

# RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE EDITION 31

A young child, likely a firefighter's child, is shown in profile, wearing a bright yellow fire jacket. The child is sitting on the grass at night, holding two lit candles. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the flames of the candles, which cast a warm glow on the child's face and jacket. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting at night.

**Shining a light  
in isolation  
ANZAC Day 2020**

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### ON THE COVER

Round Mountain Rural Fire Brigade First Officer Ian Hemerik's grandson Chayse at an ANZAC memorial in front of the station. Chayse's uniform was made by Margie Freestun.

**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**

As the COVID-19 restrictions in Queensland ease, it's good to return to some of our usual ways of working.

QFES has been there every step of the way to support Queenslanders through the pandemic, with our staff and volunteers taking on a variety of roles to help stop the spread.

This has included deployments at the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre, airports and the New South Wales border, as well as support through the State Disaster Coordination Centre.

Your work has contributed to the excellent progress Queensland has made in keeping COVID-19 cases from entering our state.

Of course, we cannot afford to let our guard down and must continue to follow health directives to ensure Queensland remains a safe place for everyone.

Now that travel restrictions are easing, I am looking forward to visiting our regions again.

I really enjoyed meeting staff and volunteers on my tour of Queensland at the start of the year.

It's hard to believe how much things have changed since then, and I've been really impressed by the way everyone has been able to adapt change quickly and continue to serve our Queensland community.

The COVID-19 restrictions have led many of you to develop new ideas and processes, and I am excited to hear about these innovative projects – you can read about some of them on page 8.

As you know, the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements is well underway. I urge you to read the article on page 12 where you will see a map of the significant amount of work our Royal Commission Taskforce is undertaking.

In times of need, our community looks to us for support, and this year has certainly been no exception. Thank you all for upholding QFES' outstanding reputation in the way you have stood by the community over the last few months.



**MIKE WASSING AFSM**  
**Deputy Commissioner**

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERISM AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

After several challenging months, I'm pleased to see we are having some reprieve from the COVID-19 restrictions. Not just in our personal lives, but in our operations, services and training.

The easing of our Pandemic Preparedness Level 3 (PPL3) Restrictions in May allowed us to recommence face-to-face training for volunteers and auxiliary firefighters, and hold Brigade, Unit and Group meetings, with limited numbers. While we have to maintain physical distancing, it allows us to reconnect and prepare our volunteers to support the community.

One of the positive outcomes of COVID-19 is the innovative approaches we've taken to service delivery and training. It's provided us with the opportunity to identify what works and ways to harness the lessons we've learned.

We are pleased to have received the State Emergency Service (SES) Review conducted by Campbell Darby and will communicate further details regarding the report very soon. It is a significant piece of work that will assist to drive the future direction of the SES, so it's essential we take our time to get it right. We'll have ongoing conversations with all SES members, Councils and other key stakeholders throughout the process.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Bushfires Royal Commission) has been underway since March, with public submissions and hearings taking place. We expect the findings to be released on August 31 and will engage our workforce in discussions as we implement recommendations.

It's fair to say that 2020 has been a truly extraordinary year so far. Despite the many challenges, we have continued to support and deliver professional services to the Queensland community. Our ongoing commitment will prove vital as we prepare for the upcoming bushfire season.

Thank you to all our volunteers for their ongoing dedication over the last few months. I look forward to your continued leadership and engagement in working with your local community.



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

## **MINISTER FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Queensland has made excellent progress in flattening the curve and minimising the spread of COVID-19. We are one of the safest places to live in a world where the pandemic has taken hundreds of thousands of lives – but we must continue the good work put in place. As restrictions ease, it is vital that we remain vigilant and keep up the practices that have seen us succeed so far – physical distancing, good hygiene, and staying home and getting tested if unwell.

As emergency service workers, the community looks to you for guidance, support and leadership in difficult times. As the health response moves into economic recovery, you will continue to have an important role, and I know you will continue to represent QFES admirably.

For those on the frontline, I thank you for your dedication to duty despite the risks, and for those in support roles, I thank you for being so flexible and adaptable to new and innovative ways of working. As an organisation, you have all ensured the fire and emergency services the community relies upon have remained largely unaffected by the pandemic.

Our volunteers have been on the front lines, too, taking on different tasks to serve their communities while coping with their own changed personal circumstances. We celebrated National Volunteer Week in May, and although the celebrations were a little different this year, I want to add my personal thanks for your ongoing dedicated service.

I look forward to being able to get back out to visit stations, brigades, groups and offices across Queensland shortly – it really is one of the best parts of my job to be able to meet the wonderful people of QFES and hear firsthand about your experiences and successes.

# ANZAC spirit shines bright

Physical distancing didn't stop us coming together to commemorate ANZAC Day this year, with people showing their respect in different ways.

As the sun rose on 25 April, QFES members across the state remembered all veterans for ANZAC Day.

The Returned and Services League (RSL) didn't let COVID-19 stop people from commemorating the day, so rallied the community to embrace Light up the Dawn – an opportunity to stand at the end of your driveway and remember.

Queenslanders came out in their thousands, sharing a friendly nod and wave from across the street, and standing in unison as they listened to the Last Post.

Marching in the ANZAC Day parade is a proud tradition for many QFES members, so people showed their respect in different ways this year.

Rhiess Honor, an auxiliary firefighter from Bundaberg, listened to the Australian War Memorial broadcast as he stood in his driveway.

"ANZAC Day is very important to me as my sister and brother-in-law are both in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and have served overseas in recent years," Rhiess said.

"My great grandfather and his brother also served in World War I, with my great grandfather involved in the famous cavalry charge on Beersheba in 1917, which led to the surrender of the Turkish forces.

"This year also marked the 75th anniversary of the Sandakan Death Marches in North Borneo in 1945, where my family lost a relative. He was the same age as what I am now.

"I'm extremely proud of the service of my family and always reflect and pay respect to those who serve, have served or have made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us."

Julie Carmody, Secretary of the Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade on Magnetic Island, said brigade members stood tall on ANZAC Day.

"Our brigade is at the base of the foothills that house The Forts – a series of World War II installations that were paramount to the protection of the island and Townsville during World War II," Julie said.

"We were honoured to have our neighbour Andrew Dajski – a well-known jazz musician – perform the Last Post via speaker.

"We laid a wreath made from island wattle and native grevillea at the flag.

"To be a part of such a wonderful and generous community surely embodies the true ANZAC spirit."

Mirani State Emergency Service (SES) Group Leader and President of the Mirani Sub-Branch RSL Jan Lindbergs marked the occasion with her son.

"I am proud to be in the SES, and show our colours and flag, but just wished I could have done more," Jan said.

"The atmosphere in our town was one of inclusion and everyone was talking about what they were going to do for ANZAC Day this year.

"We could hear the bugler sounding the Last Post from afar, which was very moving.

"It is so important for us to commemorate those who gave their lives for our country and those who are still serving.

"Many ex-servicemen and women have joined emergency services, either paid or volunteer. We do not forget, it is our history, our community, our country. Lest We Forget."

Matt Brown, an auxiliary firefighter from ANZAC Avenue Fire and Rescue Station, said it was an honour to commemorate ANZAC Day from the top of his driveway in the company of his wife Hannah and their dogs Briggs and Terry.

"This was our first ANZAC Day since my Pop passed, so I felt fortunate to be able to wear my QFES uniform as well as his service medals," Matt said.

"He served in the RAAF during World War II, deployed to Borneo. He passed away in September just shy of his 95th birthday. Pop always kept his medals and the family decided I would be their custodian now. I wore them with pride on my QFES uniform.

"My brother-in-law has also been in the army for over a decade and served in Afghanistan.

"This day has always been important in my family. You don't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been."





1. Auxiliary firefighter Michael Robson from North Coast Region.
2. Members of The Ridge Rural Fire Brigade – Tracy and Dale Pukallus and Brian Weier.
3. Emerald SES Group.
4. Carla Adams with Beau and Arrow, Central Region.
5. Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade. Photo by Kobie Rhodes, Roadwarrior Productions.
6. Auxiliary firefighter Noo Shepherd in Warwick.
7. Mirani SES members Jan and Erik Lindbergs.
8. Bundaberg SES Unit member Wayne Cameron with grandson Zack.











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- 9. Gladstone Fire and Rescue Station.
- 10. Kawana SES member.
- 11. Moore Park Beach.
- 12. Jimboomba Fire and Rescue Station. Photo by Gail Steppens.
- 13. B Shift ANZAC Day service at Kemp Place Fire and Rescue Station. Photo by Paul Mullens.
- 14. A/Bushfire Safety Officer, South Western Region Michael Welsh with his three daughters.
- 15. Auxiliary firefighter Matt Brown from ANZAC Avenue Fire and Rescue Station.
- 16. The Brisbane Coastguard in Manly Harbour.
- 17. Round Mountain Rural Fire Brigade.
- 18. Samsonvale Rural Fire Brigade. Photo by Liane Henderson.
- 19. Lieutenant Perry Jones from Boonah Fire and Rescue Station.
- 20. Proserpine SES members Greg and Amander Yuskin.
- 21. Mt Larcom SES member Cassie Wilcox.
- 22. Deputy Local Controller, Scenic Rim East SES Sandy Bell.
- 23. Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station.
- 24. Bundaberg auxiliary firefighter Rhiess Honor.
- 25. Craignish auxiliary firefighter Sue Edward.
- 26. Far Northern Region Captain Ashley Cupitt OAM.

