of key partners such as local councils, HQPlantations, Seqwater and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, work is well underway to support 74 localities identified as high-risk hotspots.

To ensure operational readiness, Rural Fire Service (RFS) staff have started training for new volunteers.

With the opening of the new Brisbane Region Headquarters Rural Fire Brigade and an influx of new members in existing brigades, volunteers have undertaken the firefighter minimum skills training.

RFS staff and volunteers have also been involved in Brisbane Region's COVID-19 response.

Alongside auxiliary firefighters and State Emergency Service staff and volunteers, RFS members have supported the Brisbane Domestic Airport operation.







# SOUTH EASTERN REGION

## Joint exercise with police

Members of the Esk and Toogoolawah Police Stations engaged with the Rural Fire Service and Esk Fire and Rescue Service to help improve emergency response across the Brisbane Valley and surrounding districts.

The police officers increased their familiarity with the emergency service members and were treated to a demonstration of the specialist equipment used at traffic incidents and fires.

Attendees also discussed how different emergency services' objectives are often interrelated and how the services can support each other.

Acting Sergeant Luke Rowley from Esk Police Station said, "We discussed how the Fire Service Officers go about their initial

response, where they store their equipment and how we might be able to assist when appropriate.

"We also discussed why we orient emergency service vehicles at an incident scene to maximise safety and promote an efficient response.

"It was a great opportunity to get together and strengthen the relationships between emergency services in the area and discuss how we can better work together for the benefit of the greater community."

Luke would like to thank Acting Captain Denis Buckley and Firefighter Kevin McGaw for taking the time to show everyone through the station.



## ATVs added to RFS fleet

After last year's disastrous bushfires, the Rural Fire Service (RFS) reviewed its operational capability and recommendations from volunteers who were on the fire line, many for weeks on end.

The difficult terrain encountered at the Sarabah and Boonah complex fires proved the value of using side-by-side All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) to access remote and difficult terrain.

As a result, the RFS now has three new Polaris Ranger ATVs, located at Canungra, the Gold Coast and the Lockyer Valley.

While not a front-line firefighting unit, the ATVs proved their worth for mapping, intelligence gathering, mopping up and backburning.

They will be a versatile and valuable addition to South Eastern Region's RFS fleet.







# SOUTH WESTERN REGION



## New Warwick SES building

While the world has been readjusting to how everyone does things, volunteers from the Warwick State Emergency Service (SES) Group have been adapting to the new challenges and leapfrogging ahead, with the development and fit out of their new headquarters.

To develop the new building, the volunteers successfully applied for a number of grants, which have allowed the building to be tailored for the needs of the SES and the local area. This includes funding for a generator to power the facility during operations.

The group's headquarters and stores used to be spread across the city, but now they will have everything in one location. The move and working bees to get everything ready have been significantly impacted by physical distancing requirements, but members have adapted and moved on.

The building comes with several offices, training areas, stand-down areas, a maintenance area and kitchen, and will be capable of running several large operations simultaneously, with adjacent areas to be used as marshalling areas.

The building will be officially opened later in the year.



## South Western Region Volunteer of the Year

Congratulations to Peter Patzwald from Cabarlah Rural Fire Brigade, who is our Rural Fire Service Volunteer of the Year for South Western Region.

Peter was nominated for his leadership, dedication and hard work in coordinating training to enable Cabarlah Rural Fire Brigade volunteers to be deployed in strike teams during bushfire seasons.

## James Massey awarded Order of Australia Medal

Sugarloaf Rural Fire Brigade First Officer James Massey (middle) was recently recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours list after 47 years of service.

James has been First Officer since 2010, Foundation Member since 1994 and Brigade Chairman, 2007-2010 and 2004-2005. He was a member of the Liston Rural Fire Brigade from 1973 to 1994 and has been on the Queensland Rural Fire Service Operational Strategic Working Group since 2015.

With many other roles within QFES, he is a very deserving recipient of the Order of Australia and is much loved in his community.

