

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE

EDITION 23



RECORD-BREAKING FLOODS

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ON THE COVER

This photo was taken during the Townsville floods, where SES volunteer Reece Booi helped rescue more than 100 residents from rising floodwaters.

Photo: Alex Battye

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

Let the Editor know what you think about this edition of Response by providing your feedback to QFESMagazine. Editor@qfes.qld.gov.au

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FOREWORDS



KATARINA CARROLL
Commissioner
QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) personnel have shown incredible dedication to protecting their communities in the past few months, most recently when tropical cyclones and severe flooding hit Northern Queensland in late January.

The State Emergency Service (SES) received more than 4800 requests for assistance between 25 January and 18 February as parts of the state, including Townsville, received record-breaking rainfall in just a few days. QFES crews again worked tirelessly to put the community's needs ahead of their own as more than 800 people were relocated from their homes. As these communities begin to recover, I'm proud that QFES is leading the way to provide assistance to those who need it most. See pages 12-13 for an overview of the floods.

This year we've also celebrated achievement through the Australia Day Honours and Awards, with 53 QFES staff and volunteers recognised for their outstanding contributions to our organisation. Four of our colleagues were also awarded some of the highest honours that can be bestowed on QFES personnel, the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) and the Emergency Services Medal (ESM). See pages 4-6 to learn more about our award recipients.

Another special award was also presented to Mrs Betty Besch, a pioneer rural firefighter in an era when few women worked in fire management. Betty received her Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Medal and clasps, in recognition of her 37 years as a member of the South Ulum Rural Fire Brigade. See pages 18-19.

I'd like to congratulate all the award and medal recipients on their dedication and commitment to our organisation and to keeping communities safe.

Safety was also the focus during the Counter-Terrorism Capability Exercise (CAPEX) 2018 Tropical Exposure, in which QFES members joined specialists from around the world for an Australian government-led exercise which challenged teams to quickly and safely address six scenarios. See pages 10-11.

While QFES continues to work towards building more resilient communities, the focus of this year will also be on maintaining the great work our organisation does to meet existing and emerging needs of the community. We know the services we provide are world-class, and I look forward to working with you all in 2019 to ensure we continue to strive for the best.

Katarina Carroll
Commissioner
Queensland Fire and Emergency Services



MARK ROCHE
Deputy Commissioner
READINESS & RESPONSE SERVICES DIVISION

The new year is well and truly underway and as we leave behind 2018, we can look to continually improve and learn from recent events. The information and lessons we gather will be part of a broader review to ensure we continue to keep our communities safe.

It has been a busy start to 2019 with the flood emergency in Northern Queensland, which again showed QFES' ability to actively respond and assist communities in need. Thank you to all staff and volunteers who work tirelessly during these disasters to put others' needs ahead of their own. As well as the floods, a contingency of QFES members from the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue Service and State Emergency Service were deployed to Tasmania to assist with bushfires. Coupled with the heavy rainfall and floods in Northern Queensland, as well as bushfires still impacting other regions across the state, we certainly do cover all extremes in Queensland.

There has been a lot of discussion around the Government Wireless Network (GWN) since it commenced in 2014. QFES has recently established the Radio/Communications Taskforce to investigate and identify any issues with the digital communications network and radio communications. The taskforce has been established to investigate technical issues and user issues, analyse and evaluate these issues and deliver a report with high-level advice and solutions. If you wish to provide any feedback on your experiences with the networks, please contact your regional representative or visit the QFES Gateway under Major Projects and Events – Radio/Communications Taskforce for more information.

While Acting Commissioner I had the honour of attending Australia Day Achievement Awards ceremonies in Brisbane and South Eastern Regions to recognise QFES members for their exceptional work in the delivery of fire and emergency services over the preceding 12 months. Ceremonies were also held in all other regions and I congratulate all those who received Australia Day Achievement awards.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the newly appointed Chief Superintendent Steven Smith in Central and Chief Superintendent Mark Stuart in South Eastern Regions. These appointments will continue to bring stability and new skills to the regions and I wish them all the best in their new roles.

Mark Roche
Deputy Commissioner
Readiness & Response Services Division



HON CRAIG CRAWFORD
Minister
MINISTER FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Christmas and New Year period is normally a time for people to celebrate and relax with family and friends, but in the past few months Queensland Fire and Emergency Services personnel have worked tirelessly responding to natural disasters across the state.

As a former volunteer firefighter and paramedic, I understand the personal sacrifices you make to provide a vital and honourable service to the community and I would like to thank you for your selflessness and dedication.

Across the state, we have spent the past three months dealing with the extreme events that nature has thrown at us, beginning with the extensive bushfires towards the end of 2018.

Our northern and far northern areas have also been affected, with Severe Tropical Cyclone Owen crossing the west coast of Cape York, quickly followed by Tropical Cyclone Penny passing over Weipa before menacing the coast for several more days.

More recently, we have seen the flood emergency unfold in our north and north-western regions, with Townsville and inland areas most affected.

As a result of these disasters, many people have lost their homes, their pets, their businesses and their livelihoods, and that's when you, the QFES staff and volunteers, really come into your own.

Just as you helped those in immediate need, you're still on the ground helping with the recovery process, which will take months if not years to complete.

Meanwhile, our counterparts in the southern states have been battling through their own intense bushfire season.

Tasmania's firefighters helped us battle our bushfires last year and we returned the favour in January, sending more than 30 QFES personnel to lend a hand.

Because that's what we do – that's what you do.

You lend a hand. I've had the opportunity to visit some of the Central Queensland region scorched by the bushfires and I witnessed firsthand the devastation being wrought by the monsoon trough and subsequent flooding in the state's north.

Residents in those areas couldn't praise the work of QFES personnel high enough and, let's face it, that's where it really counts.

I look forward to spending more time on the road this year and having the opportunity to meet more of you to say thank-you in person.

Hon Craig Crawford
Minister for Fire and Emergency Services

2019 Australia Day Awards celebrate the best of QFES

Australia Day Award ceremonies were held across the state to acknowledge the hard work and selflessness of Queensland Fire and Emergency Service (QFES) members over the past year.