# New ways of working

The last few months have changed the way we think about work, and people across QFES have been experimenting and innovating to embrace the new normal.

**COVID-19 has brought great upheaval, but new opportunities have also appeared. From video calls to working from home, we are adapting our services and operations to our changing environment, and many of these solutions will no doubt persist into the future.**

## SES recruits train online

When State Emergency Service (SES) recruits in Townsville and Thuringowa attended their first meeting with their trainers in mid-April, it looked very different to last year's training.

Instead of meeting in person, more than 40 new recruits met online for their induction and received information packs in the mail to help them start training.

SES Townsville Group Leader Nicole Bradley said the group thought outside the box to keep forging ahead for the community.

"One of our biggest challenges was finding a way to engage with everyone at the same time and still add a personal touch like putting faces to names," Nicole said.

"Email can be a bit impersonal, so we started using videoconferencing. One of the challenges was finding meaningful things to do. By delivering packs with training aids,

we got everyone to start learning basic skills without having to come in."

The project was supported by their Local Controller and Area Office, and went even better than expected.

"We thought we'd spend a lot of time sorting out IT issues, but most people accessed it easily and everyone was able to participate," Nicole said.

"The recruits appreciated the engagement, and many were excited when we told them their membership has been approved. They couldn't wait to get started."

So what's next for the recruits?

"We'll introduce them to key staff, run through their induction, give them a virtual walkthrough of our headquarters and then make a start on teaching knots and first aid," she said.

"We're also getting everyone familiar with OneDrive so we can provide eLearning courses for them to complete at home."

## Virtual scenarios for auxiliary firefighters

Auxiliary firefighters in the Scenic Rim have come up with a novel way to continue

their training during lockdown, meeting up on Microsoft Teams every week to work through virtual scenarios.

Chris Thompson, an auxiliary firefighter from Beaudesert Fire and Rescue Auxiliary Station, said they'd already started using Teams for document sharing and video conferencing before the pandemic, so taking their training online was a natural evolution.

"When the COVID restrictions came in, we stopped training for two weeks, but we started wondering how we could keep it going," Chris said.

"We do two hours of training a week. The community expects us to be 100% on our game and well trained. They expect and deserve a professional crew to turn up to their worst day."

Chris, in conjunction with Captain Andrew Rose and firefighters Peta Miller-Rose and Matthew Harris, devised a way to use Teams to work through simulated incidents such as house fires, car crashes and HAZMAT.

"I took some photos of my house, added fire and smoke in Photoshop, then shared my screen to guide them through the scenario," Chris said.



South Eastern Region EMC Amanda Rosman delivering disaster management training for the newly elected Ipswich Mayor and Local Disaster Management Group Chair Teresa Harding.



Northern Region EMC Elliott Dunn delivering training via teleconference for the newly appointed Local Disaster Management Group Chair and Deputy Chair on Mornington Island from his office in Mount Isa.

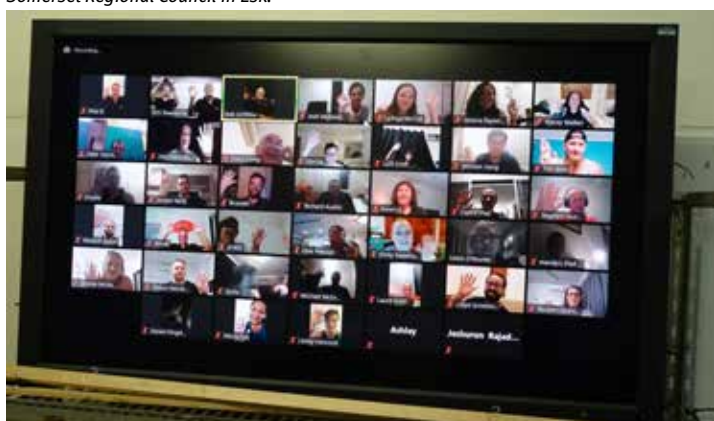




South Eastern Region EMC Daryl Hangar delivering training remotely to participants at Somerset Regional Council in Esk.



Auxiliary firefighter Matthew Harris leading a virtual training session.



New SES recruits from Townsville and Thuringowa met online for their induction.



A virtual scenario of a house fire used for training auxiliary firefighters in the Scenic Rim.

“They role-played communicating with FireCom, police and ambulance officers. We also played videos of burning houses from YouTube.

“It didn’t take us long to get past the technical issues. Now we’re only limited by our imagination.

“We can also record the sessions and play them back to refresh our skills.”

Chris said their Area Commander was very supportive and they were now running training through Teams for every station in Scenic Rim Command.

“It gives our leadership team the ability to log in from home so firefighters can ask them directly about what’s happening in the region. It really gives firefighters a sense their concerns are being listened to, understood and acted on.

“Western Commands with long distances between stations are interested in using this program even after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. We keep thinking, how did we not see this sooner? The possibilities are endless.”

### Adapting disaster management training

From south-east Queensland to Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, COVID-19 physical distancing and travel restrictions

haven’t stopped QFES Emergency Management Coordinators (EMC) from delivering disaster management training and capability development programs to key stakeholders.

In mid-March the Emergency Management Training Command (EMTC) implemented the COVID-19 Disaster Management Training Strategy to transition to remote and distance training.

Executive Manager EMTC Jane Zsombok said they also made greater use of eLearning programs via the Disaster Management Learning Management System (DM LMS).

“We adapted our standard training delivery mechanisms to continue delivering Queensland Disaster Management Training Framework (QDMTF) programs under COVID-19 social distancing and travel restrictions,” Jane said.

“It’s paramount for disaster management stakeholders to keep their training up-to-date during the pandemic, and our strategy ensures we continue delivering QDMTF programs for local government elected officials.”

Emergency Management Coordinators are working in close collaboration with local governments to provide training for new appointments to key disaster management roles following the local government elections.

South Eastern Region EMC Amanda Rosman said EMCs have adapted well to the change in delivery methods.

“While face-to-face training has continued – provided the safety and wellbeing of participants and EMCs could be ensured – most training has been conducted remotely via digital platforms,” Amanda said.

EMTC has developed or adapted a range of resources and processes to support EMCs to implement remote and distance training.

The Command has also developed extra capability development programs to bring a greater focus on hazard-specific arrangements and COVID-19 operations.

Jane said many elements of the COVID-19 Disaster Management Training Strategy would be retained after the pandemic to maintain the flexibility of their training delivery.

“While face-to-face delivery will always be preferred, elements of this strategy will be suitable for remote stakeholders when accessibility is often impacted by seasonal limitations,” she said.

For more information on disaster management training please contact your local EMC or EMTC via [DMTraining.Feedback@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:DMTraining.Feedback@qfes.qld.gov.au).

# Stopping the spread

**When Queensland closed its borders in March for the first time since the 1919 Spanish Flu, QFES staff and volunteers were ready to help protect the state from COVID-19.**

To stop the spread of the virus, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) established patrol checkpoints at the border with New South Wales, prohibiting entry to anyone without an exemption.

Since early April, State Emergency Service (SES) members have supported border operations at four checkpoints at the Gold Coast, including the Gold Coast Highway and the M1.

Acting Local Controller SES Gold Coast Unit, Bret Fournier, said they performed a range of tasks such as supplying and installing marquees, operating hand sanitiser stations and carrying out general duties.

“We helped QPS collect motorist data and register motorists who had trouble accessing the border control website for passes,” Bret said.

“We also provided community engagement – advising motorists of the 1.5 metre rule, giving them information on quarantine procedures and reminding them to wash their hands.

“We used a roster of three eight-hour shifts, with 12 members per shift. Our collaboration with QPS, the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Transport and Main Roads was exemplary.

“This experience has allowed us all to build better, stronger relationships between services while allowing for our volunteers

to understand how the SES fits in the big picture under the different levels of government.

Bret said the biggest challenge for their unit was not knowing how long the border would have to be closed, along with the risk of putting volunteers on the frontline – asking their members to do something that could affect their entire family.

“We in the Gold Coast Unit pride ourselves on being one big family,” Bret said.

“Every day and night I have ensured one of my managers including myself visits every site to ensure our team and those we are assisting have everything they need.

“We have gained a better respect from the public and the other agencies for the professionalism and compassion a volunteer has.

“A simple thank you goes a long way and really does give those receiving it a feeling of gratitude.”

## Arrivals from the air

The SES, Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue Service have also supported border operations at Queensland airports, helping QPS meet arrival flights.

Area Controller Far Northern Region Sean McGuinness said QFES members played an important role at Cairns Airport.

“We assisted QPS to meet interstate and then all arrival flights coming in,” Sean said.

“We were there in case someone presented requiring medical attention – we would monitor them and respond as necessary until the Queensland Ambulance Service arrived.

“We have a great working relationship with QPS in the Far Northern Region, and working with them on this was a good opportunity to respond to the necessary measures implemented during COVID-19.”