A very humble firefighter, James most recently took the helm during the Stanthorpe fires, overseeing his crew and running air operations.

James said, "I have seen the Rural Fire Service go from a situation where they had no equipment whatsoever, and all it was, was what farmers had, to a situation now where we have very sophisticated trucks."



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# FAR NORTHERN REGION

## Rural trailers for the Torres Strait

The Torres Strait Rural Fire Service will receive a major boost to its response capability with the arrival of 10 new firefighting trailers destined for island communities in the Torres Strait.

The new trailers, valued at about \$140 000 each, will carry bush and structural fire mitigation and response equipment to better equip their members for emergencies and natural disasters.

Deputy Mayor Getano Lui Jnr and Mayor Philemon Mosby of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council joined Member for Cook Cynthia Lui MP and Brigade Training and Support Officer Darryl Robinson at the official handover of the trailers.



## Online storytime

With physical distancing becoming the norm, Cassowary Coast Regional Council Library have teamed up with Innisfail Fire and Rescue Station to continue bringing joy to children from the comfort of their own homes.

Karen Stacey from the library approached the station asking if they would be interested in reading and recording a children's story to go on the council's portal.

Acting Station Officer Matt Long and firefighters Mal Davison, Mark Lawrence and Alan Baird all took part.

The readings were so successful they may become a regular occurrence, with other Southern Command Fire and Rescue Stations keen to participate.

## Vertical rescue training resumes

With COVID-19 restrictions starting to ease, it was great to see auxiliary firefighters from all over Far Northern Region attend a three-day Level 1 Vertical Rescue Course run by Station Officer Wayne Roe and James Woodcraft at Gordonvale Fire and Rescue Station.

Trust in the training provided and the safety team, equipment familiarity and knot tying were all paramount in running this successful course.

With more courses to be rolled out over the next six months, from Level 1 Swiftwater to ATV, many auxiliary firefighters will be given the opportunity to catch up on training that was put on hold during the pandemic.

A surprise visit from Far Northern Region Acting Assistant Commissioner Adam Gwin was welcomed by all. He viewed training in progress and provided an update on what was happening around the region.

[www.qfes.qld.gov.au](http://www.qfes.qld.gov.au) | 13 QGOV (13 74 68)





# NORTHERN REGION

## Forrest Beach auxiliary training

Forrest Beach Fire and Rescue Station recently conducted an Auxiliary Recruit Training and Education Program.

While the course was small in numbers, it was big in capability, providing valuable new members for the Hinchinbrook Shire auxiliary crew.

Auxiliary Captain and Training Support Officer Lyn Roveglia said, “The course achieved its outcomes with all four recruits successfully completing the course.”

Northern Region would like to welcome Auxiliary Firefighters Serina Pennay, Shane Hamilton, Jake Hutchinson and Andrew Steven.



## Energising QLD SES Partnership renewal

Townsville was chosen as the site to announce the renewal of the Energising QLD Partnership on 17 July 2020.

The launch was hosted by Northern Region SES, with the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Craig Crawford MP, Energy Queensland Area Manager Wayne Alderman and Powerlink Queensland General Manager, Communications Gerard Reilly attending.

The partnership renewal will provide \$200 000 of vital equipment to SES groups across Queensland in the next 12 months.

Energy Queensland provides \$150 000 and Powerlink Queensland provides \$50 000 towards the program.

The items to be handed over include power tools, defibrillators, battery-powered lighting and stretchers, along with new technology such as vehicle fridges and thermal imaging devices.

The equipment Northern Region received from the 2019/20 program, worth more than \$31 000, was acknowledged on the same day a little north of Townsville, in Bluewater, with Commissioner Greg Leach also in attendance.

## Rotary donation

When State Emergency Service (SES) Area Controller John Forde was approached by Rotary Australia to discuss potential donations for resources, he jumped at the chance.

Sponsored by Rotary District 9550, the funds were secured during last year’s monsoon.