Fifty-three QFES staff and volunteers from across Queensland were awarded Australia Day Achievement Medallions for recognition of their exceptional contributions to the department and their communities.

Australia Day Achievement Pins are presented to individuals from QFES who have performed outstanding work that has gone above and beyond the normal course of duty to provide a significant contribution to the delivery of fire and emergency services in Queensland.

The award recipients come from many areas around QFES and their achievements are wide and varied.

Some of the work recognised included work in building resilience through community engagement, developing our workforce through operations training programs, leadership and support during extremely challenging emergency events, dedication to charity and fundraising events, and delivering high levels of operational services to communities.

Acting Commissioner at the time, Mark Roche, said the recipients represented the dedication and extraordinary efforts that individuals had gone through to make QFES a world-class organisation.

“Members of SES, RFS and FRS are often faced with difficult and challenging situations, but they work tirelessly to continuously make Queensland a safe place to live,” Mr Roche said.

“The Australia Day Achievement Awards are a proud tradition of QFES that provide us with a great opportunity to celebrate the invaluable work that members of our organisation provide to their communities.”

“Congratulations to all the award recipients and we thank you for your ongoing commitment to providing emergency services and helping us to achieve our goal of creating safe and resilient communities in Queensland.”

Auxiliary Firefighter Michelle Murray received an award for her outstanding dedication to upholding the values of QFES and raising awareness of domestic violence issues through firefighter and community engagement.

“The awards are a great opportunity to recognise some of the people who make up the QFES workforce and I am proud to be part of an organisation that chooses to speak up about domestic violence and is committed to becoming White Ribbon accredited,” said Ms Murray.

Acting Brigade Training and Support Officer Stephan Powiesnik, who was recognised for his services to the School Community Safety Program and volunteer training of Speewah Rural Fire Brigade and Clohesy Rural Fire Group, said the awards were a great initiative that acknowledged the work behind the scenes that people do and the sacrifices they make that aren't always recognised.

“It was an overwhelming feeling to be given this award because you work hard and go out of your way to volunteer yourself for a good cause and you don't expect to receive anything in return, so it's something special to be given an award,” said Mr Powiesnik.



(l-r) Stephen Smith, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Readiness and Response Services; Roni Bau, Applethorpe Rural Fire Brigade; Mark Ryan, Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective Services.

Acting Executive Manager Louise Snowdon was recognised for her tireless commitment, expertise and support in progressing work on organisational transformation to enhance QFES' future sustainability and relevance.

“Receiving the award, I felt honoured that someone had taken the time to nominate me and humbled for being recognised for my work, particularly when we have a lot of deserving staff and volunteers,” said Ms Snowdon.

Six Australia Day Appreciation Certificates were also presented to organisations and individuals external to QFES who provided outstanding support to QFES over the past 12 months.

In addition, four members of QFES were awarded Australian Fire Service Medals (two recipients) and Emergency Service Medals (two recipients). See pages 6 and 7 for their stories.

Thanks to QSuper for their ongoing support of QFES and sponsorship of the Australia Day Achievement Awards.



QFES SER Australia Day Awards recipients.



Brisbane Region Australia Day Award recipients.

QFES members recognised in Australia Day Honours

Four QFES members received some of the highest honours that can be awarded to QFES personnel in the 2019 Australia Day Honours List.

Deputy Commissioner for Emergency Management, Volunteerism and Community Resilience, Mike Wassing, and Assistant Commissioner Far Northern Region, John Bolger, were each awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM). Longreach SES Group Leader, Karen Peters, and Warwick SES Local Controller, John Newley, were each awarded an Emergency Services Medal (ESM).

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing said he was very humbled to receive the AFSM.

“It was great to hear from members from my first brigade, the Dromana Fire Brigade where I was a volunteer, who reached out to congratulate me. I reflected on my time there, and what being a rural fire volunteer instilled in me, which was how being part of a team in that environment was to be part of something deeper.

“It was in that first rural brigade that I realised I could make a career of being a firefighter. It wasn’t something I’d thought about when I was growing up. Those experiences I had as a volunteer, and what it means to be something that is bigger than yourself, still sit with me today. My volunteering experiences really pushed me in the career direction I’ve taken.”

Mike wanted to acknowledge all the people who help him in his role.

“We do what we do as part of a team, at work as well as at home. My family have given up a lot to support me, allowing me to be away overnight, weekends and on deployments.

“It was also great to be able to change states and come to Queensland to work with the three services together, to be part

of serving Queensland’s communities, and to influence the services and how they work with our communities.”

Assistant Commissioner John Bolger said he was sincerely and truly humbled to receive the AFSM.

“I see this as a pinnacle of my career, to be recognised by peers and the wider community for my contribution.

“I genuinely feel I have an amazing career, one with opportunities to make a difference in people’s lives. I believe when people are given an opportunity to make a change, they tend to make things better.”

John said it was important that everyone should be able to come to work as their true selves and feel welcome.



Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing.



Assistant Commissioner John Bolger.

“About three years ago, before same sex marriage was legalised, there was a lot of great work done by people in the organisation to lay the groundwork for change in QFES.

“For me, I wanted to make it known that it was perfectly okay to be both a member of the LGBTIQ+ community and QFES, and this is some of the work we did as a part of QFES Transforms.

“I love being a part of QFES, and I sincerely believe in our QFES values. Our organisation has come a long way in the past few years and I’m proud to be a part of that journey.

“My mother instilled in me from a young age a strong sense of fairness and equity. I was always encouraged to question, ‘how does your action affect others?’ I continue to bring that to our workplace every day.”

Longreach SES Group Leader Karen Peters said she was humbled to receive the ESM.

“It’s rewarding to be out there helping the community – I don’t do it to be recognised.

“I’ve always been community minded, it was part of my upbringing, and I enjoy helping the community.

“I was with the Scouts for 10 years and I’m with the Rural Fire Service as well. I’ve recently moved to Emerald so I have moved

station, and I’m looking forward to helping the community here.”

