

# RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE EDITION 33



**Queensland  
firefighting  
milestone**

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In a first for Queensland, QFES has contracted a Large Air Tanker to boost our firefighting capability during the bushfire season. Photo by Jack Tran.

**RESPONSE** is a bi-monthly magazine produced by 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

Last month, the Bureau of Meteorology declared the start of La Niña, so we can expect more flooding and cyclones in Queensland this summer. As always, QFES members are ready.

By partnering with stakeholders and the community, and by taking a risk-based approach to planning, we will help make Queenslanders safe and resilient.

While the 2020 bushfire season has been less significant than in recent years, several large fires have threatened communities and QFES members have been working hard to contain them.

We significantly reduced the risk to communities by completing a record amount of bushfire mitigation activities earlier in the year. Queensland's new Large Air Tanker (LAT) has already played a valuable role in supporting ground crews at fires. Read more about the LAT on page 4.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our harmonised operations during bushfire season so far, which have led to such positive outcomes for the community.

The Queensland Government is now in caretaker mode as the election draws near and a new government is formed. Our daily business continues as we support the government during this period, and continue to work together to ensure the safety and resilience of our communities.

Like many other countries around the world, our economy has been affected by COVID-19, and as public servants we all need to work together to ensure we are focused on delivering our core services.

I know here at QFES we have a great team of people who are extremely dedicated to their work, and I have every confidence we will play our part in supporting the government and our communities by delivering optimised services for the people of Queensland.

We will soon welcome new people to the QFES team as we are joined by our colleagues from the Public Safety Business Agency (PSBA). I am glad to say work is progressing well to make this a seamless transition for all involved and I look forward to welcoming them into the department in the near future.

The uncertainty that has defined 2020 is not over yet, but we will continue to be flexible and adaptive as we deal with the challenges faced this year.

In a constantly changing environment, we are strongest when we work together, combining and building on the strengths of individual teams and services.

As QFES continues to mature and evolve, we can't go wrong if we keep supporting and learning from each other – our collaborative and collegiate working environment will serve us well as a strong foundation for our future.



**ADAM STEVENSON**  
**Acting Deputy Commissioner**  
**STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

The Queensland Government recently announced its intention to transition the Public Safety Business Agency's (PSBA) existing functions and people to both QFES and Queensland Police Service (QPS).

I am leading our work with PSBA, QPS and our other public safety agency partners to ensure a smooth transition of PSBA's functions to QFES and other agencies by 30 June 2021.

We are taking the opportunity to consider how our corporate functions can be better aligned to service delivery, and how we can integrate PSBA's functions into that future.

We are also working closely with Queensland Treasury and the Public Service Commission to support the Savings and Debt Plan.

In these times, we need to make every dollar count. We will remain focused on delivering our core services to the community and making sure our services operate efficiently to keep our communities safe while increasing their resilience.

The importance of resilient communities was one of the issues noted in the interim observations released by the Bushfires Royal Commission on 31 August, ahead of the final report due to be handed down at the end of this month.

The interim observations have highlighted opportunities for improvements in recovery, response and preparedness arrangements at a national level. You can read more on page 7.

I'm proud to report that the QFES Capital Works team has already delivered eight infrastructure builds in the 2020/21 program, with another eight to be completed by the end of the financial year.

Those delivered include Bracken Ridge, El Arish, Esk, Kilkivan, Mount Isa, Pimpama, Rathdowney and Yarraman.

The team has also been workshopping with the regions to prepare a five-year infrastructure plan aligned with the growing needs of developing communities.

This work has been undertaken in conjunction with Strategic Services to ensure all builds are fully supported by analytical data. Taking this evidence-based approach to infrastructure planning means QFES is directing its investment responsibly and making sure we are best placed to service a changing environment.

It's just one more way QFES is adapting the way we work to secure a capable, resilient and safe future for Queensland.



*The aircraft can drop 10 000 litres of water, gel or retardant.*

# A first for aerial firefighting

**QFES has contracted a large waterbombing aircraft to boost our aerial firefighting capability.**

The Dash-8-Q400AT Large Air Tanker (LAT) is one of the most innovative emergency response air tankers in the world and QFES has engaged it for this fire season.