Initial planning meetings with representatives from Rotary and the Townsville Local and Area Controllers identified two potential support resources for the region.

After three months, Townsville Area SES members received two new support trailers for operational support and response.

The first, a purpose-built ATV trailer, was constructed to move the ATV around the region.

Previously, the SES would need to hire a trailer to move this resource around, so the trailer has greatly improved the response time for this resource.

The second is a specialty-built trailer with the capability to provide catering and welfare support for members at incidents and prolonged searches.

It can also be used as a community engagement resource, with a swing-out 55-inch flat screen TV to assist with community messaging, recruitment or fundraising.



Townsville Area SES now has greater capability to support the SES from Cardwell to Ayr and as far west as Richmond.

Local Controller Townsville Bob Griffiths said, “We can’t thank Rotary enough for providing these two assets. They will provide great support to all Northern Region volunteers when responding to emergency events in their communities.”





# CENTRAL REGION

## Conquer the Mountain

Rockhampton C-shift firefighters took on the start of winter and COVID-19 restrictions by changing things up with an eight-week fitness challenge.

As one of their weekly activities, the crew walked Mount Archer to build their endurance. They decided to challenge the other shift staff and hold the “Conquer the Mountain” race.

Eleven Rockhampton firefighters, regional and area office staff and some of their families kitted up and took on the mountain on Saturday 18 July.

Station Officer Shane Tapp said, “It’s a different way to keep fit while spending a little quality time with family. We’ve seen quite a few personal best times broken over the past eight weeks.”

There were two challenges, one for the fastest time and a handicap race. The participants managed COVID-19 restrictions with staggered start times and maintained physical distancing.

Josh Melville took out bragging rights with the fastest time of 55 minutes 41 seconds, and Sam McInerney won the handicap timed race with a time of 29 minutes 11 seconds.

The organisers hope to make this an annual challenge.



## Volunteer Community Educator induction

Central Region conducted a Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) induction in July using updated package materials.

The activity included facilitators from the State Emergency Service (SES) and Rural Fire Service (RFS) alongside the Central Regional Community Engagement Officer.

The meeting, presentations and discussion groups were held via Microsoft Teams. Eleven SES members and one Fire and Rescue Service auxiliary firefighter attended, coming from Agnes Waters, Emerald, Calliope, Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Mount Larcom.

More activities will be scheduled in the future.



## Assistant Commissioner Darryl King’s travels

Since the easing of travel restrictions, Assistant Commissioner Darryl King and members of the Central Regional Leadership Team (RLT) have been busy travelling around greeting people and thanking them for their efforts and strength displayed during the COVID-19 period.

Notable trips included the Western Swing Tour where AC King and Chief Superintendent Steven Smith travelled to Emerald, Blackall, Barcardine, Longreach and Winton.

At each stopover they visited the mayor of the area, thanked them for their assistance to QFES, and discussed preparations for the upcoming seasons. They also visited Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) stations to meet crews, thank them for their efforts and discuss their concerns.

A highlight of the tour was the Road Crash Rescue training courses conducted at Yeppoon, Winton and Longreach. The Yeppoon and Winton training had a mix of participants from the FRS and the State Emergency Service (SES), while the Longreach training made use of a Kilo Rescue Appliance to provide a realistic training scenario.

AC King and CSupt Smith presented an Assistant Commissioner’s Certificate of Appreciation to the Winton Shire Council for their assistance in supplying an excavator to move cars for the course.

AC King and members of the RLT also travelled to Mackay, Carmila and Airlie Beach to support the handover of a Combined Aerial Pumping Appliance and new Type 3 Scania appliances by Minister Craig Crawford.

They met with Minister Crawford at the newly reformed SES Unit at Carmila, just south of Mackay, who are back together after a three-year absence to train and respond to emergencies, including road crash rescue. There was a great turnout, which really highlights the dedication of this small community.

AC King and the RLT wish to thank all involved for their efforts and hope to see them soon during future travels.