Karen said it was quite a surprise to receive the award.

“I was a bit emotional when I got the nomination letter and again when I got the letter confirming I would be getting the medal.

“My friends and family say it’s well deserved, and I’m looking forward to going to the ceremony later this year and receiving the medal.

“It’s thanks to my family that I’ve been able to help the community. My husband is very supportive.

“I also had a very good team behind me in Longreach SES, as well as support from other agencies like Rural Fire Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Police Service.”

Warwick SES Local Controller John Newley said he was surprised and delighted to receive the ESM.

“There are a lot of people out there doing a lot of work, and you think you’re just one of the crowd.

“I couldn’t do what I do without family support and of course the other volunteers. Volunteers are tremendous people, and this

medal is as much for the other volunteers as it is for me.

“Volunteers are doing all sorts of things for the community, and a lot of them volunteer for RFS and other organisations, they wear multiple hats.”

John said a conversation at work led him to a life as a volunteer.

“Over 40 years ago, I was working in a bakery and the boss said to me and another guy: ‘How about we go and see the SES? They’re looking for people’. It was a totally different organisation back then – you learned a lot on the run.

“The 2010-11 floods were huge, it was more than a month before I returned to work. I was at Warwick, at Gundy, then Cyclone Yasi came along. Being a Local Controller then was a big deal – I was on the Local Disaster Management Group as well – making decisions that had to be made at that level.”

John also acknowledged the work of other volunteers.

“Where would we be in Australia without all the volunteers? I was at the National Volunteers Awards mid-last year and saw how many different things people volunteer for. Volunteers do a lot of work in the community and I want to acknowledge all the volunteers for all they do.”



Warwick SES Local Controller John Newley.



Longreach SES Group Leader Karen Peters.



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Independent member appointed to the QFES Board of Management

Corporate governance expert, Jennifer Robertson, has been appointed to the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) Board of Management (BOM) as the inaugural independent member.

The QFES BOM changed its terms of reference in late 2018 to include an independent member in its membership.

An independent member will bring a broad range of experience to the BOM and an enhanced ability to look at issues without preconception.

It also allows the BOM to gain an insight into 'best practice' procedures to improve accountability and transparency.

Ms Robertson will bring her considerable corporate governance experience to this role. She is a practising lawyer and has been working in the corporate governance space for more than a decade advising both public and private sector organisations on best practice.

As well as sitting on several boards, Ms Robertson is the Deputy Chair of the Queensland Building Construction Commission and Chair of the Defence Reserves Support Council Queensland.

Ms Robertson says she is honoured to be appointed to the BOM and is looking forward to being able to assist the board in making the best decisions to support the great work done by QFES staff and volunteers.

"I am particularly looking forward to better understanding the QFES business and meeting as many of the people that perform a critical service for the Queensland community," she said.

Deputy Commissioner Doug Smith said having a true independent member on the QFES BOM is an important step forward for QFES.

"The BOM will be able to learn from Jennifer's considerable governance experience and her input will provide a different and diverse perspective as well

as augmenting the current Board members knowledge and expertise," Deputy Commissioner Smith said.

The QFES BOM meets every two months. Commissioner Carroll chairs the board

and membership includes the QFES Deputy Commissioners and the PSBA Chief Operating Officer. Ms Robertson's first board meeting will be in February 2019.



Jennifer Robertson with Acting Inspector Mark Burchard, Area Commander Roma Street Command.

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The Australian team entering a scenario supported by a robot.

CAPEX 'Tropical Exposure' comes to Queensland

Two years of planning came to fruition late last year when specialist Chemical Biological Radiological (CBR) response teams from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia converged on Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy (QCESA) for an Australian government-led capability exercise.

The teams comprised specialists from agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United Kingdom's Defence Science Technology Laboratory and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Around 300 personnel and visitors participated each day during the Counter-Terrorism Capability Exercise (CAPEX) 2018 Tropical Exposure.

The CAPEX theme used four principles as a basis for scenarios: detect, exploit, attribute and defeat. The training incorporated current and emerging threats using CBR materials drawn from across the globe. These threats are no longer the realm of science fiction novels but instead are very much potential scenarios worldwide.

Over a six-day period, different scenarios challenged the teams to rapidly and safely exploit each scene and problem posed. Responses were assessed by international experts who identified science and technology gaps. Insights gathered during this exercise will inform new research across the four nations which will assist first responders to safely respond to and manage potential incidents across the globe.

At the official opening, Queensland challenged the teams to "be safe, prepared and excellent. To be a student, teacher, mentor, coach, creator and innovator. To be a friend and most importantly, be a practitioner we know you can be".

CAPEX was coordinated by the Department of Home Affairs using expertise drawn from across Australia. Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) led by the Research and Scientific Branch, in collaboration with our colleagues from Queensland Police Service (QPS) Forensic Services Group, Explosive Ordnance Team and Queensland Health (QH) Radiation Health Unit played leading roles in designing, constructing, testing and delivering the scenarios.

Participating in CAPEX really assists in our preparations to meet these emergency threats

- Katarina Carroll

The capability exercise provided the opportunity to highlight Queensland's expertise on a world stage.

QFES Commissioner Katarina Carroll said having participated in an earlier CAPEX in the United States, hosting a CAPEX in Queensland reflected the high regard the expertise and capabilities in our agencies were held, even beyond Australian shores.

"It also reminds us how important our multiagency relationships are and participating in CAPEX really assists our preparations to meet these emergency threats," Ms Carroll said.

CAPEX also provided QFES an opportunity to test resources under development such as the new command/ communication trailer and learn and share expertise with international experts to make our responses better.

The exercise team can take a deep breath now it is finished, and the United Kingdom has grasped the challenge set by Queensland to plan and deliver the next CAPEX.



US team briefing at Command and Control trailer.



A snapshot of the operational support area, including the decontamination trailer and forensic evidence management trailer.



Record-breaking floods in the north

Once in a century rainfall in northern Queensland led to record flood levels in Townsville, forced many families to evacuate their homes, cost graziers in western Queensland their livelihoods and affected an area twice the size of Victoria.