It can drop 10 000 litres of water, gel or retardant, compared to QFES' existing waterbombing aircraft, which can drop between 2000 and 3200 litres of water each.

Commissioner Greg Leach said the LAT would support crews on the ground during bushfire seasons by providing fast and effective firefighting options.

"The LAT flies at up to 670 kilometres an hour, with a maximum range of about 1800 kilometres, so it can travel quickly between many different regional airports throughout the state," Mr Leach said.

"Within an hour of receiving a call out, the aircraft can travel from Bundaberg, north to Proserpine, south to the Queensland-New South Wales border or west to Tambo."

## Game changer

Air Operations Executive Manager Martin Gibson said QFES had borrowed LATs from other states and territories in the past, but this was the state's first dedicated aircraft of this kind.

Queensland first used a LAT in 2018 through an arrangement with New South Wales Rural Fire Service and the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) but this became challenging when our southern neighbour faced their own bushfire emergency.

"LATs have proved to be effective in the past two seasons, where they played a key role in keeping massive bushfires at bay," Martin said.

In 2019, waterbombing helped keep communities safe at Peregian, Sarabah, Stanthorpe and Pechey. QFES used 72 aircraft for a total of 6557 hours, more than twice as much as in 2018.

Martin said QFES would use the new LAT to fight fires in a different way.

"Historically we've used aircraft for more direct attacks, but the LAT is a more strategic asset," he said.

"We can use it to reinforce fire breaks and help slow fires down before they reach the breaks.

"The LAT drops water mixed with retardant or gel depending on the situation. The timing varies: gel is effective for about three to six hours, whereas retardant remains for up to a week.

"This is the first major use of retardant in Queensland."

## A flexible approach

Martin said the new LAT was a smaller and more versatile model to those in other states and territories.

"It can take off from shorter runways and is lighter than most LATs, so it could reload at regional airports such as Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Mackay, Townsville and farther afield," he said.



Unlike other LATs, the Dash-8-Q400AT can also land with full fuel and its load at 78 per cent capacity.

If a drop is cancelled, the aircraft can either fly to reduce its fuel, or drop a small amount of load onto a pre-authorised location and land with the bulk still on board.

Martin said Bundaberg was the best place to base the LAT, both strategically and logistically.

“We can resource our existing airbase there, and we’ve also taken the opportunity to enhance it to accommodate the LAT,” he said.

“We’ve installed critical water and mixing infrastructure for filling the LAT’s tanks, and electrical infrastructure to service a demountable base office.

“It’s an accessible location and it provides a sizable response footprint within Queensland.

“We can also fly the LAT to New South Wales to assist there if needed, as they’ve done for us in previous bushfire seasons.”

### Fighting fires from above

Canadian pilot Dave Ingibergsson, Captain of the LAT, travelled to Australia with the aircraft and will spend about 90 days in Bundaberg, on-call throughout the bushfire season.

Dave has been flying for about 35 years. He started out flying for airlines but a sense of adventure drew him to aerial firefighting about 17 years ago. Although he’s worked all over the world, this is the first time he’s fought fires overseas.

“I wanted to come over to Queensland and showcase this fantastic aircraft,” Dave said.

After arriving in Bundaberg, Dave and his co-pilot immediately underwent a COVID-19 test, followed by a 14-day quarantine. They became operational on 1 September and will be staying in the neighbouring town of Bargara during their deployment.

“The LAT is an airliner, so as pilots we do everything a commercial pilot would do, but on top of that we have to bring the plane down close to the ground to deliver the load,” Dave said.

“Other than landing and take-off, commercial flights generally fly at about 6000 metres, but we spend our operational role at around 300 metres, and we drop the load at about 35 to 45 metres.

“Because we’re so low to the ground, often surrounded by smoke, flying the plane has to become second nature. We use the rest of our brainpower to be firefighters.”



The aircraft can travel at up to 670 kilometres an hour. Photo by Jack Tran.



The aircraft’s ground crew includes trained volunteers. Photo by Jack Tran.

Part of his job as a pilot is to scan ahead to make sure there are no hazards in the way.

“We can see a lot from up there — all the firefighters and their equipment. We have to make sure the area around the drop is clear.

“We keep an eye on environmental conditions like wind shifts, which can have a big influence on where we drop the payload. Even differences in the terrain can affect how it behaves once it lands.”