He said a challenge was that SES members were not allowed to access the areas beyond the airport gates because the SES doesn’t automatically receive clearance unless in an emergency.

“Initially this is where QPS wanted us to be stationed to keep the arriving passengers separated while waiting to be interviewed,” he said.

“We worked with a QPS senior officer to set up a suitable area just inside the arrival hall so we could maintain physical distancing between the passengers and keep the interview process flowing well.

“A number of people took the opportunity to speak with our members to show their appreciation for the work we are doing in response to COVID-19,” Sean said.



SES members underwent health checks before commencing duty at Cairns Airport.



Commissioner Greg Leach visited the SES crews assisting QPS at the border.





Gold Coast firefighters conducting a hazard reduction burn.

# Getting ready for bushfire season

**QFES crews across the state are undertaking mitigation activities as part of Operation Cool Burn to prepare for this year's fire season.**

Operation Cool Burn started on 1 April and is scheduled to run until the end of August. Thanks to some great work by QFES personnel and our Area Fire Management Group partners, QFES has planned more than 600 activities, with nearly 140 completed by late May.

Executive Manager Bushfire Mitigation, James Haig, said it was yet to be seen how the winter weather would affect the landscape, but heavy grass fuel loads were curing rapidly in a number of areas.

"This highlights the importance of making the most of weather windows during Operation Cool Burn and having a flexible and agile approach to reducing bushfire risk," James said.

"Although it's called Operation Cool Burn, hazard reduction burning activities are only one part of preparing for a safer bushfire season.

"Working with our land management partners and our communities is equally important.

"This year we've had a strong focus on recognising the community as a key partner, sharing messages about local bushfire risks and supporting them to prepare their families and properties. This is a critical component in reducing the impacts of bushfires."

At the same time, many of our land management partners — such as Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, HQPlantations and local governments — have been busy upgrading key firebreaks in the most at-risk areas.

COVID-19 restrictions have also set us challenges in the way we get these important messages across. However regions and QFES Media have used various methods to work within the restrictions and get the job done.

"Thank you again to all personnel who have been contributing to planning and implementing Operation Cool Burn this year," James said.

"Please keep up the good work so we can achieve QFES and our partners' common goal of having Queensland communities as safe and well-prepared as we can when the bushfire season starts."

## Success stories

QFES and land management agencies are undertaking hazard mitigation activities across Brisbane Region with over 130 activities planned during Operation Cool Burn.

One of the region's major projects is the House Mountain Range Fire Management Strategy, developed as a result of private landowners working with Rural Fire Brigades, Moreton Regional Council and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Volunteers from Samford Rural Fire Brigade mapped about 2000 hectares of bushland east of Mt Glorious, adjacent to very high-risk communities, to start the implementation of the plan.

Mt Nebo, Samford and Closeburn Rural Fire Brigades were involved in the planning and fuel load assessments, and conducted trial burns in small areas in readiness for the larger portions of land burnt in June.

The strategy will be implemented over five years to develop a mosaic of asset protection and ecological burns.

In late May, brigades from the Caboolture and Pine Rivers Groups combined to undertake a 60-hectare hazard reduction burn at Narangba, eradicating weeds and increasing a buffer zone around the Narangba Residential Estate.

This provided a chance for the brigades to incorporate Incident Management training and field operations.

Due to the size and nature of the burn, an Incident Management Team (IMT) was established and the burn was sectorised to manage it and allocate resources to achieve the desired outcome.

The hazard reduction burn was a success, demonstrating how multiple brigades and groups could interact and allowing IMT strategies to be tested in a live scenario to ensure volunteers were prepared for the upcoming fire season.



A hazard reduction burn at Narangba.

# Our Royal Commission roadmap

It has been called the **Black Summer of Bushfires** – Australia’s extreme bushfire season in 2019-20 resulted in devastating loss of life, property and wildlife across the nation.

The bushfires have profoundly affected communities across Australia, and the changing global climate carries risks for the environment and Australia’s ability to prevent, mitigate and respond to bushfires and other natural disasters.

Australia as a nation must adapt to address the consequences of longer, hotter, drier seasons and severe weather events.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements was established in February 2020 in response to this devastating event. Once the Royal Commission was announced by the Prime Minister, the terms of reference were decided and the commission started receiving submissions.

Commissioner Greg Leach said he encouraged all QFES volunteers and staff to understand the implications of the Royal Commission and be part of the changes that will result from the inquiry.

“Submissions were sought from across Australia, addressing the many different aspects of what people experienced during these events,” Mr Leach said.

“The Commissioners visited fire-affected communities to hold forums, gather evidence and see first-hand the effects of these fires. They would have visited even more if COVID-19 hadn’t limited their schedule.”

QFES established a taskforce to manage the organisation’s response to Royal Commission requests for information.

QFES is required by law to provide information as indicated and must adhere to the strict format and timings outlined by the Royal Commission.

“QFES is working closely with other Queensland Government departments and Crown Law to provide responses and prepare for Royal Commission hearings,” Mr Leach said.

Crown Law provides QFES with legal advice and representation at the hearings.

The first ceremonial hearing of the Commission was held on 16 April, followed by further hearings in May and June. These hearings can be viewed at [naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au](http://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au).

## Witnesses

The hearings can ask witnesses all manner of questions based on the submissions from agencies, staff, volunteers, councils and the community.

The QFES Royal Commission Taskforce has developed a witness kit with a suite of documents and contacts to make the process easier to navigate.

Our wellbeing team and the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) are also available to assist. Any person who is requested to give evidence before the Commission will receive full support from the taskforce.

## Next steps

Mr Leach said QFES had gone through significant changes in the past few years and would continue to do so as we adjust and look at the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery process and how we work more closely with other jurisdictions into the future.

“The Royal Commission will hand down its findings and recommendations on 31 August. QFES will then have a significant program of work to adjust its business based on the recommendations,” he said.

The Royal Commission has also launched the *2019-20 Bushfire History Project* to document the bushfires as part of our nation’s history. People are invited to submit photos and videos taken during the bushfires and the ongoing recovery.

For more information, visit the Gateway or [www.naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au](http://www.naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au).





# Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements 2020

## Improving QFES operational and business practices

Implementation team and program of work established to guide and support change across QFES with collaboration from volunteers, staff and external stakeholders

### The work begins

» QFES RC Taskforce commence transition of action plans to business units and regions

**31 AUG 2020**

RC findings and recommendations report due

**MAY—JUN 2020**

RC hearings conducted

» QFES action plans established

**SEP 2020**

» Government considers report and initiates actions to address recommendations

**JUN 2020**

» Post-RC planning incorporated into the QFES continuous improvement process

**MAY—JUN 2020**

» Witness and hearings preparation

» QFES RC strategy and objectives identified and developed

### MORE INFORMATION

[www.naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au](http://www.naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au)



[rcnda.enquiries@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:rcnda.enquiries@royalcommission.gov.au)



### MORE INFORMATION



Check the 'QFES RC Bushfire Taskforce' Gateway page



[QFES.RCBushfireTaskforce@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:QFES.RCBushfireTaskforce@qfes.qld.gov.au)

**APR 2020**

The RC supplies Notices requesting information

Public submissions close with more than 1400 received

The RC formally commences with Ceremonial Hearing in Canberra

» QFES Taskforce engages subject matter experts

**MAR 2020**

The RC invites the public and agencies to make submissions

» QFES Taskforce collects and analyses data

» QFES RC Bushfire Taskforce established

**FEB 2020**

The RC holds public forums in fire-affected areas

Terms of Reference established

PM announces Royal Commission (RC)

**SEP 2019 — JAN 2020**

**QFES operational response during Black Summer Bushfires**



Australian Government

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



Queensland Government

**RESPONSE** Edition 31 June 2020 13

# Welcome to the newest QFES recruits

Recent firefighter and FireCom graduates will now be deployed across the state.

## 23 new firefighters ready to join their crews

QFES firefighter ranks have been boosted with the recent graduation of 23 firefighters from Recruit Course 109.

COVID-19 presented challenges during the recruits' training, but they persevered and will now embark on new careers supporting the community with fire and emergency responses.

Commissioner Greg Leach congratulated the recruits and presented them with their Certificate II in Public Safety (Fire Fighting and Emergency).

"I congratulate all of our new recruits on the skills and courage they have displayed in completing their training to become firefighters," Mr Leach said.

Recruit Duncan West who was a circus acrobat before joining QFES said he had been looking for a career that was meaningful.

"I know there'll be challenges to face every day, but I'm proud to represent QFES and perform a role where I can really make a difference," Duncan said.

He was awarded the Commissioner's Dux Award for the highest overall assessment and commitment to the recruit course.

"It was a tough course physically and academically so I just did what I could to the best of my ability," Duncan said.

"The instructors were masters of progressive overload - they've certainly prepared us well for what's ahead."

Recruits will continue their studies over the next three years, completing a Certificate III in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations) and a Certificate III in Public Safety (Community Safety).



## FireCom recruits ready to answer the call for help

QFES will have eight additional Fire Communications Officers answering the public's calls for help following their graduation at the School of Fire and Emergency Services Training (SFEST) in May.

Commissioner Greg Leach said the new recruits were ready to answer the call for help after 14 weeks of intensive training.