Townsville residents weathered the worst floods the city had ever seen as a monsoon trough dumped a year's worth of rain in nine days, with more than 1.1m recorded by the Bureau of Meteorology, breaking the previous record of 886mm set in 1998.

As the Ross River dam filled to more than 200 per cent of its capacity, the State Emergency Service (SES) received more than 4800 requests for help in flood affected areas.

Homes and businesses were inundated by the torrential rainfall and it forced more than 800 people to relocate to evacuation centres with the help of QFES members and other emergency service crews, defence personnel and neighbours.

More than 800 QFES personnel were deployed from around the state to respond to the flood emergency which affected North Queensland towns including Townsville, Ingham, Mt Isa, Cardwell, Cairns, Tully and Ayr.

QFES Commissioner Katarina Carroll praised the efforts of QFES crews who worked tirelessly to help the community during this catastrophic event.

"The response of QFES staff and volunteers during these difficult times was remarkable, especially considering there were thousands of requests for support in less than two weeks," Ms Carroll said.

"SES volunteers were on the ground working with partner agencies to prepare for the torrential rain and flooding by

assisting residents with roof tarping and helping to deliver more than 160 000 sandbags to the North Queensland region."

Swiftwater Rescue crews were deployed to critical areas and rescued 69 people from floodwater, including a pregnant woman in labour.

Behind the scenes, personnel in Fire Communication Centres, the State Operations Centre, Regional Operations Centres, the State Disaster Coordination Centre, Incident Control Centres and corporate services provided critical incident management and support services to operational teams on the frontline.

QFES crews also completed hundreds of washouts of properties, with staff and volunteers from the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue Service and SES combining

efforts to assist in the clean-up. In mid-February, more than 8700 damage assessments had been completed.

Drought-stricken graziers across north and west Queensland estimated they had lost 500 000 head of cattle and livestock in the floods, and infrastructure like homes, fences, troughs and tanks were swept away in the devastation.

Farmers estimated it would take months to realise the full impact of the floods on herds and grazing land across parts of Queensland.

Thousands of homes, businesses and schools have been damaged by floodwaters, leaving many uninhabitable as the cost of the disaster continues to mount.

Ms Carroll said that while these once-in-a-lifetime floods had devastated parts of the region, the response of QFES staff and volunteers would leave a lasting positive impact on the community.

"Our staff and volunteers showed bravery in the face of disaster and the work, both on the frontlines and behind the scenes, helped the community endure some extremely difficult conditions," Ms Carroll said.

"As we continue to support the region with its recovery, I want to recognise the contributions of all members of QFES for their hard work in ensuring the safety of Queenslanders.

"My thoughts also go out to all those who have been affected by the floods in the region, especially those who are in the process of rebuilding and recovering."



New boots on the ground across Queensland

Following three months of intense training, 36 firefighting and fire communication recruits graduated at an induction ceremony held in Brisbane in late December.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) Commissioner Katarina Carroll and Member for Logan Linus Power, representing Fire and Emergency Services Minister Craig Crawford, welcomed the new graduates.

Commissioner Carroll said she was excited to watch the new officers commence their careers in emergency services.

“It always gives me great pleasure welcoming new graduates to the QFES family,” Ms Carroll said.

“At QFES we expect a high level of professionalism, honesty and resilience and I’m confident the training our recruits receive prepares them to serve the ever-evolving needs of our Queensland communities.

“I encourage the new officers to be courageous in how they challenge themselves and their peers and help improve our workforce.”

Thirty graduate firefighters received a Public Safety Certificate II in Fire Fighter and Emergency Operations, having gained skills in live fire behaviour, wildfire, road crash rescue, technical rescue and hazardous materials management.

A Public Safety Certificate III in Emergency Communications Centre Operations was awarded to six new fire communications officers.

Queensland’s new recruits will be assigned to Ipswich, Townsville, Charters Towers, Maryborough, Gladstone, Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg and the Sunshine Coast.



Minister Craig Crawford and Commissioner Katarina Carroll congratulate dux of recruit course Matt Dillon.



The December 2018 graduating course.

Communications upgrade brings SES up to speed

QFES has begun work to onboard the SES to the Government Wireless Network (GWN).

As we kick off 2019, the newly formed SES Communications Onboarding Project team has embarked on the first stages of an initiative that will deliver critical communications improvements to the SES.

The SES Communications Onboarding project spans two years and will transition the SES to the GWN.

The GWN is a fully integrated, secure digital radio communications network that emergency service personnel in South East Queensland use to communicate mission critical information.

The SES currently operates on several different technologies and networks, often without the provision of individual radios for those responding.

This project will establish an important milestone whereby all QFES services in South East Queensland will operate on the same communications network as other emergency services.

Upgrading communications technology will reduce issues such as analogue radio congestion, coverage blackspots and allow us to replace ageing radios.

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing recently announced the project would develop a communications solution that includes how coordination processes and systems such as TAMS will link more seamlessly with other systems across QFES.

“Communications play a vital role in ensuring the coordination of operations and safety of those responding,” Mr Wassing said.

“With SES volunteers working in the same theatres of operation as other QFES services, the need for them to access the same communications technology and platforms available to other agencies has become more urgent.

“The new radios operate on a digital network, are shock resistant and waterproof, which makes them ideal for the tough conditions our SES volunteers often operate in.”

Mr Wassing said the improved communications would enable streamlined responses to disasters in Queensland.

“Improvements in radio communications means greater radio coverage, granting access to support at all times and better

exchange of mission-critical information with other services to better assist our communities,” Mr Wassing said.

“The project is taking the necessary time to design an approach that includes the input of the QFES workforce and will result in a coordinated oversight model.”

Mr Wassing added there had been substantial engagement with local governments on the proposed changes to SES communications infrastructure.

“The QFES Chief Strategy Officer, Assistant Commissioner SES and relevant SES Regional Managers met with all affected local councils to talk through the business case and the proposed changes to radio communications.

“Further briefings are planned early in 2019 with local government to update them on progress, and to begin the planning and logistics process of replacing existing radios in vehicles,” Mr Wassing said.