### Communicating with ground crews

The LAT is supported by a two-person team in a lead plane, also known as a ‘birddog’ aircraft.

“The birddog aircraft is flown by a highly experienced pilot from Victoria, who works with a QFES-trained Air Attack Supervisor,” Dave said.

“The Air Attack Supervisor coordinates the placement of the drop in communication with the Incident Controller on the ground.

“They also provide critical intelligence to the Incident Controller about the fire’s behaviour and conditions.

“The birddog aircraft arrives on scene a few minutes before we do, gives us the information we need, and leads us into the drop or directs us to it from overhead.

“Working with them allows us to complete the drop as safely and efficiently as possible.”

### The right tool for the job

Dave said he felt a great sense of satisfaction when they helped make a difference in slowing down a fire.

“Not all missions and deployments are wins, and that can be disheartening at times, but overall there’s a sense of satisfaction for a job well done,” he said.

“We hold formal and informal debriefs to see what we can do better next time.

“Queensland should be proud of the aircraft QFES has secured.

“This is absolutely the right tool for the job. It’s an extremely efficient airplane to meet the needs of Queensland communities.

“In my view, it’s a game changer in the air tanker world. This will be the wave of the future, and Queensland is really at the forefront of this next generation of LATs.”

# Managing bushfires

The Queensland Government recently approved the Queensland Bushfire Plan, which outlines Queensland's arrangements for managing bushfire at a time when a coordinated approach is more important than ever.

As the lead agency for bushfire, QFES has a number of responsibilities under the plan, in partnership with other agencies and the community.

The plan is a key document within Queensland's disaster management arrangements. It is a sub-plan to the Queensland State Disaster Management Plan, which is developed by the Queensland Disaster Management Committee.

Developed following extensive research, benchmarking with other states and territories and feedback from stakeholders, the plan is a living document and will change to cater for any relevant recommendations from the Bushfires Royal Commission.

The Queensland Bushfire Plan applies to all Queenslanders and is a different document to the QFES State Bushfire Operational Plan, which focuses specifically on QFES' bushfire responsibilities across the phases of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

## Putting the plan into practice

Michael Welsh is the Bushfire Safety Officer for South Western Region and the secretariat for the Darling Downs Area Fire Management Group (AFMG).

Michael said the AFMG was essential to identifying vulnerable communities at risk.

"The AFMG collaborates and coordinates mitigation activities to lower the risk of

bushfires affecting those communities," he said.

Fire management groups and committees operate at the local, area, regional and state level. In total, there are more than 50 AFMGs largely based on local government areas, seven Regional Inter-departmental Committees for Bushfire (one per region) and a State Inter-departmental Committee for Bushfire.

"The Queensland Bushfire Plan helps QFES, our partner agencies, major landholders and communities understand how everyone works together to mitigate the risk of bushfire," Michael said.

Even though this season isn't on the scale of last year's, the region has had several problematic fires.

"They're mainly fast-running grass fires and we've gotten most of them under control within a few hours, but we've also been fighting a larger scrub fire," he said.

"The fires have caused a lot of smoke and reduced visibility, particularly one on the escarpment in mid-September."

Michael said each region had tailored methodologies for identifying risk.

"In South Western Region, we send out a bushfire risk assessment worksheet to brigades and AFMG members before the bushfire season," he said.

"This allows us to gather the evidence about bushfire risk. At the AFMG meetings



RFS volunteers fighting a recent fire at Springbrook. Photo by Cam Neville.

we use the evidence to identify the vulnerable communities we need to prioritise."

For example, this year the AFMG identified a high-priority burn in Giraween National Park, south of Stanthorpe, because there was a long history of large fires in the area affecting multiple land tenures.

In 2019, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and QFES also conducted a burn in state forest near Stanthorpe that significantly reduced the impact of the Stanthorpe fire.

"The fire started to the west of the burn and had to skirt around it, moving through open country before it reached the community.

"That kept its intensity down, because it couldn't reach the high fuel loads and get into the treetops. It gave us time to get our people and resources in place to fight the fire.

"We would have lost a lot more structures in Stanthorpe without that burn."

QFES also hosted a series of PREPARE.ACT. SURVIVE. community information sessions around the same time as the burn.