# New regional HQ

**QFES' new South Western Regional Headquarters in Charlton is a step closer to becoming a reality after the official sod turning ceremony took place at the end of June.**

The purpose-built, \$16.9 million upgrade to the QFES precinct will also include the Charlton Fire and Rescue Station and a Regional Operations Centre (ROC).

The ceremony opened with a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony by the Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Corporation.

Minister for Fire and Emergency Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships Craig Crawford, QFES Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche, Councillor Paul Antonio, and McNab Constructions Director Michael McNab officially opened the site with the turning of the sod for the next phase of the build. Work started on the first phase in February.

Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche said having the Regional Headquarters and the Charlton Fire and Rescue Station at the same precinct would increase the region's emergency response capability.

"The new facility is in an ideal location, close to the centre of town and at the junction of major roads and highways so crews can respond rapidly to all types of incidents across the area.

"This state-of-the-art facility will empower our fire and emergency crews to keep up with the demands of their growing community and support QFES members to meet and exceed community expectations," Mr Roche said.

The ceremony closed with an address by Regional Assistant Commissioner David Hermann, who said staff were excited at having all QFES South Western regional staff at one location.

"The greater efficiencies gained by having the ROC co-located with the Fire Communication Centre (FireCom), Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Fire and Rescue Service and administrative support staff is of immense benefit," he said.

"This will serve the community well not only during normal business activities but during times of high operational activity such as the 2019 bushfire season."

Having all regional staff in one building will also save costs as work units are relocated from rented accommodation facilities.

Charlton Fire and Rescue Station will be staffed 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The station will be the third permanent fire station in the Toowoomba Command and surrounding residential communities.

The new FireCom and ROC will provide an enhanced capability for South Western Region to coordinate operational incidents during day-to-day operations and periods of high emergency activities.

Charlton Fire and Rescue Station is expected to be occupied during December 2020 and the headquarters in early 2021.



From left to right: Toowoomba Regional Council Mayor Paul Antonio, Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche, Minister Craig Crawford and McNab Director Michael McNab.





The CAPAs are valued at around \$1.8 million each (including firefighting equipment).

# Reaching new heights

**QFES has boosted our firefighting and aerial rescue power with the handover of seven new Combined Aerial Pumping Appliances (CAPA).**

The CAPAs, worth a combined \$12.6 million, were handed over to the Toowoomba, Gladstone, Mackay, Surfers Paradise, Wishart, Chermside and Kemp Place Fire and Rescue Stations. They will replace the existing Telescopic Aerial Pumps across the state.

The vehicles are fitted with articulated ladders that can extend up to 32 metres to help firefighters rescue people from medium-rise buildings. Their tight turning circle allows them to manoeuvre narrow residential streets.

Engineered and assembled in Germany by Rosenbauer, the CAPAs are part of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) fleet replacement strategy, providing firefighters with the latest equipment for emergency response.

Commissioner Greg Leach said the CAPA was the first of its kind in Queensland.

“It is fantastic to see our firefighters equipped with some of the world’s best appliances,” Mr Leach said.

“These new CAPAs combine a full crew of four firefighters with aerial capability, which will greatly increase the aerial rescue capability of the FRS.”

Brisbane Region Aerial Coordinator Michael Pearce is one of the firefighters who will be using the new appliances. He received initial training from Rosenbauer and has since been training other operators in Brisbane Region.

The firefighters will undergo about 80 hours of training over several months to ensure they’re safe and familiar with the appliances before they become fully operational.

Over the past 12 months, firefighters have already undergone training to attain national prerequisites such as the Heavy Rigid license and Elevated Work Platform qualification.

“This is a great opportunity for Queensland because we can stay ahead of the game,” Michael said.

“Having these appliances to work with encourages all firefighters to train and become the best. For Brisbane especially, we have an opportunity to increase the standard of our aerial operators and aerial capability, which ultimately increases our response capability.”

Michael said the vehicles would be highly effective at a range of different emergency

incidents, from medium-rise rescues to unit fires, factory fires and structure fires.