The project team will shortly be asking for your input through working groups and reference groups as part of a co-design approach. For more information on the project or to get involved, email SESComms-Onboarding@qfes.qld.gov.au





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Ride along adventures

SDCC State Duty Officer Courtney Russell ventured out of the office and joined the Camira Fire and Rescue crew on a ride along for a day.

Most days, Courtney Russell can be found working tirelessly at her desk in the State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC) but when the opportunity came for her to participate in a ride along with the day shift crew from the Camira Fire and Rescue Station, she left her desk to help serve her community in a different way.

"I arrived in the morning and was provided with a tour of the station and information on what my responsibilities would be in the event that a job would be received. We received a call out within the first 10 minutes of the shift handover and we had to respond," Courtney said.

"The crew was quick to load the truck and respond to a fire alarm that had been activated in a nearby shopping centre, and I soon discovered that the call out had been a false alarm.

"Our final call of the day was responding to a local grass fire where I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to fight the fire from a safe distance, and only with the help of the Camira Fire and Rescue crew."

Courtney said the day was a great opportunity to provide information sharing between her role in the SDCC and the role of frontline fire fighters as they worked together to serve Queensland communities.

"I was given a detailed brief on all the lifesaving equipment used within the truck appliances and I witnessed first-hand how both the rural and urban fire brigades used the equipment and worked cohesively to control a fire," Courtney said.

"A few days later I was also invited to visit the School of Fire and Emergency Services

Training (SFEST) facility at Whyte Island and was taken on a tour to see the rigorous training our recruits go through.

"Both these experiences provided me with a greater understanding and appreciation of the hard work it takes to be a firefighter and what actually happens outside of the office environment.

"I highly recommend employees take the opportunity to participate in a ride along if they are ever given the chance or to visit the SFEST facilities at Whyte Island."



Recognising a true pioneer

The day is Thursday 17 January 2019. It is just another day for Mrs Betty Besch, or so she thinks.

When the nurse came to Betty's room to help her dress for the day, she suggested a dress. "Why do you want me to wear a dress," Betty asked? The nurse explained that today they would like to take a photo of Betty for the Benevolent Aged Care newspaper. Betty didn't quite understand why they would want to take her photo but went along with it anyway.

Shortly after, Betty was wheeled downstairs where her son Ewan and his wife Kathy, their two grandchildren (Betty's great-grandchildren), an old family friend Col Weeks and two unfamiliar faces were waiting for her. Wayne Kapernick, Area Director of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and his Administrative Officer Leticia Jukes were the two faces Betty had not met before.

Betty wasn't like most other women, there was more to her that made her special
- Wayne Kapernick

Betty appeared slightly confused but nevertheless politely conversed with them. Wayne approached Betty and explained why everyone had gathered at her home.

"Take a breath and cast your mind back to 23 June 1979 in South Ulam, Queensland," Wayne said.

"It's hot, the farms are large and dry and work is hard. Men ran the farms and wives raised the children and cared for the house.

"But then there was Betty Besch. Betty was a mum of two children and a devoted wife to her late husband Ian.

"Betty wasn't like most other women, there was more to her that made her special. Betty, along with her husband Ian, were the beginnings of and became the core members of the South Ulam Rural Fire Brigade," Wayne said.

For a woman to be working alongside men fighting fires and preparing neighbours with farm and fire management was



something unheard of. In addition to this, Betty catered for and supported the welfare of all brigade members. For 37 years Betty served as a member of the brigade and during that time earned the utmost respect of her brigade members and the community.

In Betty's later years, she put down the hose and served as a support member for the brigade, a very valued part of any brigade.

It was explained to Betty that the reason for the visit was to present her with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) Medal and clasps.



The QFES Medal provides recognition of demonstrated commitment to ethical standards, personal integrity and diligent service over a prolonged period. The two clasps each represent an additional 10 years' service.

Leticia Jukes had the pleasure of sitting down with Betty after her medal presentation where Betty recited wonderful memories.

"They all think I'm just an old nobody here, but little do they know I was invited twice for morning tea at the Governor's House," Betty said.

"These medals will proudly sit next to my late husband's medals in the cabinet," Betty said.

Betty's son Ewan is a very active member of the South Ulam Rural Fire Service and local fire warden for the area too. Ewan's wife Kathy is also a valued member of the RFS.

These medals will proudly sit next to my late husband's medals in the cabinet
- Betty Besch

SOUTH EASTERN REGION



Road Safety Week

Late last year Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) personnel, specifically Southport crew, attended the launch of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Christmas Road Safety Campaign. There was an impressive display from emergency response agencies including QFES, QPS, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Department of Transport and Main Roads and helicopter crews from RACQ Life Flight and QPS Polair.

Key messages on the day focused on safe and smart driving behaviour during the holiday period. Emergency services representatives spoke about potential tragic results of driving when tired, under the influence of alcohol or other substances, and speeding. The community was also reminded of the importance of staying up to date with weather and fire warnings and to never attempt to cross flooded roadways.

“Fabulous Facial Fibres” top QFES Movember fundraising

Sean Wulff, team captain from “SER Firefighters with Fabulous Facial Fibres” shares his team’s Movember success.

“In recent times, the month of November has become an annual celebration of some very dodgy looking moustaches being grown courtesy of people raising funds for the Movember Foundation. I took part this year under the strict provision, from home, that the offending Lip-Toupée would be removed on the stroke of midnight at the end of the month (after seeing it at the end of the month, I totally understand why).”



A team of brave individuals from QFES SER was gathered (mostly as a dare and good old peer pressure) on the understanding that we would strive to, not only look foolish but more importantly, raise donations to help fund the ideals of the Movember Foundation. The foundation funds projects globally addressing men’s health generally, but with particular regard to the issues of prostate cancer, testicular cancer, men’s mental health and suicide prevention.

Our team ‘SER Firefighters with Fabulous Facial Fibres’ were not only responsible for some of the dodgiest soup-strainers grown, we were also the highest fundraising team within the QFES Challenge, raising a total of \$4,501. Special mention must be made of our highest earner, Wayne Teece, who put us all to shame raising a whopping \$1,367 individually. Thanks also to our friends and colleagues for their generous sponsorship.”