"This gave the community the tools to get their property ready, and anecdotal evidence told us that because of those sessions the community was much more prepared."

QFES' bushfire mitigation activities before the Stanthorpe fire were so successful, they were used as a case study in the Bushfires Royal Commission.

You can read the Queensland Bushfire Plan at [disaster.qld.gov.au/cdmp/Pages/default.aspx](http://disaster.qld.gov.au/cdmp/Pages/default.aspx)

## Queensland's approach to bushfire is underpinned by three key principles:

1. **Hazard mitigation:** this should be informed, planned and coordinated to reduce the burden in response.
2. **Public safety:** to protect and preserve human life, it is crucial to provide public information that informs the community of their bushfire risk and enables their response.
3. **Collaboration and coordination:** managing the bushfire hazard requires a collective effort from a wide range of stakeholders to produce positive outcomes for the Queensland community.

# Royal Commission interim findings flag national improvements

**With the findings from the Bushfires Royal Commission due at the end of October, early observations flag important national improvements in Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR).**

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, also known as the Bushfires Royal Commission, wrapped up on 25 September after receiving 1772 public submissions over four months.

The Commission was established in February this year in response to the 2019-20 bushfire season, which resulted in devastating loss of life, property and wildlife around Australia.

Interim observations and draft propositions were released on 31 August covering some

of the issues the Commission is expected to address in its report.

Commissioner Greg Leach said the interim observations flagged opportunities for improvements in national recovery, response and preparedness arrangements.

“Overall there is a strong emphasis on national collaboration and how we work together,” he said.

“QFES looks forward to the release of the final report and supporting the

implementation of Queensland Government endorsed recommendations.

“This will pave the way to further collaborate with our partners around the country to improve our PPRR.

“This is something we are always doing – continual improvement and change has become a part of our everyday work.”

To view the interim observations and draft propositions, visit [naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au](http://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au).



Volunteers from Currumbin Valley Rural Fire Brigade at the Springbrook fire in August.

## Key points in the interim observations

Even the most well-resourced government agencies cannot entirely protect the public from the risks of natural disasters. Some bushfires, for example, will be too large and too widespread; some Australians will live too remotely; and there are only so many firefighters, aircraft and trucks that can be deployed at the same time.

All Australians, and particularly those in high-risk areas, must take steps to prepare themselves and their families for natural disasters. It is for this reason that preparation for, response to, and recovery from, natural disasters has been called a ‘shared responsibility’— shared between individuals, private enterprise, not-for-profit organisations, and all levels of government.

Over the coming decades, Australia is likely to experience more frequent and intense natural disasters. This will require all jurisdictions to work together to coordinate strategic decision making and share resources across the jurisdictions and the Australian Government.

Cooperation and collaboration between Australian, state, territory and local governments is vital in national natural disasters, particularly in disasters that affect multiple communities and multiple jurisdictions concurrently.

# ThankQ

for all that you do.

Your dedication in caring for our community is inspiring.

You're the reason why we do what we do.

And have been since 1912.

Visit [qsuper.com.au](https://qsuper.com.au) to find out how  
we are supporting our members.





# New tools to support the community

QFES is using two new engagement tools to help reach all members of the Queensland community and make sure everyone is prepared for when disaster strikes.

## Preparedness tool for people with disability

Regional Community Engagement Officers (RCEOs) are collaborating with The University of Sydney and Queenslanders with Disabilities Network to promote the new Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Workbook.

The workbook is a conversation guide that people with disability can use to tailor emergency preparedness planning to their strengths and support needs.

The project's Principal Investigator, Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve from The University of Sydney, said the team developed the tool after conducting stakeholder consultation sessions in Brisbane, Ipswich, Rockhampton and Townsville.

"QFES and other stakeholders from the disability, community, health and emergency management sectors shared their experiences and exchanged knowledge about how to reduce risk and increase the resilience of people with disability to disasters," Michelle said.

"P-CEP will facilitate much better levels of preparedness by helping people with disability consider how they will manage their unique support needs in emergencies.

"People with disability have to manage every day in challenging environments, so they develop their own strategies for using their strengths and managing their support needs in ways that work for them. They bring these strengths to emergency preparedness."