"FireCom Officers play an invaluable role, supporting people in their most vulnerable moments," Mr Leach said. "Their response can be the difference between life and death."

Mr Leach presented the graduates with a Certificate III in Public Safety (Emergency Communications Centre Operations) and congratulated them on their commitment and dedication in completing the course.

Recruit Owen Hardman from the North Coast Region who received the Dux Award from Commissioner Leach said he wanted to provide assistance to those in need.

"I had considered a FireCom role for years before applying - I'm glad I can be here to help my community," Owen said.

"The instructors created an excellent learning environment to ensure we were fully equipped to perform our roles.

"I spent a week in my region's FireCom Centre prior to starting the recruit course and was disappointed that I couldn't contribute.

"It's a great feeling to be back and ready to put what I learned into practice."

## Award winners

### Firefighters

**Duncan West** – Commissioner's Dux Award

**John Cummings** – Dan Campbell Award for most improved firefighter

**Michael Spann** – Caltex Award for most outstanding practical recruit firefighter

**Jamie Ryan** – QBANK Road Crash Rescue Award for displaying the best practical and theoretical knowledge for road crash rescues

**Andrew Boland** – Deputy Commissioner's Safety Award for an exemplary attitude towards best safe practice

### FireCom

**Owen Hardman** – Commissioner's Dux Award

**Kari Galea** – Most Improved Award for displaying the greatest progression throughout the course

**Chloe Wilson** – Deputy Commissioner's Award for showing exemplary support for her fellow recruits





TEM Aviation Fire and Rescue Training.

# A world leader in training

From its inception in 1997 to its conclusion in June 2020, the Training and Emergency Management (TEM) unit served the people of Queensland by creating safe and resilient communities through training, advisory and prevention services. With QFES' strategic imperative now shifting away from proactive commercial services, we reflect on the achievements of the last 23 years.

TEM was an innovation generator, seeking unique partnerships within our community and growing QFES' own capability from these relationships. The Queensland mining boom provided strong growth and profitable income for TEM in the early 2000s.

With the resource sector expenditure decline over the past five years and competitors emerging in the private sector, a change in direction was needed.

Andrew Sbrizzi, Executive Manager of TEM since 2016, said there were many shining examples of TEM's partnerships, including City of Gold Coast Council, Refrigeration Warehouse Transport Association, Redlands City Council, Locatrix, the mining sector and many Queensland Government agencies.

TEM also built long-standing relationships with major international clients such as Santos, Origin Energy, ConocoPhillips and Caltex.

"Mutually beneficial agreements were the backbone of TEM's success, because they simultaneously improved QFES and our partners," Andrew said.

"For example, TEM's collaboration with the mining sector indirectly improved our own capability.

"Specialised training and lessons learned were rolled back into our education programs to ensure our organisation is contemporary and current."

## Beginnings

Originally known as the Commercial Development Unit, TEM was established after the Staib Review and the Hilmer Report encouraged all government entities to operate as businesses to efficiently reduce the tax burden on our community.

"The unit grew from the Mount Isa Mines agreement in 1998," Andrew said.

"This agreement is still in place today, which demonstrates the unique partnership QFES has with industry."

## Early expansion

Robin Boniwell, who served with TEM from 2010 to 2016, said TEM expanded its range of services over the years to include urban firefighting, road crash rescue, technical rescue and incident management courses for a wide range of clients.

"Our clients included commercial industrial firefighting teams, overseas and interstate firefighters, interstate whole-of-government incident management teams and private contractors," Rob said.

"At its peak, TEM expanded its scope to provide advanced live fire training courses, CASA-accredited aviation firefighting courses, bushfire mitigation products and services, standby operational services for ships and major events, major event planning and maritime safety courses," Rob said.

According to Andrew, "TEM's zenith was in 2012, when federal mitigation contracts and a booming mining sector created a 26-person team spread across Queensland servicing up to 150 different clients."

## World-class training

TEM prided itself on being the industry leader in its field.

"The unit used the same high-quality training materials as full-time professional firefighters and our training staff were experts in their field," Rob said.

"TEM enhanced QFES' reputation through the quality of our service delivery – members of the public specifically requesting our firefighting professionals to deliver their training courses."

## Closure

As a result, TEM will close on 30 June and QFES will continue to manage several legacy contracts under state and regional command structures.

Assistant Commissioner Stephen Smith said, "We thank everyone who has worked with TEM since 1997, through training, administration support or servicing our commercial agreements.

"Our staff have been working tirelessly ahead of this month's closure. Our permanent staff members are being offered maximum employment opportunities with QFES and across government, including retraining, deployment and redeployment."

# Rising stars

In the spirit of Youth Week (1-9 April), Response sat down with four young members from across QFES to find out what motivated them to join and what they enjoy about serving their community.

## BRAYDEN MORRICE

### Fire and Rescue Service

Age: 25

Membership: Nine months

#### Why did you join?

I wanted a more active and challenging career. Having the opportunity to help people in times of crisis also appealed to me.

#### What do you like about being a member?

I like being a part of an organisation that is making a positive impact on the community. The best part of working for QFES is the camaraderie. Teamwork is an integral part of the job and I like knowing that no matter what the situation is, the rest of the crew has my back and is willing to help.

#### What is the best experience you've had as a member?

I've been involved in a large range of incidents including fires, road crash, vertical and even animal rescues. The best experiences come from knowing you've done your part in making someone's worst day a little better.

#### What would you say to other young people thinking about joining QFES?

I would highly encourage young people to join. It is a great opportunity to learn a variety of different skills and there is not a job in the world that is more rewarding.

#### What safety message do you have for the community?

While spending time at home social distancing, it is a great opportunity to test your smoke alarms and change the batteries.



## BREE MILLS

### Public Service

Age: 22

Membership:  
Administration Officer,  
Community Safety – three  
years

#### Why did you join?

A great job opportunity for a great service.

#### What do you like about being a member?

Every day is different.

#### What is the best experience you've had as a member?

The best experience I have had is being involved in our Regional Operations Centre (ROC) in our recent bushfires. In the ROC, you are continuously learning new skills and knowledge as well as meeting and working with people from all over the world.

#### What would you say to other young people thinking about joining QFES?

Go for it – there is a wide range of opportunities and you will never be bored.



“There is so much to do and it is without a doubt worth it so just do it.”

*Skye Kierys*





# SKYE KIERYS

## Rural Fire Service

Age: 22

Membership: Calliope Rural Fire Brigade – four years

### Why did you join?

I'd finished school and had started working but I felt I could do something more with my time and for the community. Mum and I were at the Mt Larcom Show when we saw the marquee for the Rural Fire Service and I told mum I was joining and so was she. And just like that we became members of the Calliope Rural Fire Brigade.

### What do you like about being a member?

I love all the different sides to being a rural firefighter. Whether it is going out to a fire call, helping out in an Incident Control Centre (ICC) or being a Volunteer Community Educator, I love them all.

### What is the best experience you've had as a member?

My best experience was probably during the 2018-19 fires. It might have been a hard time for residents and firefighters alike, but it was so amazing to see everyone working together, with the community pulling together and not only helping each other but also the firefighters. I helped out in the ICC during the night shift and I was put up in a cabin during the day. The owners were amazing and friendly and took every opportunity to show their gratitude for what every one of us were doing. There is nothing like a crisis to bring a community together and that is the best experience.

### What would you say to other young people thinking about joining the SES or Rural Fire Service?

Do it! You never know where it could take you and while it seems scary, I can tell you it is, but what you get out of it is so much more. There are many opportunities that can open for you and if you don't want to fight fires that's okay, you can still be a support person, or a Volunteer Community Educator, or you can help out at the ICC during big fires. There is so much to do and it is without a doubt worth it so just do it!



# TANNER GILL

## State Emergency Service

Age: 16

Membership: Mirani SES Group – nine months

### Why did you join?

I was looking for something to do outside of school, and I saw that the SES was recruiting. I thought it looked interesting, so I joined.

### What do you like about being a member?

I really like the friendships that I have made and the training that I've received.

### What is the best experience you've had as a member?

The best experiences I've had would probably have to be when we get together as a unit and do exercises.

### What would you say to other young people thinking about joining the SES or Rural Fire Service?

Do it. The experiences and training you get are amazing, plus it looks good on your resume.



“The best experiences come from knowing you've done your part in making someone's worst day a little better.”

Brayden Morrice



The new thermal imagers can detect heat up to 150 metres away.

# Thermal imagers to aid SES land searches

In the last 12 months, 104 SES groups received 157 essential pieces of equipment, including new thermal imagers, thanks to the Energising Qld SES Equipment Program.

The program was launched in Townsville in August 2019, followed by five official handover events across Queensland.

In addition to the thermal imagers, SES groups have received solar charging blankets and iPads, along with battery-powered lights, defibrillators, vehicle accessories, power tools and stretchers.

The new equipment was made possible by SES Supporting Partners, Energex and Ergon Energy (part of Energy Queensland) and Powerlink Queensland.

North Coast SES Regional Manager Merrick Ilett said, “Whether it’s search, storm damage or vertical rescue, the equipment is hi-tech, robust and highly functional. It supports SES volunteers to be our best.”



One of the new thermal imagers being used in land search training.