“The CAPA has a fast get-to-work time: you can pull up and position the vehicle and reach a height of 32 metres in about 90 seconds,” he said.

“We can also use the CAPA to create a water tower for factory fires, structure fires and medium-rise fires because it has a 3000 litre per minute monitor.

“We have other options we can put on the cage, such as a thermal imaging camera and a video capability.”

The latest in infrared technology enables operators to locate and extinguish fire hotspots in smoke-clogged areas and at night with pinpoint accuracy.

Three Hydraulic Platform Aerial Appliances will also be delivered later in the year, allowing firefighters to reach even greater heights of up to 42 metres using a hydraulic boom.

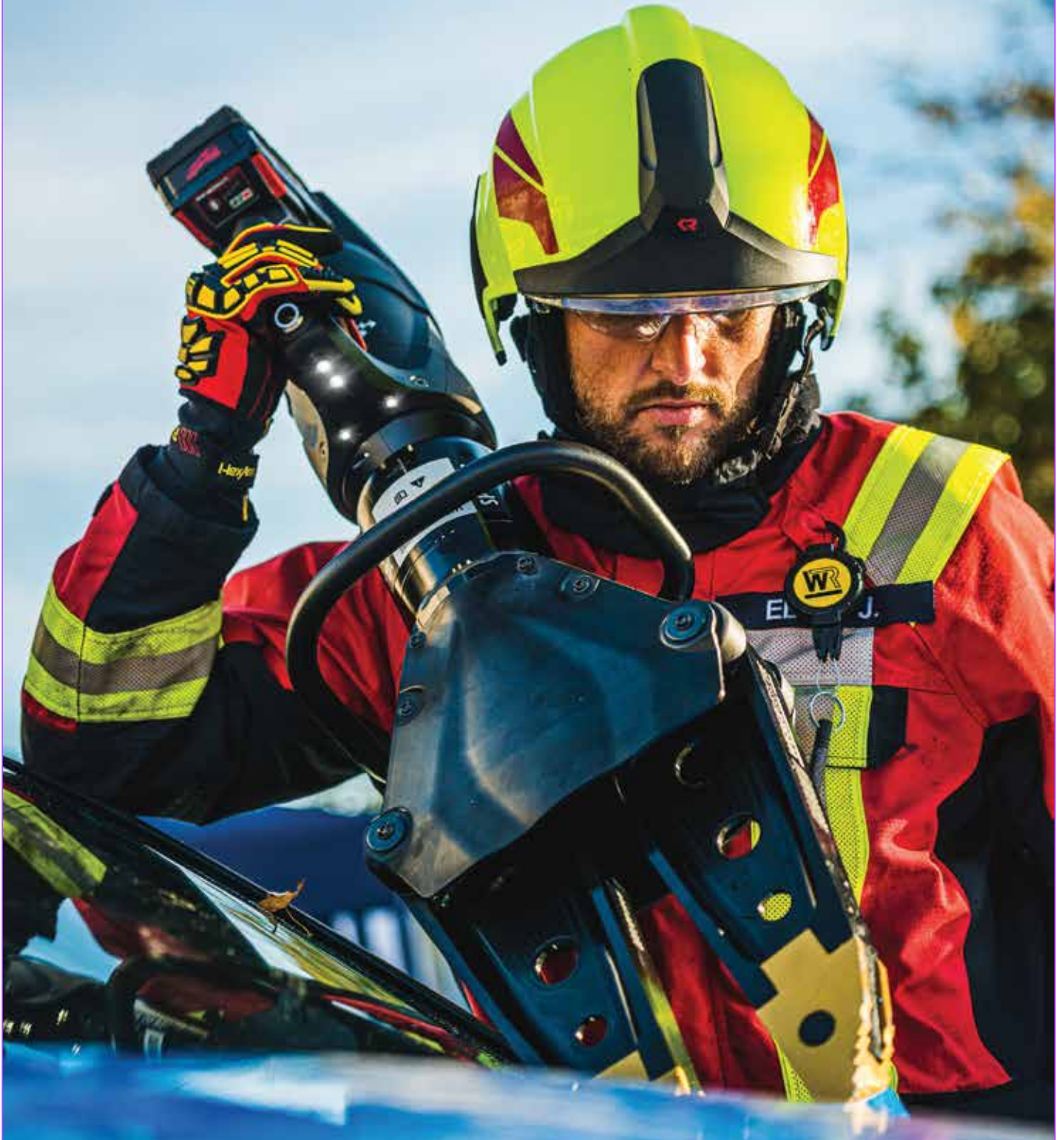


Firefighters can reach a height of 32 metres in about 90 seconds.



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# Age is just a number

To celebrate Queensland Seniors Month this August, *Response* spoke with some of our volunteers and staff who are veterans of working with the community.

Age is no barrier to working in QFES – there is a job for everyone, and many find it a great way to stay physically and mentally fit.

Our senior volunteers and staff, many of them with decades of experience, have a wealth of knowledge to pass onto future generations of the emergency services.

**Charles Hamlet**  
**State Emergency Service Mackay**  
**Member for 19 years**

Charles is a leader, field operations member and trainer. At the tender age of 74, Charles is still climbing on roofs to help people after storms and cyclones, conducting land searches and passing down his knowledge as a trainer.

“I like to get out and about after retiring five years ago and it’s the perfect way to expend energy,” Charles said.

He is also a keen hiker and climber and with a friend plans to climb a mountain near Mackay each day for 45 days. By the time they finish, they will have climbed the equivalent to Mount Everest: 8848 metres.

“Age is just a number,” Charles said. “You might slow down in the number of push ups you do, but you still do them.”



**Pat and Errol Noye**  
**Rural Fire Service Turkey Beach**  
**Combined membership of 29 years**

This husband and wife team enjoy keeping the community safe, working together with their members, learning new skills and meeting up with their fellow volunteers.