Northern Region RCEO Paul Cannon said the P-CEP Workbook was a fantastic tool.

"Until now, QFES has provided the community with a four-step plan, which makes it simple to get prepared," Paul said.

"However, people with disability need to consider more than just four steps.

"The P-CEP Workbook bridges this gap by covering eight areas: social connectedness, transportation, assistive technology, management of health, personal support, communication, assistance animals and living situation."

Paul recently had a chance to put P-CEP into action when he was contacted by a woman with a disability who lived in a storm tide zone in South Townsville. She wanted to know if she should buy a generator to prepare.

"I quickly realised she didn't need a generator for emergencies – she would need to evacuate," Paul said.

"I wanted to talk with her about how to be prepared, but our standard four-step plan wouldn't have been enough for her.

"So I arranged to sit down with her and her carers to talk about P-CEP. I left the P-CEP Workbook with them and asked them to develop a plan for themselves.



People with disability can use the P-CEP Workbook to consider their strengths and support needs when preparing for emergencies.

"I helped them fill in the final details, and she was really happy with the result. It helped her feel much more prepared.

"It's great to see the P-CEP project come to fruition when it has been led by people with disabilities and their representative organisations.

"It's now up to QFES to support this initiative and help share these resources, so we are actively expanding our community engagement efforts."

You can find out more about P-CEP at [collaborating4inclusion.org/pcep](http://collaborating4inclusion.org/pcep)

## Home fire safety visual guide

Queensland has a culturally diverse community and QFES is always seeking new ways to engage with them.

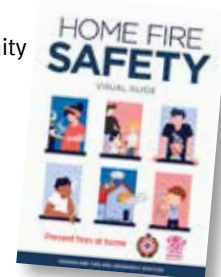
RCEOs identified the need for an easy-to-understand home fire safety guide for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, to ensure they have the tools to avoid fire risks in the home.

The RCEOs worked with the State Community Engagement Unit and local multicultural organisations to develop a visual guide.

They chose this approach over a translation because research has shown many new arrivals to Australia are not literate in their own languages, so visual guides are more accessible.

The visual guide not only provides clear information, but can assist CALD community members with learning the English language.

The booklet is available on the QFES Download Library and in hard copy. If you would like a copy, contact your RCEO or the State Community Engagement Unit.





Matthew created this lamp to show “there is light within the black dog”.

# Creating art from trauma

**With everything that has happened this year, R U OK? Day is more important than ever, reminding everyone to reach out if you’re worried about someone. We spoke with auxiliary firefighter Matthew Mohr about his experiences with traumatic situations and how making sculptures out of recycled metal helps him process them.**

Even though many of us couldn’t mark this year’s R U OK? Day on 10 September with a morning tea due to COVID-19, it was still a timely reminder that working in the emergency services can take a toll.

Emergency services workers report suicidal thoughts more than twice as often as others, but those levels decrease when they have more social support and resilience.

On R U OK? Day Commissioner Leach recorded a special video message encouraging everyone to reach out to a family member, friend or colleague who didn’t seem like themselves or was acting out of sorts.

If you’re struggling, you can contact the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network anytime. They offer a range of services that are confidential, free and easy to use.

## A creative outlet

Auxiliary firefighter Matthew Mohr started making sculptures about five years ago, after attending a serious road accident with his crew from Beerwah Fire and Rescue Station.

“I couldn’t sleep, so I went down to the shed and started making a big stainless-steel sculpture of a fish,” Matthew said.

“I felt at ease and the everyday stress faded away.”

Matthew said each piece represents how he was feeling at the time he made it. His work ranges from sea life and native animals to flowers and abstract shapes.

“I don’t draw plans for my sculptures – I just come home from work, go into the shed, put my music on and zone out.”

Dr Bernie Scully, Manager of Clinical and Organisational Development Services, said this kind of creativity had great psychological benefits, particularly when dealing with exposure to trauma.

“On one level, it can take on the qualities of mindfulness and helps bring people into the here and now, so they can start to leave difficult memories in the past,” Bernie said.

“On another level, expressing emotions through sculpture helps people stay with difficult thoughts and feelings and

emotionally process them so they are more healthy and functional, and less reactive.”

## Reflecting on loss

Matthew has faced other tragic situations since that first road crash, and some of the hardest are when people attempt suicide in the Glass House Mountains.