More information on the Movember Foundation can be found at <https://au.movember.com>



SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Exercise Boomerang

Late last year, Bulloo Shire Council (BSC) Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) participated in Exercise Boomerang. Boomerang was a crisis management operational exercise designed to examine and practice established emergency procedures for an aircraft crash within the Thargomindah Aerodrome boundaries.

The objectives of the exercise were to:

- practice the Thargomindah Aerodrome Emergency Procedures Plan and all associated Emergency Services Sub Plans
- test the efficiency of communications during the operation
- practice responses and coordination between BSC, aerodrome personnel and emergency services
- exercise command, control, coordination and liaison procedures
- evaluate the efficiency of existing procedures
- identify, review and amend any functions, procedures and deficiencies.

All agencies involved walked away with a better understanding of existing procedures and new ideas to help them better prepare themselves and the community for any similar event.



South Western Region welcomes new training facility

Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Craig Crawford officially opened the Tactical Training Facility at the Charlton Regional Headquarters late last year. Following this, bookings and inspections of the facility are on the increase. This facility will host the first Auxiliary Recruit, Training and Education Program for 2019 in March.

QFES engages with community over a Bunnings snag

Throughout the year, emergency services in Toowoomba gather at one of the local Bunnings and take over the carpark. December 2018 was no exception, with Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service joining forces to deliver road safety messages to the community. Bunnings are always willing to host our crews and we appreciate their continued support. Thank you to everyone who attended and showed such enthusiasm for engaging with the community.



FRS farewells Lieutenant Terry Dwyer after 44 years

Lieutenant Terry Dwyer commenced his service in Chinchilla on 4 September 1974. Since then, Terry has dedicated his life to the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and community. He has always conducted his duties diligently and with pride. Testimony to the respect that people have for Terry was the representation from several stations from across the region, as well as fellow retired firefighters from Chinchilla, at his retirement. Terry also received the Chinchilla Australia Day Citizen of the Year award from the Western Downs Regional Council for his dedication to the community. Congratulations and well done to Terry and his family for 44 years, four months and four days of dedicated service to the community and all the best for your retirement. You can now hang up your pager with pride.



FAR NORTHERN REGION

From fires to floods and training in between

During the unprecedented weather conditions in November 2018, Far Northern Region had 900 reported fires which resulted in an all-hands-on-deck approach to manage the response.

The State Emergency Service (SES) has maintained a very active presence in the Far Northern Region (FNR) since November 2018 and into 2019. SES capabilities and resources assisted regional fire operations at the Innisfail Incident Control Centre (ICC) and Cardwell forward control. They gathered damage information and recorded via Survey 123, and also conducted drone flights in the Cardwell and Silkwood areas.

The blended Incident Management Teams in the FNR Regional Operations Centre (ROC) and ICC supported on-ground operations

which included teams deployed from other QFES regions, interstate and international firefighting colleagues.

With Tropical Cyclone Owen threatening Western Cape York Communities, the SES utilised drone technology to assist in gathering before and after footage to aid in timely and accurate reporting of damage to community infrastructure.

A big thanks to the entire Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) workforce that put their hand up to deploy and work in the many operations centres across the state for fires.

Regionally, the SES continued training ahead of the 2019 storm and cyclone season – from first aid and storm damage in the Torres Strait, to safety at heights in Edmonton.



NORTHERN REGION

Townsville Central State School

Townsville Central State School vacation care was treated to a visit by the South Townsville 'C' Shift crew for some fire safety revision.

The children thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to look over the appliance and appreciated the time the firefighters spent with them.



Sandbags delivered in preparation for floods

More than 160 000 sandbags were delivered to North Queensland communities to help them prepare for the severe rainfall that would hit the region. The SES provided more than 25 000 sandbags to Townsville alone in anticipation of the record breaking floods.

There were also call outs to rescue people trapped in their motor vehicles as they attempted to escape to higher ground.



The North rallies as the rain pours

The #bigwet floods broke all rainfall records for Townsville and surrounding regions, with thousands of homes inundated. But Queenslanders showed extreme resilience, as members of QFES and the community banded together and did all they could to support one another.

QFES Swiftwater Rescue teams were deployed to the Northern Region to provide assistance to the people who were escaping flood affected areas. There were people trapped in cars, unwell

patients who needed transfers to hospitals and even a pregnant woman in labour who was taken to the maternity ward.

More than 4800 requests for flood assistance were made and everyone in the area went into overdrive to help the community survive the challenging weather conditions.

Now that the floodwaters are receding, QFES is working hard in the recovery phase.





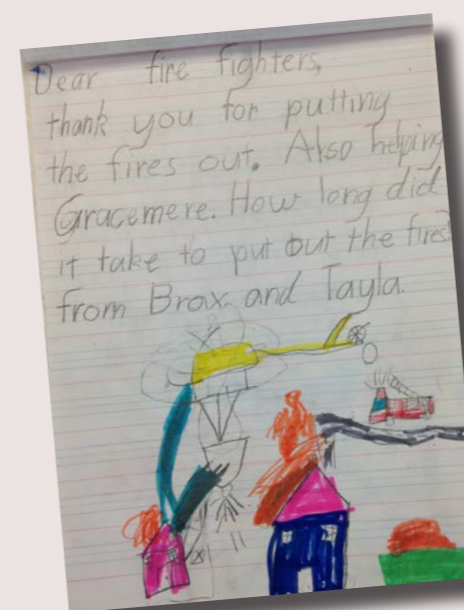
CENTRAL REGION

Students say thanks to their local heroes

Year One students from St Paul's Primary School in Gracemere recently thanked local firefighters for their work battling the fire that threatened their community in November 2018.

A collection of letters and pictures made by the children tell stories of thanks for saving their lives, the Gracemere community, their homes, even Grandma's home and pets.

This was a touching thank you to all emergency services workers who assisted in the event.