Deputy Local Controller Sunshine Coast SES Unit Aram Ross said his unit will use the new thermal imagers to help find missing people in land searches.

“We have responded to several urgent searches in the middle of the night for missing children or people living with dementia,” Aram said.

“Searches are inherently difficult, especially when you can’t wait until daylight, so thermal imagers are incredibly useful.”

Aram’s unit has been training for searches by inserting heat packs into dummies, hiding them in bushland and using the thermal imagers to find them.

“The thermal imagers have seven different colour palettes, from black and white to a variety of colours, so we can detect different heat signatures and ranges,” he said.

“They can detect heat up to 150 metres away, which is much farther than we can usually see during a search. Their temperature range is from -40 to 330°.

“We can also use the thermal imagers to take images during a search and save them for use as evidence.”

Energy Queensland Chief Financial Officer Peter Scott said, “It’s because of their dedication that we at Energy Queensland remain ardent advocates of Queensland’s SES volunteers and why we have continued to provide direct support in the form of new emergency equipment for more than a decade.”

Powerlink Interim Chief Executive Kevin Kehl said, “Powerlink is proud to continue this partnership with Energy Queensland to deliver vital equipment that makes a positive difference.”

SES are proud of this long-standing partnership, enabling SES, Energy Queensland and Powerlink Queensland to deliver better outcomes for our communities.

# Keeping track

You name it, chances are it's recorded in QFES' Operations Management System (OMS), which celebrated its 10th year in 2020.

As QFES' primary planning, rostering and reporting tool, OMS covers almost all aspects of QFES, from vehicle crewing to incident reporting, training and community education.

OMS has grown over the last 10 years to become ingrained in daily work across QFES.

Manager, Digital Systems & Services, Karolyn Maule said a mountain of activities have been recorded in OMS which helps QFES articulate the benefit we provide to the state of Queensland.

"There is a mammoth amount of data at QFES' fingertips. It's much more than just operations – OMS is an enterprise solution for all of QFES," Karolyn said.

"It holds records for all QFES members including SES volunteers who have been deployed to large-scale events.

"OMS assists us to keep track of who is on the ground during large-scale incidents as well as providing evidence to support

hours in attendance at incidents for training purposes or to support WorkCover claims."

"The data also allows us to plan compliance checks and community education, which leads to better prepared communities."

Firefighters use the system daily to obtain their roster, nominate their availability for call back and crew their vehicles.

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) workforce are some of the biggest users, because they use OMS for everything from their equipment and brigade management to administration.

OMS provides strategic information to help QFES members meet the operational requirements for frontline operations and large-scale events. Situational awareness in relation to personnel allows QFES to determine capability and capacity during events and can assist in assessing when reinforcements are necessary.

The uses of OMS data are so varied that it

can tell you everything from which brand of washing machine starts the most fires to the size of a QFES member's shoe

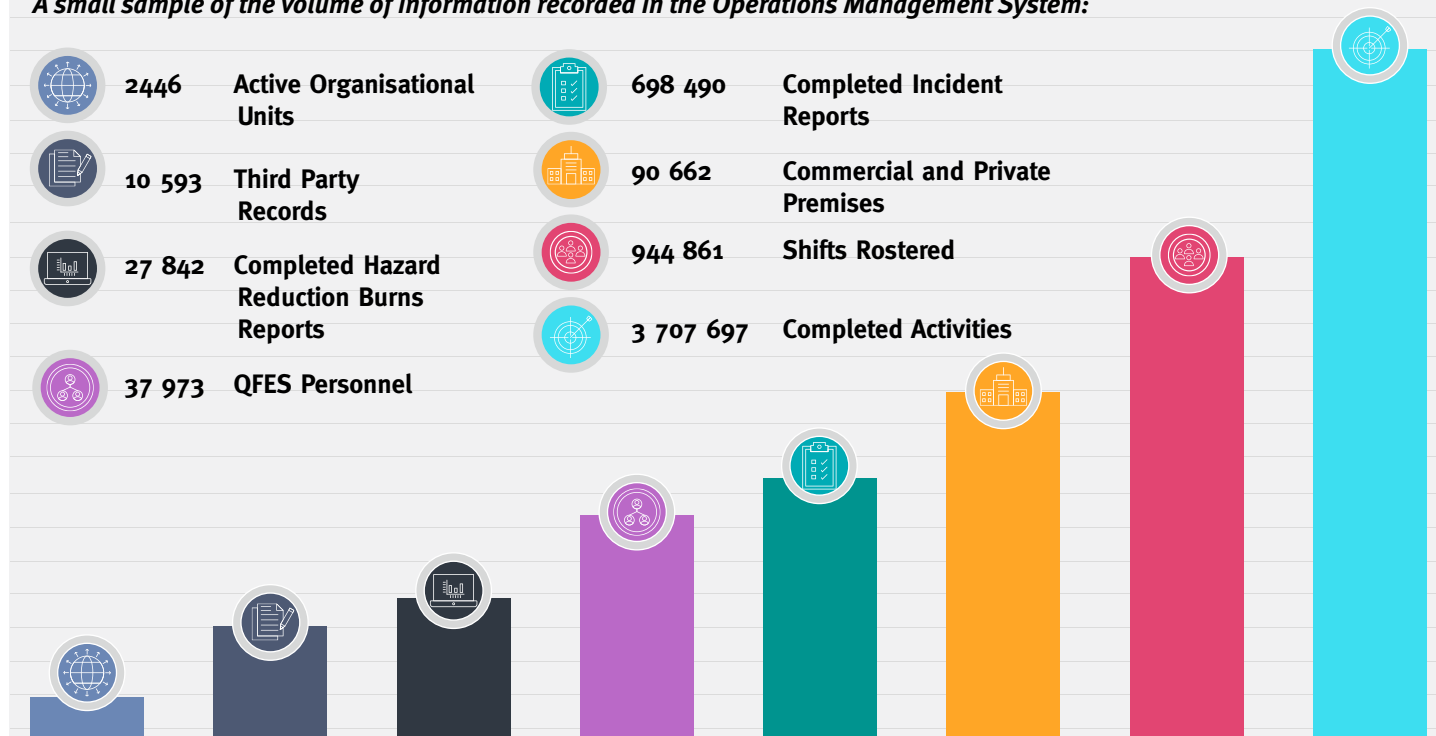
QFES regularly responds to enquiries from ministers and external agencies. The OMS data is used to provide crucial information for reports such as the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services.

It is used to provide funding applications to the Queensland Government as well as forming part of the Annual Budget papers.

The OMS support centre provides ongoing support to all QFES members across the state. The team has processed more than 58 000 support requests as well as more than 6600 enhancements and fixes with the help of the OMS Production Support Team and PSBA Software Development Group.

Since NEXUS went live in December 2017, the support centre has processed more than 39 000 update requests to make sure personnel details are up to date.

## A small sample of the volume of information recorded in the Operations Management System:



\*This data is current as at 26 May 2020.





# NORTH COAST REGION

## Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during COVID-19

When the Australian Government declared a Human Biosecurity Emergency due to COVID-19 on 18 March 2020, this enacted emergency restrictions on entry to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities ('designated areas') to slow the spread of COVID-19. These restrictions have been called a 'lockdown' and led to serious challenges for those communities. QFES has been working hard to support them.

The rationale behind the restrictions was to protect the communities from the introduction of COVID-19, which could have led to significant levels of illness and even deaths. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are at risk of higher mortality from COVID-19 as communities can have higher levels of chronic disease.

Three QFES regions – North Coast, Northern and Far Northern – have provided advice and support to help Local and District Disaster Management Groups manage the response to COVID-19 in communities from Cherbourg to as far north as the Torres Strait, out west to Burke and across to Palm Island.

Acting Emergency Management Coordinator Chris Wegger from Far Northern Region said the threat of COVID-19 caused distress in many forms to people impacted by the travel restrictions.

"For tens of thousands of years these remote communities have maintained cultural and family kinship connection with one another," Chris said.

"To help communities remain COVID free, a 14-day mandatory self-isolation period was introduced at a facility in the regional centre of Cairns. The isolation was very difficult for many people.

"Usually mothers can have cultural and family support days after giving birth, but the isolation process kept mothers and newborns for an additional 14 plus days."

Other restrictions included the inability to buy basic clothing items.

"Most of the community stores have very limited capacity to carry general items we in regional centres take for granted," Chris said.

"Most community members either travel to Cairns or get family to send items by air freight and barge to them.

"The restrictions on non-essential travel, coupled with supply demands at regional centres and people only being able to buy small quantities, put pressure on councils and authorities to find ways to ease restrictions without compromising the health and safety of community.

"It's a major operation and we've been attending daily back-to-back meetings over the phone and via video calls to make



A vehicle checkpoint at Cherbourg in North Coast Region.





# FAR NORTHERN REGION

amendments to operations on a daily and weekly basis.

“To date we’ve kept our Far Northern Region Indigenous communities COVID free.”

North Coast Region Regional Community Engagement Officer Julie Bruynius said the travel restrictions require border control, with a vehicle checkpoint, screening process and entry permit systems. Local Government Areas have developed pandemic sub-plans to manage the response.