“When I sit and talk with them, I try to help them see they’re not alone – they’re not the only one dealing with these issues,” Matthew said.

He was recently recommended for a bravery award for rescuing a man on Mount Beerwah.

“He saw his friend fall down the mountain and he was so distraught he was going to jump off the edge as well.

“I talked to him but he tried to jump. Thankfully he got caught in some shrubs, which gave me time to climb along the cliff face and save him.

“I’ve kept in touch with some of the people I’ve rescued, and they come around to my place now and then to make their own

creations out of metal, or we go for a walk around the mountain and talk about things.”

One of Matthew’s favourite pieces is a sculpture he made for QFES to mark Firefighters Remembrance Day last year.

“The sculpture features a vine climbing up a fire ladder, and each leaf on the vine is for a firefighter who lost their life on the job.”

Bernie said the sculpture was a beautiful example of the way people use objects or places to remember losses in their life.

“Whether it be loss of a loved one, a missed opportunity or a significant change of life course, objects and places can provide a tangible point to reflect,” he said.

“If people go to lengths to make the memento special, it helps them acknowledge the significance of what they had in a positive way, rather than getting stuck focusing on the negatives of what they have lost.”

### Beauty from tragedy

Crafting the sculptures is a long, slow process – Matthew once spent more than 160 hours on a three-metre great white shark.

One of his most striking pieces is a silver spray of melted aluminium mounted on burnt timber. The metal is from a car fire he attended, and he sold the sculpture to raise money for New South Wales bushfire relief.

“I spent hours polishing the metal because I wanted to beautify what we do,” Matthew said.

“When we turn up to something charred and burnt and horrible, I want to make it into something I’d love to see.

“That’s why I like working with recycled metal. Most of my materials have been thrown out because they’re rusty or broken, so I clean them up and turn them into wanted things again.

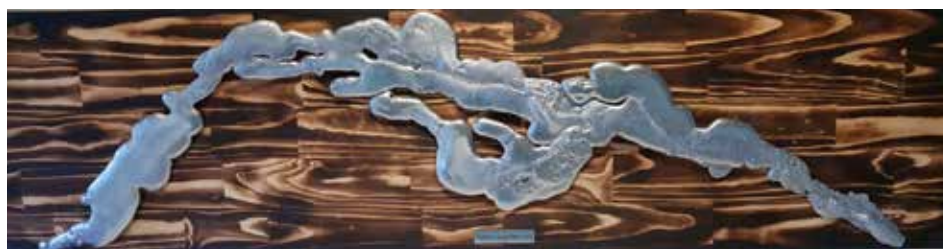
“The local farmers know me as the ‘metal man’ and share their castoffs with me.”

Bernie said art can help people experience post-traumatic growth, a process of learning and finding strength and personal growth from trauma.

“Matthew’s artistic process is a great representation of post-traumatic growth, whereby we can realise that beauty and goodness can come out of times when we



Matthew made a bell from an old fire extinguisher for North Coast Region FireCom to hang in their operations room.



A sculpture made with melted aluminium from a car fire.

can feel fragile and broken, depending on the perspective we take.”

### Speaking out

In 2019, Matthew went through a period of depression and anxiety.

“I attended a lot of bad jobs in quick succession and they hit me hard. I thought I was ok but I wasn’t,” he said.

“It can be hard living in a rural area, because when I turn out to accidents, sometimes I know the people involved.

“All I can say is, when you feel you’re not well, reach out and talk to someone.

“It makes it so much easier than just sitting there battling by yourself.

“When you’re at a low point, you often think you’ll get judged by your peers, so you don’t talk to them about it, and that’s the worst thing – to hold it all in.

“Once I came out and told people I was struggling, it was amazing how many people said they were struggling too.

“I’d like to thank my partner Samantha Lee for being there for me through my dark days, and my best mate Geoff Cameron, who has always been there for me.”

Bernie said Matthew’s story showed there were lots of things we can do to help

ourselves, but it can be good to talk with someone when we feel stuck.

“People fear they will be judged if they speak out, but I have spoken with countless people who tell me it was the best thing they ever did,” Bernie said.

Matthew has auctioned off several pieces to raise money for good causes, including Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Mix FM’s Give Me Five for Kids and Movember.