Errol is the First Officer of the Turkey Beach Rural Fire Brigade and the Miriam Vale Group Leader. He was most recently deployed to Nowra and Bega in the January 2020 fires.

Pat joined as a support member before becoming a firefighter. She is currently the brigade’s secretary/treasurer, crew leader and fire warden, as well as the Miriam Vale Group Administration Officer, Operational Support Unit Operator and interim Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland representative for the Gladstone area.

“Just because you are a senior, don’t think for a minute you cannot be of use to the service. There is more to it than fighting fires,” Pat and Errol said.

“There are support members who help to maintain the station, cater, provide training, logistics, help in the incident control centres and provide education to the community.”

**Robert Paterson**  
**Fire and Rescue Service – retired**  
**Joined in 1974**

Robert’s career started with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board in 1974 and throughout his career he worked to become a station officer, gaining a level 3 fire safety qualification.

After retirement Robert is still giving back to the community, providing fire safety education to senior citizens.

He is the Retired Firefighters Association organiser in the Gold Coast area and recently has become the QFES Chaplain for the Gold Coast South area.

“If you think of age as just a number, exercise and have a good healthy diet you will be able to carry on with all those different projects you always wanted to complete or achieve,” Robert said.

“Also by keeping yourself active it keeps your brain working and functioning properly.”

It’s an inspiration to see so many QFES members giving up countless hours of their time over years and decades to keep their fellow Queenslanders safe.

QFES thanks all our senior volunteers and staff for their service.







Bundaberg Fire and Rescue Station Senior Firefighter Luke Griffin is also a photography and lawn enthusiast and he managed to combine his interests and snap this picture. Luke refurbished this Scott Bonnar 45-cylinder mower, which has since found a home with a firefighter in Toowoomba.



Sunshine Coast Fire and Rescue Service crews and vertical rescue technicians came to the rescue after Harvey the beagle slipped 10 metres down an embankment.



Swiftwater Rescue Technicians braved the icy water at Cabbage Tree Point in a training exercise to increase their knowledge of the area and their equipment.