“QFES has supported these communities during lockdown by providing input into the pandemic sub-plans for maintaining the essential supply chains for goods and services such as food, postal services and medications,” Julie said.

“For example, people in Cherbourg, which only has one small shop, had trouble accessing everyday items.

“Cherbourg is only six minutes from the larger town of Murgon, and the community travels there daily to shop and pay bills.

“QFES worked with our partners and the community to quickly try to establish adequate measures to meet the demand.”

Some of the restrictions in Cherbourg were recently relaxed to allow shopping on set days and times, with limited numbers of people in vehicles.

However, planning is still underway in case of a COVID-19 case in Cherbourg or Murgon, which would result in a total lockdown.

“Communication with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been extremely important, to ensure they receive clear advice on what is happening, why, what it means for them and what they need to do,” Julie said.

“In Cherbourg, I led a communications sub-group to ensure all communications reinforced government messaging, while being culturally appropriate to the Cherbourg community.

“Two key stakeholders in the group are the local radio station and council elders. Our relationship with them is vital as they are a trusted source of information and advise the sub-group on community sentiment and emerging concerns.

“We developed a communications plan for the Local Disaster Management Group, the radio station conducted interviews with council and well-known Indigenous community members, and we produced social media content and a community directory detailing local services and their availability during COVID-19.”


The sub-group also developed a community information sheet that went to each household and a flyer stressing the need to stock up on food, medications and winter items in case of a total lockdown.

“It is challenging for any community and takes time to manage restrictions while ensuring essential services are in place and that communities are managing physically and mentally through the process,” Julie said.


## COMMUNITY INFORMATION SHEET CHERBOURG

This is a strange and new experience for us all. Things will be different for a while and will continue to change as we deal with and confront the Coronavirus crisis. To try and make that easier for you, we have put together this Community Information Sheet. We have also attached a Community Directory of services you may need plus other information

**CLEAN YOUR HANDS OFTEN**




**COVER YOUR MOUTH**




**What can we all do to get us through these tough times:**

- Keep in contact with loved ones- phone, skype, email, social media.
- Touch base with friends you have not seen in a long while.
- Keep healthy- the food you eat, take your medications, drink lots of water and stay hydrated, do some exercise
- Help children and young people in your home continue their school work and learning
- Only listen to or share information from reliable sources - listen to the local radio and check Councils website. The main source of information on the coronavirus is Queensland Health <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/> Or <https://cherbourg.qld.gov.au/>
- Do things to help you relax - stay calm. If you feel overwhelmed or upset, don't try and cope alone, talk to a counsellor or health worker

**SANITISE OFTEN**



**KEEP YOUR DISTANCE 1.5M**



Use the Department of Communities Hotline 1800 173 349 if the help you need is not in the Community Directory or available.



# BRISBANE REGION



## Training vodcasts

QFES has introduced great training initiatives to adapt to COVID-19, and the Brisbane Region Training Team's contribution is a new series of vodcasts to support remote training.

Although the initiative was fast tracked due to COVID-19 restrictions, the idea was developed before the pandemic.

Station Officer Jason Anderson said the main motivation for the vodcasts was to give personnel the chance to receive training without attending every session, since many of them were balancing personal priorities, family and work.

"Each episode is presented by content experts and provides an in-depth explanation of topics such as Senior Firefighter and Officer development," Jason said.

"This approach has the potential to expand into other areas to meet the needs of our personnel – the opportunities are endless.

"With hundreds of views each week, the concept is proving to be a complete success and a worthwhile project for the region."

Jason explained that the team's greatest challenge was the technical aspects, since the team behind it were all self-taught with minimal experience with digital media.

Guidance from the QFES IT and Media units helped them produce the vodcast at a high quality.

"The success of the vodcast is down to the overwhelming support from this team as well as Assistant Commissioner John Cawcutt, Acting Superintendent Enes Seferovic and Acting Inspector Cameron Corneal," Jason said.

## Bracken Ridge Fire and Rescue Station starts operations

Although its official opening has been delayed due to COVID-19, the Bracken Ridge Fire and Rescue Station is completely operational and servicing the Brisbane community.

The station is the newest addition to the Hendra Command, replacing Sandgate Fire and Rescue Station, which opened in August 1970 and serviced Sandgate and surrounding communities for nearly 50 years until its closure in March 2020.

With surrounding infrastructure expansion and changing risks to the area, a larger facility that accommodated larger appliances was needed.

The Bracken Ridge station is centrally located and provides coverage to over 32 square kilometres within the Northern Brisbane Zone.

As a reminder of the station's humble beginnings, the original plaque from Sandgate now takes pride of place in the foyer.

The new site accommodates 10 firefighters and includes a multipurpose building designed to be the Brisbane Region's Technical Rescue Hub. The building features a 40-seat function/training room, a training tower, office spaces and warehouse-style storage.



## Mitigation burns underway

With Operation Cool Burn in full swing, Brisbane Region Rural Fire Service are working closely with their Area Fire Management Group partners to undertake their 116 planned mitigation burns. Work is also underway with pre-burn site preparation and fire break maintenance.

To complement the mitigation burns, the service has developed an extensive community engagement plan that involves key partners. After the initial plans for community engagement were heavily impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, the Bushfire Safety Officer and Regional Community Engagement Officer redeveloped their plans to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers.

Work is currently underway to develop a series of short videos targeting the key concepts discussed during Prepare. Act. Survive presentations as well as partnering with local councils to undertake letterbox drops and mailouts.





# SOUTH EASTERN REGION



## Technical rescue training on the Wineglass

Logan Technical Rescue crews joined with Logan City Council to undertake a vertical rescue exercise on a water tower in Browns Plains, affectionately dubbed the Wineglass.

With a state-of-the-art council drone hovering metres away, the crews rescued a dummy and gave him an escorted trip back to earth.

The exercise was a great opportunity for Logan Council to see QFES capabilities and allowed crews to refresh their skills and enjoy a bit of landmark spotting around the Great South East.

Exercise coordinator Station Officer Von Nida said, "It was a great opportunity to make us think through and try different ways of achieving the same outcome.

"Everyone has their own ideas, which is important for problem solving, but an exercise like this essentially makes everyone agree on a plan and get on board to achieve our goal."

## New equipment for SES groups

SES groups from across the region recently received new equipment through the Energising Qld SES Equipment Program, a partnership between Energex and Ergon Energy (part of Energy Queensland), Powerlink Queensland and the SES.

Some of the equipment will assist in the day-to-day management of the groups and their operations, such as the four new iPads received by the Somerset Unit.

Other equipment is more specialised, such as the Ferno Mule, a unique stretcher accessory that reduces much of the physical work involved in long-distance patient retrievals.

Given the terrain covered by the Tamborine Mountain SES Group around the hinterland, this item will be put to good use in the future.

The Gold Coast SES Groups also received six Milwaukee LED light stands to assist with a wide range of tasks, reducing the need for generators. The Beaudesert and Ipswich SES Groups received two Ferno split basket stretchers.





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#### **APPROVED QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT SUPPLIER**

Alliance Leasing Pty Ltd is an approved supplier under the Queensland Government panel arrangement Novated Leasing Services QGP0026-16. The arrangement commenced 7 November 2016 for a period of three (3) years with an extension option of up to two (2) years. From 7 November 2016, all Employees who wish to access a motor vehicle using a novated lease must use one of the approved Salary Packaging Novated Leasing Panel Suppliers to arrange, organise and manage the novated lease. The novated lease will continue to be administered through the Salary Packaging Administrator.

#### **QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT DISCLAIMER**

The implications of salary packaging a motor vehicle through a novated leasing arrangement, including tax savings will depend on your individual circumstances. The information in this publication has been prepared by Alliance Leasing for general information purposes only, without taking into consideration any individual circumstances. Before acting on any information or entering into a novated leasing arrangement, you should consider your objectives, financial situation and needs, and, take the appropriate legal, financial or other professional advice based upon your own particular circumstances. **The Queensland Government strongly recommends that you obtain independent financial advice prior to entering into, or changing the terms of, a salary packaging arrangement.**





# SOUTH WESTERN REGION

## Tanya Wittman wins Outstanding Female Leader Award

Congratulations to Tanya Wittman for winning the Outstanding Female Leader Award presented by Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing.

Tanya has been an inspiration for women since joining the SES. She developed the initiative 'Empowering Women in Orange' to encourage women to join and create awareness of their roles within the organisation.

Tanya has proven to be an extremely valuable member of the SES and is well respected within her community for her commitment, enthusiasm and dedication.

Tanya was nominated for the award by several peers in recognition of her outstanding work as an SES leader.

The award acknowledges individuals, teams, initiatives, projects and activities which support, promote or improve the standing of women in QFES.



## Light up the Dawn

Queenslanders celebrated ANZAC Day very differently this year, and Inspector Mark Saunders was no exception.

Mark served with the Australian Army Reserve from 1992 to 2009 and was actively involved in border security operations in Far North Queensland from 1999 to 2009.

"It was a different service for me this year and the first time I have worn a QFES uniform on ANZAC Day, even though I've been an RFS volunteer and staff member for the past 15 years," Mark said.

"In the past I have always been in military uniform and since 2012 the uniform has been World War I Light Horse."