You can find out more about Matthew’s sculptures on the Matthew James Metal Arts Facebook page.

#### If you need someone to talk to, contact:

QFES free counselling at [qfes.qld.gov.au/fesn/counselling](http://qfes.qld.gov.au/fesn/counselling)  
 Fire and Emergency Services Support Network free 24-hour confidential counselling on 1800 805 980  
 Lifeline on 13 11 14  
 Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800  
 MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978  
 Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467  
 Beyond Blue on 1300 22 46 36  
 Headspace on 1800 650 890  
 QLife on 1800 184 527

# Celebrating women in emergency services

**QFES and our members were recognised in every category of this year's Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFA) Awards.**

QFES' success in the 2020 WAFA Awards showcases our commitment to diversity and inclusion, and supporting women to follow their chosen career path.

## The meaning of leadership

The Youth Leadership Award recognises a young volunteer who has demonstrated strong and consistent leadership and a commitment to the safety of their community. This year's winner is State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer Kiara Muraca.

Kiara joined the SES Redlands Unit when she was just 16, and in the five years since has proven her leadership skills.

She has been deployed across Queensland, including for the Stradbroke Island fires in 2018 and south-east Queensland's severe weather in January 2020.

Kiara said her dad inspired her to join the SES.

"He was really excited about going to an information night and brought me along, because he thought it would help me build up confidence," she said.

"It has to be one of the best decisions I have ever made."

Her advice to other young people joining the SES is don't be afraid to speak up or put your hand up for anything.

"There are so many members who are there to help and support you," she said.

"They want you to succeed and build confidence within yourself."

Her first major deployment was in Townsville for the 2019 floods, where she

backed up the team leader as second in command.

"I learnt so many useful skills from other units that I have carried into our local jobs and I continue to show other members these tricks," she said.

"Our main role was storm damage and heights, although no one really knew what was going to happen until we got there.

"Everyone worked as a team as if we had all known each other for years, but we had just met that week!

"A good leader is someone who allows everyone to have a say and be heard but can still take charge of a stressful situation," Kiara said. "They empower others and encourage growth and happiness."

## Role models

Christine Whitby and Shakira Westdorp both received honourable mentions for the Outstanding Contribution by a Female Firefighter Award.

Christine joined the Tirroan Rural Fire Brigade in 2010 and is a champion for women through her guest speaker engagements with various community groups and organisations. As a Volunteer Community Educator, she works tirelessly to ensure the community is well educated in fire preparedness. She has recently shown leadership by operating the communications van during disaster operations.

Shakira has consistently promoted QFES and firefighting as a career for women, inspiring many women to join fire and emergency services across Australia.

She has demonstrated leadership through her contributions to operational capability, diversity and inclusiveness in the South Eastern Region and the whole of QFES.

Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short received an honourable mention for the Male Champion Award for his long history of mentoring staff and volunteers and encouraging women in the progression of their careers. Mr Short gives his time generously as an enthusiastic and supportive mentor and a strong advocate for professional development.

## Dedicated to diversity

QFES as a whole was awarded the Member Organisation 'Diversity, Fairness and Inclusion' Award.

This award recognises QFES' dedication to diversity and inclusion, particularly the partnership between QFES and not-for-profit organisation CareerTrackers. QFES participates in the Indigenous Internship Summer Program each year, enhancing the economic participation of Indigenous peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland.

Assistant Commissioner Stephen Smith AFSM said, "Our partnership with CareerTrackers has given QFES the opportunity to be involved in the development and growth of our interns, introducing them to the emergency management sector, where they are able to see the tangible results of their work.

"We are very proud of the relationship we have built with CareerTrackers in creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students."



Kiara Muraca on deployment in Townsville during the 2019 floods.

## 2020 WAFA Awards

### Winners

Kiara Muraca – Youth Leadership Award

QFES – Member Organisation 'Diversity, Fairness and Inclusion' Award

### Honourable mentions

Christine Whitby and Shakira Westdorp – Outstanding Contribution by a Female Firefighter Award

Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short – Male Champion Award

# Focus on health and safety

As part of Safe Work Month, QFES is implementing a new set of policies, procedures and tools to support the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers.