Twelve Fire and Rescue Service auxiliary firefighters and State Emergency Service volunteers sharpened their skills at a Road Crash Rescue awareness course at Winton.



Several team members from the Fire and Rescue Service Directorate were recognised in July for their commitment and dedication to duty. Ten personnel from Community Infrastructure, Specialist and Technical Response, Research and Scientific, and Fire and Rescue Service Branches were presented with Assistant Commissioner's Commendations by Commissioner Leach at the State Deployment Centre.





The QFES Aussie Rules team donned their uniforms for their first training session in the lead-up to the emergency services championship later in the year.



State Emergency Service members and new recruits from the Townsville and Thuringowa groups finally met up in person after the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.



Rockhampton firefighters recently held a training exercise at the Pilbeam Theatre, where technicians simulated fire conditions by smoking up the auditorium.



Alexander's parents took him on a visit to the Mackay Fire and Rescue Station, where the D-shift crew gave him a warm welcome.



Firefighters from the Bundaberg Fire and Rescue Station rescued a 13-year-old boy stuck 13 metres up a tree in Moore Park.



# A rare honour

**His leadership during last bushfire season and dedication to helping the community are just some of the reasons why firefighter Barry Dyer from Widgee Rural Fire Brigade was named the Rural Fire Service Assistant Commissioner's Volunteer of the Year for 2020.**

Barry received the honour during Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week in June, when QFES took some time out to thank our hardworking volunteers.

RFS Assistant Commissioner John Bolger AFSM said Barry received this special award for his exemplary and loyal service to both his brigade and the community.

"His compassion, enthusiasm, optimism and encouragement showcase everything an RFS volunteer should aspire to," Mr Bolger said.

Barry said he was working with earthmoving equipment on his cattle property when Mr Bolger called with the good news, which came as a complete surprise. Barry has been with his brigade for 28 years, serving in several roles including treasurer, officer and first officer.

"The very fine people you work with and meet from other brigades is one of the huge benefits of being part of the RFS," Barry said.

Becoming first officer was a steep learning curve for Barry, especially when fires swept through his district last summer.

"Five fires were sparked by lightning strikes from dry storms," he said. "They were very random and in the worst possible places.

"One was in very steep country up on Widgee Mountain, where we couldn't drive the trucks.

"We worked with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), fighting the fire by putting in fire breaks with rakehoes, which was nearly impossible on the steep slope.

"At the same time, a big fire was burning nearby at Kandanga.

"The Black Snake fire was the biggest of all. It took a lot of resources and air support over five or six days, plus follow-up and monitoring.

"If uncontained, the Black Snake fire would have posed a big risk to homes. Through hard work and a little bit of luck we managed to contain it.

"It was a huge effort over very long days in rough terrain, with the assistance of many other brigades and QPWS."

Barry said being a volunteer is all about working with a common goal to assist the community.

"No matter how long you're out on a fireground, you're always learning, because fires always have something new hidden up their sleeve," he said.

"No two incidents are the same – you have to build up your toolbox of skills as much as you can so you can adapt to whatever scenario you're in."

Barry said he owed a lot to his wife and family.

"My wife is the support behind everything I do. There were many times I wasn't at home very much and she had to look after a lot of things.

"I'd like to thank all the great inspiring people I've met along the way. I've learnt a lot from them."



Firefighter Barry Dyer from Widgee Rural Fire Brigade received the Assistant Commissioner's Volunteer of the Year Award.

## Regional Volunteer of the Year Award winners

Brisbane – Dean West from Rocksberg Moorina Rural Fire Brigade

South Eastern – Trevor Turner from Mount Alford Rural Fire Brigade

South Western – Peter Patzwald from Cabarlah Rural Fire Brigade

North Coast – David Morton from Bungadoo Rural Fire Brigade

Central – Errol Noye from Turkey Beach Rural Fire Brigade

Northern – Corinne Young from Black River and District Rural Fire Brigade

Far Northern – Garry Pickering from Croydon Rural Fire Brigade





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