This year, he stood in the driveway of the motel he'd been living and working from since the start of the year while on secondment as the Area Director Roma. He had a lot less polishing to do!



## Recognising our Peer Support Officers

Goondiwindi Fire and Rescue Station took time out during Peer Support Week (before the COVID-19 restrictions) to celebrate and recognise the valuable service Peer Support Officers provide to QFES staff and volunteers.

In particular, they honoured auxiliary firefighter and Peer Support Officer Phillip Starling, who supports his colleagues in Goondiwindi Command.

Phillip became a Peer Support Officer in 2018 and was deployed to the Stanthorpe fires in September 2019, where he spent time on the fire grounds looking out for QFES colleagues and locals.



# CENTRAL REGION



## Innovation in tough times

With auxiliary firefighter training cancelled, there has been one common theme: how do we keep connected and maintain interest?

Fire and rescue stations across the region have introduced a variety of ways to do just that, starting with sending out questionnaires to station staff each fortnight to encourage them to research a range of topics.

Stations are also holding presentations on platforms such as Skype, Zoom and Facebook Messenger Video Chat.

Crews have enthusiastically taken up these training sessions, which help them maintain focus and structure.

The stations have willingly shared their experiences and offered assistance to others in the region to help them continue developing new training solutions.

## Regional Community Engagement Network – supporting our people and the community

The Regional Community Engagement Network (RCEN) is made up of representatives from all services in Central Region.

From Proserpine in the north, Longreach in the west and Agnes Water in the south, staff and volunteers meet once a month to collaborate and coordinate community engagement priorities for Central Region.

The RCEN aims to be a regional focal point for collaborating on engagement strategies to create opportunities to connect people with the right knowledge, practical skills and resources to strengthen their community's capability and adaptive capacity.

The QFES engagement strategy promotes that we first engage with our people to understand their local needs, their communities' risks, needs and educational requirements. Then we will reach out to our partners and together engage our communities.



The Central Region Community Engagement Plan concentrates on seven key priorities in 2020. You can find more information on the Gateway under Central Region – Regional Knowledge.

## Operation Cool Burn at Mt Rooper

April saw the start of Operation Cool Burn for the Mackay Area, with the first major burn conducted at Mt Rooper near Airlie Beach under COVID-19 restrictions.

The burn was complex because Mt Rooper has high fuel loads from Tropical Cyclone Debbie, as well as critical infrastructure such as telecommunication, power and radio facilities at the peak. The mountain also abuts residential properties at Shute Haven.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) engaged SES crews to assist with closing walking tracks. They also enlisted Cannon Valley Rural Fire Brigade with two appliances, auxiliary firefighters from the Airlie Beach Fire and Rescue Station with two appliances, and an Eton 35 Side-by-Side Mule for the steeper sections.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads supplied electronic message boards to inform the community and manage traffic control on the day.

Briefings followed physical distancing restrictions, which was quite a challenge with 30 people.

QPWS conducted aerial ignition across the site and ground crews lit around the infrastructure sites. The burn covered 1200 hectares and QPWS conducted some fill-in burns during the rest of the week.

The burn reduced significant fuel loads, protecting neighbouring housing and infrastructure with good biodiversity mosaic for the important conservation status of the land.







# NORTHERN REGION

## Northern Region Operational Support Group

The devastating impacts of Cyclone Yasi in 2011 made it clear the Rural Fire Service (RFS) North Queensland needed a centralised operational support group.

A working group was developed, which led to the Northern Region Operational Support Group (NROSG) being established in 2016. First Officer Jim Besgrove heads the group, which is supported by Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade.

In October 2019, NROSG was formalised and officially became a Headquarters Brigade, the first of its kind in QFES. The brigade now has more than 40 active members.

Jim Besgrove said NROSG increases Northern Region's operational incident capability in the areas of command and control, communications, logistics and crew welfare.

"The brigade can also deploy strike teams in response to support incidents within the region and further afield," Jim said.

"NROSG has grown over the years and we now have a significant number of support vehicles and trailers, as well as a catering trailer and three amenities containers with toilets, showers and washing machines.

"We are in the process of completing a demountable kitchen building to support any emergency operations."

The Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland also provided grant funding to NROSG for a 65 KVA 3 phase generator with a portable distribution switch board and a 6000-litre portable water skid-mounted tank and pump unit to support major incidents.

For the last three years, NROSG has been involved in organising and providing Incident Control for various hazard reduction burns, two of which have now become yearly exercises held at Hervey's Range and James Cook University in collaboration with local brigades and other QFES agencies.

During the 2019 Townsville monsoon, NROSG demonstrated their operational support capability by providing personnel to fill functional roles in the Incident Control Centre, Emergency Operations Centre and Regional Operations Centre, as well as providing support to the main staging area and Control Point at Reid Park.

The welfare team, with support from the Townsville Thuringowa Lions Club, supplied more than 16 000 meals in 14 days, proving they are capable of providing welfare during large incidents and natural disasters.

The valuable contribution of NROSG has not gone unnoticed, with the group receiving the Commissioner's Award for Leadership in 2018.



# Hanging up their helmets

**Physical distancing may make it hard to hold a big farewell party for retiring firefighters, but that hasn't stopped crews across Queensland from celebrating the decades of service by some of their longest-serving members.**

A lot has changed in the 40-odd years since Station Officer John Heppell and Senior Firefighter Steve Appleton joined the fire service, but one thing still holds true – when the bells drop, it's go time!

Both men will be greatly missed by their co-workers at the Beenleigh Fire and Rescue Station for their vast experience, sense of humour and easy-going natures.

John said working with Steve and the other firefighters was always an adventure.

"Steve was a great firefighter. I have a lot of respect for him, and all the firefighters I worked with," John said.

One of the incidents that stands out in John's memory is the Town Hall fire in Townsville in the late 70s.

"I was only two years on the job when that happened. It was one of those big old-fashioned town halls, a two-storey building with a veranda.

"It was a huge fire and in those days we only had small crews – most only had two firefighters to a truck."

John said his advice to people joining QFES was to be prepared for the unexpected.

"You're always going to be surprised. Don't feel left out – ask silly questions.

"I remember once we responded to a car accident on the Pacific Highway where the four cars involved were facing north beside a big ute that was facing south, against the direction of traffic.

"We were sitting there thinking, why is that ute facing backwards?"

"It turned out the ute had been driving in the southern lane when it hit another car, jumped the barrier, flew over a car in the northern lane and landed facing south."

## Making it right

Steve Appleton has the added privilege of handing over the reins to his youngest son Johnathan, who recently completed his recruit training in the same Command.

"I was pretty chuffed when he started at Loganlea Station in May, even though we missed crossing paths by about a month," Steve said.

"My advice to him was that, as a firefighter, you're out in the community, and even if some of the things you see aren't pleasant, you can feel good about your work at the end of the day.

"You didn't make the situation, but you can do your best to right it."

In recent years, Steve assisted with rescues, including a dramatic rescue of six people trapped in a cart near the top of the Green Lantern ride at Movie World.

"Their cart came loose from the track high above the ground, but didn't fall.

"Those carts weigh around three and a half tonnes, and huge bearings were falling to the ground around them. Our ladder driver was a marvel, the way he placed the ladder for us to get up there.

"We always prepare for things like that just in case they happen, and we got everyone out safe.

"I loved every minute of my career and I miss going to the station."



John Heppell (centre left) and Steve Appleton (centre right) at their pre-COVID farewell.





## The Annual Longreach Fire Brigade Championships

John Palmer OAM served as an auxiliary firefighter at the Longreach Fire and Rescue Station for 45+ years, retiring in January this year.

He is a popular leader in the community, dedicating his time to many causes such as organising major scouting events as a scout leader for 44 years, and sitting on state and local health advisory boards. His roles have included President of the Longreach Athletics Club and Mayor of Longreach Regional Council.

“I joined the brigade when I was 18 because I wanted to serve my community,” John said.

“All us young guns used to sleep at the station so we were first on the trucks. We were 10 feet tall and bullet proof.

“They were good days because it was like a second home. We still have all the old fire trucks here at Longreach and some of them still run.

“We were working side-by-side, we trusted each other and we did what we needed to do. It was a fantastic journey.”

Every year since 1928, the station has held the Annual Longreach Fire Brigade Championships in the main street of Longreach. John has never missed one.

“We close off the main street and the public come along and put their chairs on the footpath and watch us practise our skills,” John said.

He was awarded the coveted Blue Ribbon 12 times and still holds six of the eight event records. John was proud to see one of the apprentice mechanics he employs join as an auxiliary firefighter. A career highlight was when his son Ben joined about 14 years ago.

“I couldn’t have done any of it without my family and the community’s support. And that hasn’t changed. And I don’t reckon you should ever forget that.

“I reckon I haven’t hit my peak yet.”



John Palmer (left) with his son Ben and grandson Macen.

## Changes

After 34 years of service, Bundaberg Fire and Rescue Service Area Commander Inspector Ronnie Higgins said goodbye to his mates in April.

Even with physical distancing, the crew put on a good send-off, including a farewell lunch and a final drive home in the firetruck.

“The best memories are just being with the guys each day,” Ronnie said.

“It’s been great to be part of the team here in Bundaberg. We have a lot of fun, but when it’s serious we get down to it.”