SES to beef up skills in state challenge

The beef capital of Australia is excited to welcome teams from every region in Queensland to Rockhampton on the weekend of 4 and 5 May for the 2019 State Emergency Service (SES) State Disaster Rescue Challenge.

Preparations are well underway to create a unique opportunity for SES volunteer units to come together in the spirit of friendly and robust competition. The training and learning that come from such a challenge enhance operational response and the service provided in times of disaster to our Queensland communities.

For more information on the event contact Jeffrey Green on Jeffrey.Green@qfes.qld.gov.au



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NORTH COAST REGION

Caloundra station officer to embark on global research trip to boost mountain rescue capability

On 29 May this year, Caloundra Station Officer Greg Toman will take part in a three-month research trip investigating mountain rescue prevention and capability strategies and programs. Greg was awarded the Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship and will visit Canada, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Austria, Italy and France.

The research project will provide valuable information on:

- optimal rescue team composition
- casualty access techniques - bottom up and top down
- efficient rescue techniques for small rescue teams
- light-weight, multi-functional rescue equipment
- personal survival equipment
- use of Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAS)/ Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)/ drones
- coordination and safe operation with helicopter rescue crews
- preventative strategies and their implementation.

Greg is an experienced climber and has played a vital role in establishing the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) remote rescue team. Greg has meetings scheduled with a number of organisations that have preventative mountain rescue programs in place and aims to bring back valuable information to QFES, as well as land managers including Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. QFES will benefit from learning how specialist rescue teams operate around the world – gaining greater insight into techniques, technology and effective prevention strategies used. Due to the increasing number of mountain rescues taking place and the type of rescues being attended by QFES, this information will be of great value.



Plane crash victim visits firefighter rescuers

Caloundra Airport plane crash victim Ben Berg dropped in to Caloundra Fire Station in late 2018 to catch up with his firefighter rescuers Gavin Thistlethwaite, Dale Diefenbach, Ian Belcher, Travis Norton (482 Alpha Caloundra), Matt Forster and David Burns (474 Lima Maroochydore). Inspector Kent Mayne was Senior Officer at the scene.

Ben was cut out of his plane on 12 August 2017 and doctors have told him he was minutes away from losing his leg. He suffered major injuries but is improving over time. He was very eager to meet the crew who assisted in the rescue and helped to reduce the amount of ongoing damage and injury he sustained.



PIO course for QFES personnel and volunteers

Late last year a Public Information Officer course was held for the North Coast Region. Twelve participants from Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Emergency Management and Fire and Rescue Service, completed the two-day course and are now able to support the public information role in future events.



BRISBANE REGION

Refinery foam cannon exercise

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) firefighters, fire suppression specialists and other Caltex affiliates from around the world attended a two-day exercise at Caltex's Lytton oil refinery to observe their foam cannon in operation.



The cannon can deliver 49 000 litres per minute for up to an hour and is able to be deployed up to 3.2 kilometres across four 12-inch holes. Attending Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) crews provided operational feedback and other advice, continuing previous work and collaboration between zone, area and local command and crews.

North Stradbroke Island fire debrief

More than 30 different QFES and community stakeholders attended a debrief in mid-January about the Information Management Teams (IMT) operations during the North Stradbroke Island fire in late 2018. Similar to other debriefs around the state, knowledge hub staff facilitated the debrief using the new lessons management format. Preparation and response to fires on North Stradbroke Island, or Minjerrabah, can be more complex and intricate due to the number of land management agencies involved. Diverse stakeholders, including tourism operators, large private mining operations, traditional owners, national parks and local government worked effectively together to contain the fire and successfully defend important infrastructure. Positive feedback regarding the process will be used to inform higher level improvement processes.



Remote aircraft trial

The trial of Remotely Piloted Aircraft systems (RPAS) in FRS continued across Brisbane Region in 2018. During the year, drones were used at many industrial, house and unit fires, a school fire and when investigations have been conducted by the Fire Investigation Unit. Due to its success, the Brisbane trial is progressing to the next stage. New RPAS pilots from the Tango Command vehicle operators, Fire Investigation Unit and Compliance and Prosecutions Unit are likely to be trained at the beginning of March. This will provide efficient and effective 24-hour RPAS operational capability for these teams while complying with Civil Aviation Safety Regulations.





Recently, Robert was the driving force behind the Logan House Fires Community Workshop.

“Following the tragic Slacks Creek fire, where I saw first-hand the impact it had on our firefighters and the community, I felt extremely passionate about helping to make a difference,” Robert said.

The Logan Command currently experiences the highest number of preventable house fires in Queensland.

Late last year stakeholders gathered to participate in a one-day workshop in Beenleigh to explore the issue of house fires in Logan.

“One of my favourite phrases is, ‘There is always opportunity in chaos’ and some of my best outcomes have been achieved when the odds were against us.”

– Robert Bloss

There, workshop participants identified potential barriers to this issue, as well as strategies to help reduce the number of house fires in the area.

Attendees included representatives from local and state government, emergency services, non-government organisations and community groups.

Robert, who organised the event, alongside the South Eastern Region Regional Community Engagement Officer (RCEO) Hailey

Hayes, said this was a first for the region to call upon local community members to help QFES develop place-based strategies to target a local issue.

“The objectives of the workshop were to increase awareness of the prevalence of house fires in the Logan community and to collaboratively develop community-led strategies to enhance resilience and reduce the number of house fires in Logan,” Robert said.

“The workshop was unique due to us directly engaging with key members and representatives from the Logan community to help us identify barriers and propose solutions.

“Some of the most significant barriers identified were insufficient education, cultural and social factors, community attitudes and lack of coordination.

“The participants then worked in small groups to brainstorm strategies to address these barriers and presented their best ideas for further consideration.

“At the end of the workshop we gained a commitment from attendees to share the responsibility of reducing the number of house fires by taking ownership of some of the solutions that were identified during the session.

“This form of two-way engagement meant that we could gain a deeper understanding of real-life barriers present in the community and together work to develop community-led strategies.”

Robert said moving forward, he’d like to work more closely with the Logan community and continue to be involved in targeted engagement.

“One of my favourite phrases is, ‘There is always opportunity in chaos’ and some of my best outcomes have been achieved when the odds were against us,” Robert said.

“I’m determined to help the Logan community combat this issue.”

Community focused

Born in the United Kingdom, Robert Bloss served as a firefighter for the London Fire Brigade for eight years before making his way over to Australia.

When Robert first arrived here, he joined the fire service in Canberra before joining Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) in 2003.

Since then, Robert has completed many roles across the organisation at various levels and in different regions.

One of Robert’s most memorable experiences was his role as Ministerial Liaison Officer (MLO) where he had the opportunity to work and view QFES from a high level.

Robert, now Inspector at Logan Command, says he is able to use the valuable experiences and knowledge he has gained over the years at a grass-roots, community level.

“To me, everyone is part of the community,” Robert said.

“Not only do I represent my command, I also represent the community and my top priority is QFES’ service delivery to the community.”





Bike 4 Burns goes virtual

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) pedal pushers and their police and ambulance counterparts are gearing up for the Bike 4 Burns 2019 Charity Bike Ride.

Cyclists participating in Bike 4 Burns will tour from Bundaberg to Brisbane in May, but the good news for avid riders is you don't need to leave the comfort of your own area to take part.

There is an opportunity for riders to take on the challenge of virtually riding the same distance.

For those of you not joining the Bike 4 Burns crew on the road, but who use cycling as a mode of transport to and from work or to keep fit in the gym, don't let those kilometres go to waste.

You're invited to gather together a few like-minded friends, family members and colleagues and conquer the 645 kilometres as a team over the seven days from 15 to 21 May.

The virtual ride is open to QFES workforce, partners and friends as well as our Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service colleagues. It doesn't cost anything to enter and you can support and raise funds towards burns research and technology.

The way it works is that each team will have a nominated team captain. Once a team is registered, the Children's Hospital Foundation will then provide the team captain with a Bike 4 Burns Virtual Ride link – where supporter pages can be created for each team member. Participants will be able to log the number of kilometres they complete each day via the supporter page. For some healthy competition, a leader board is also visible on the supporter pages.

Bike 4 Burns virtual registrations open at the beginning of March, so keep an eye out for the information and registration packs being distributed via email. Alternatively, you can contact Karen Perry on 0439 669 156 or email karen.perry@qfes.qld.gov.au for further details.

Together, let's gear up and raise some money for this worthy cause.



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TOWNSVILLE FLOODS

Commissioner Katarina Carroll and Emergency Services Minister Craig Crawford speak with SES volunteers during the Townsville floods.



PROJECT EXCELLENCE AWARD

AC Andrew Short with Robert Wolski, joint winner of the Project Excellence award for his work during the 2018 bushfires, at the CareerTrackers gala dinner.



RECOVERY EFFORTS

Rural Fire Service volunteers help in the Townsville recovery efforts.



HELPING HAND

Defence personnel work alongside QFES members to assist in the clean up in north Queensland.



TASMANIA

A contingent of QFES personnel en route to Tasmania to assist local crews battle fires.



WORKING TOGETHER

QFES members worked with partner agencies to ensure a coordinated flood recovery effort.



BRIEFING

SES volunteers take part in a briefing session during the floods in Townsville.



RESCUE

Swiftwater rescue crews rescued 69 people during the floods in northern Queensland.



QFES TECHNICAL RESCUE

QFES Technical Rescue members participating in a PSBA and QGair recertification exercise at Archerfield Airport.



SUPPLIES

SES crews assist in providing much-needed supplies to local areas cut off by the floods in North Queensland.



COMMUNITY SPIRIT

QFES came together with the community, including the Curra Swans AFL club, in the flood clean up.



TOWOOMBA FIRE BRIGADE

Toowoomba Fire Brigade Historical Society trucks and museum on display at Pioneer Village.

A show of gratitude

Every day Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) workforce, both paid and volunteer, face uncertainty in their line of duty – protecting lives and properties in our communities and displaying a unique sense of courage in doing so.

While they don't expect praise, it is always nice when their selflessness and hard work is recognised.

Recently, a Gurrumbah resident Dulcie, who almost lost her home to bushfires, sent a heartfelt message of thanks to those who worked tirelessly to protect her home.

Dear John and Adam,

You are probably not aware that I have a property in the small town of Gurrumbah (now a ghost town) not far from the Lappa – Mt Garnet Road.

My family and my roots go back more than 100 years in this area, so naturally, my home is very precious to me.

Recently, my home was under severe threat from fire and as always, neighbours sent me warning and rallied around to help. In past years that was all that was needed. But not this time. I wanted to express my appreciation to the wonderful fire fighters who worked tirelessly throughout the danger period and helped keep my home safe. In particular, Les Wilson and Ken (I think they are based in Port Douglas) who kept checking in to advise and help ensure my safety and that of my property.

Fires were on every surrounding hill. I raked leaves, cleared gutters, soaked gardens and house surrounds.

A neighbouring grazer put in a fire break with his loader. It was an exhausting week for me as well as everyone else.

The town reserve of Gurrumbah is all burnt, but my house is safe. Thank you to all fire fighters, including volunteers and neighbours for their great efforts in containing the fires. You have my utmost appreciation.

Kind regards,

Dulcie.

Dear Dulcie,

A beautiful email, thank you.

Adam, Lawrence and I are fortunate to lead a team of brave and committed firefighters. This was a long campaign with what would be close to 40 days and nights of operations. Our team of volunteers, auxiliary, permanent firefighters and helicopter crews ably supported by our State Emergency Service volunteers and staff, along with our friends from the Salvation Army, all worked tirelessly. We also had our QFES team embedded into our councils, all combined with our friends and colleagues from Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service we formed an amazing team. Dulcie, we even had an impromptu mechanical workshop under a beautiful old fig tree in Atherton, never have I seen such contented mechanics at work.

I am so very proud that, like yours, we did not lose anyone's home, which of course as you describe houses so many treasured memories.

Notes like yours Dulcie are the icing on our cake, thank you so very much for writing to us.

Cheers,
John Bolger

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