Ronnie was proud to be part of the process for securing new fire stations in Bundaberg and Childers, as well as renovating some of the stations.

“I’ve seen a lot of changes. When I started, our work was mainly about fighting fires. Then it evolved and we started doing HAZMAT jobs and car crash rescues in the 90s, then we moved on to other kinds of rescue like technical rescue, vertical and confined space, and now the focus is on disaster management.

“Our role is all about helping the community. It’s great to see young kids’ faces light up and the happiness you bring them when the truck pulls up or they visit the station.

“I want to thank all the people I’ve been involved with. Without the people around you, your career is nothing.”



The afternoon C shift gave Ronnie Higgins an appropriate farewell in April.

# ThankQ

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# Wear Orange Wednesday

On Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day), we celebrate and thank SES volunteers for their contribution as part of National Volunteer Week.

QFES usually holds community engagement activities and recruitment drives, but to comply with physical distancing, this year we held a virtual morning tea.

Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short hosted the morning tea for SES volunteers and staff on Zoom, giving them the chance to come together as a group for the first time ever.

More than 100 people took part, including Commissioner Greg Leach and Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing, staff from each region and state office, and many of our valued SES volunteers from across Queensland.

Commissioner Leach said, "In honour of this day, we take the time to thank our Queensland SES volunteers for their dedication and tireless devotion to their communities.



Commissioner Greg Leach and Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short cutting the cake for WOW Day.

"Our volunteers provide an invaluable service to all Queenslanders.

"The past year has been especially trying for the Queensland community, and we thank our volunteers for their dedication and assistance during the difficult fire season and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as this year's severe weather season."

There are currently 4900 active SES members in Queensland across 297 SES groups. So far, in the 2019/20 financial year, they have devoted more than 266 400 hours to training and preparedness and more than 96 200 hours to operational response.



SES members from across the state joined the virtual morning tea.



## Home Fire Safety gets fresh look

A new Home Fire Safety website is bringing all home fire safety and escape plan information into one place, continuing to remind Queenslanders to prepare their homes and practise fire-escape drills.

The message of home fire safety has never been more important, with most Queenslanders needing to stay at home because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Adults working from home, more appliances and devices in use and recharging, more home-cooking, candles being lit, cooler weather and potentially bored school children can all lead to more home fires.

The 2020 Home Fire Safety campaign will launch next month to raise awareness about reducing the risk of accidental home fires and again drive home the importance of planning, discussing and practising a home fire-escape drill.

QFES crews attended 1806 residential structure fires last year, with seven fatalities.

QFES ad campaign co-ordinator Jennifer Kerr said this year's refreshed campaign would continue to educate Queenslanders about the importance of fire safety in the home and fire-escape drills.

"We've also been researching how best to reach our target audiences in this COVID-19 environment because the way people are getting their information is quite different from last year's campaign," Jennifer said.

"More people are online, listening to music streaming services on smart speakers at home, and listening to the radio at home so we're targeting our campaign to reach those audiences.

"We've also created a new-look website, which is easy for Queenslanders to navigate and has all the home fire safety information in one place.

"People can go to the site and quickly find everything they need to check their home for fire safety and make an escape plan."

Jennifer said the new website also features more detailed content and specific tips for parents of young children as well as older Queenslanders and their carers.

The 2020 Home Fire Safety campaign will launch in late July and run until the end of August. Radio ads will play in the south-east, Rockhampton and Toowoomba, while the campaign will also feature online, on Spotify and on parenting websites Brisbane Kids and Mustdobrisbane.

Visit [www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fireescape](http://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fireescape) for more information on home fire safety.





In the spirit of Reach as High as You Can Day on April 14, QFES crews tested a new Combined Aerial Pump Appliance (CAPA) under the Story Bridge. CAPAs can reach up to 32 metres in less than 90 seconds to assist with a wide range of incidents.



One of QFES' youngest fans created this amazing Lego fire station in the spirit of Lego Masters.



Artist Pam Withers showed her support for firefighters by donating her painting to the Gympie Fire and Rescue Station.

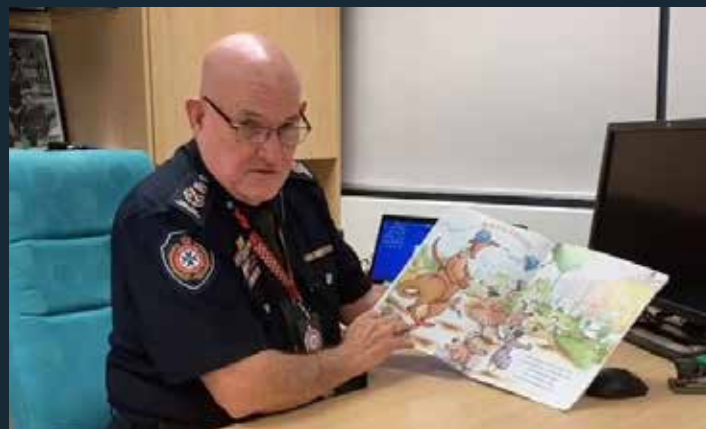


The crew from Wishart Fire and Rescue Station and the Retired Firefighters Association celebrated retired firefighter Frank Sloman's 80th birthday with a surprise drive-by, lighting up his day despite the COVID-19 restrictions.





Logan SES, in association with local agencies, helped prepare and deliver care packages to vulnerable members of the community. They left the packages at people's doors to avoid direct contact and keep people safe.



As part of the top-secret Operation Storytime, Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche and other QFES leaders read their favourite storybooks to spread a little joy during Easter time.



This year, the annual Domestic and Family Violence Candle Lighting Vigil was held virtually by DVConnect.

QFES Commissioner Greg Leach and other QFES leaders participated in the event to remember those who have lost their lives to domestic and family violence.



The Pine Mountain and Districts Rural Fire Brigade left activity packs and chocolates out the front of the station for local kids and adults to keep busy during isolation.

QFES encouraged parents to use their extra time at home to talk about home fire safety with their kids. Two-year-old Harry took our online test to become a junior firefighter and was pretty chuffed with the results.



Southport Fire and Rescue Station received a call in the early hours of the morning to rescue a curlew chick stuck in a drain, and bravely descended into the darkness to bring it to safety.



Firefighters worked to contain one of the first bushfires of the season at Takura in the Hervey Bay region this May.

# A Swedish exchange

**Senior Firefighter Chris Peate from the Gold Coast embraced the opportunity of a lifetime when he went on an 11-month exchange to Öja, Sweden.**

Chris got the idea when he talked to a colleague at the 2018 Commonwealth Games and discovered that a firefighter in Sweden wanted to participate in an exchange.

He flew to Sweden in May 2019 with his wife and three of their kids, while his exchange partner Daniel Jibbers flew to Australia. On arrival they were welcomed by one of his new colleagues, Hasse, who presented him with his helmet.

While his kids settled into their new Swedish schools, Chris went straight into his induction.

“Sweden has a reputation for having an elite firefighting service, and they are massive on their training,” he said.

“When on shift physical training was mandatory. It was a mix of soccer, floorball, running, gym, swimming and CrossFit. On some days there were organised classes for us to attend.”

Chris also learnt more about Sweden’s ‘Healthy Firefighter’ approach to decontamination and supporting healthy minds and bodies.

“Sweden takes the health and wellbeing of firefighters extremely seriously,” Chris said.

“This was clear to see on day one when I underwent a comprehensive medical

examination, with two more throughout the year.

“The way in which they carry out decontamination after a fire is extremely simple and effective, to help reduce the risks of their crews being affected by cancer.

“The ongoing training on shift ensures all staff, no matter what role or position they hold within the organisation, are in the best possible condition they can be.

“Training for ice rescues in dry suits was an interesting experience because of the freezing cold.”

Chris said he didn’t always understand what incident they would be responding to because the calls were in Swedish, but en route the others would let him know what was happening.

“Vehicle incidents involving moose were quite common,” he said.

Another notable difference was facial hair.

“Their Breathing Apparatus masks are positive pressured the same as ours – the only difference is facial hair is allowed while on shift. It was great to not have to shave for a year.”

The county where Chris worked ran a shift of eight, including the Insatsledare IL

(Inspector), Styrkeledere SL (Station Officer) and six Brandman (firefighters).

“The IL would respond in their car, then the front truck 1010 would respond with five crew members – the SL, driver and three in the back made up of Smoke Diver 1 and 2 and the Smoke Diver Leader.

“Depending on the incident, the other two crew members would drive either the second truck, ladder or water truck.”

Chris said he and his family were lucky enough to fit in some travelling before the world closed down due to COVID-19.

“We travelled to places in far northern Sweden where we went dogsledding and saw the northern lights.”

His family also participated in Midsommar celebrations, picking flowers and making wreaths to place on the maypole for the traditional ring dances.

“After spending a year in Sweden I can see why they are held in such high regard throughout the world with their practices,” Chris said.

There were days where it was extremely hard with the language barrier, culture and weather etc, but as a whole we have all benefited from the opportunity.

“Tack så mycket för att läsa och Ha det så bra (thank you very much for reading and all the best).”



Chris Peate (front row, second from right) with his Shift 4 in Sweden.



Chris at an incident at the local airport.





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