There is nothing more important than your health and safety, which is why QFES has developed these new resources, along with an online learning program, to help you play your part in creating a safe workplace for everyone.

People Operations Support (formerly Human Capital Operations Support) Director Lyn Richards said the new policies and procedures cover a range of topics including risk management, consultation and communication, incident management and investigation.

“These documents provide practical tools and information on how to risk manage health and safety, with simplified requirements, easy-to-use forms and a consistent standard across the organisation,” Lyn said.

“Each and every day, our people take measured risks to protect the community, but with risk comes the potential for harm.

“A serious injury or illness can have a significant and long-lasting effect on someone and their family.

“We are always looking for ways to improve our work health and safety management systems including our policies, procedures, training, equipment, clothing, plant and equipment.”

To produce the new policies and procedures, the People Operations Support team invested the time in getting to know our business and how improved risk management, incident management, investigation and genuine consultation can better support QFES members.

The team consulted with QFES members through surveys, site visits and discussions at health and safety committees to get ideas and feedback on core policies and procedures.

“As a leader I am passionate about safety, not because it’s my job, but because



*New policies and procedures will help create a safer workplace for all QFES members.*

like all leaders and managers in QFES I genuinely care about making sure all our members have a safe and healthy work environment,” Lyn said.

“Safety leadership is where we demonstrate our commitment to a safe workplace through our actions and our words.

“QFES urges you to place health and safety at the forefront of your decision making,” Lyn said. “Make safety a common discussion topic in QFES.

“Make sure you report all hazards, incidents, near misses and injuries as soon as possible so we can continue to make things safer for everyone.”

The new learning programs are relevant to all QFES members and include a course designed for managers and another for staff and volunteers.

The courses will provide a high-level overview of the new requirements, as well as key information about the support and services available for your health, safety and wellbeing.

You can find the new policies and procedures, as well as supporting information and guidance around health, safety and wellbeing on the Gateway.



*QFES members can complete an online learning program to better understand the new policies and procedures.*

# Battling the elements

Hikers and climbers flock to the Glass House Mountains for outdoor adventure, but if they're not careful, they can get lost, stranded or injured. QFES has developed a new remote rescue course to make sure we're ready to respond.

QFES' new remote rescue team has rescued 190 people from mountains in the North Coast Region from the start of 2017 to mid-2020.

The team was formed from an existing group of trained vertical rescue personnel and the Technical Rescue Unit.

Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and State Emergency Service (SES) personnel completed their first training with an external provider in 2016, and QFES has since developed our remote rescue capability to the point where we can provide our own training course.

Fifteen FRS staff from the North Coast Region and Brisbane Region underwent the first two iterations of the QFES course in August to prove the course content.

Director of the Specialist and Technical Response Branch, Chief Superintendent Brad Commens, said the course trained QFES members to scramble across rock faces, establish anchor points in the natural environment and drill removable anchors to rescue people in danger.

"The 10-day training course is both mentally challenging and physically arduous because operators have to carry everything they need up the mountain," Brad said.

"Each remote rescue operator carries more than 20 kilograms of equipment, food, water and spare clothing so they and the people they're rescuing are totally self-sufficient."

Rescues often extend into the night, partly because many hikers and recreational climbers start in the afternoon, without realising they haven't left enough time to get down.

"Many people don't realise climbing down is far more treacherous than climbing up," Brad said.

"As night falls, there's also a lot of dew build-up on the rocks, which makes them slippery. Combining that with fading light, cooling temperatures and inevitable fear, this is often the time when the team is called on for rescues.

"We recently rescued three people who reached the top of a mountain as it was getting dark. They had no warm clothing, two of them had bare feet, and they only had one phone with a torch on it. They were definitely pleased to see the rescue team."

When it becomes too dangerous for the rescue party to descend in the dark, they can stay overnight on the mountain with

space blankets they take with them, or in emergency shelters.

"The shelter is a nylon bag made of tent material. Four people climb into it and sit in the corners, leaning against the walls to hold it up," Brad said.

"It's only about 1.4 metres long, 60 centimetres wide and 75 centimetres high. You can't get much sleep, but it maintains body heat and keeps the weather off, if there is a suitable place to set up on the mountain."

The walk to the point of rescue can often take several hours, and the casualty may need to be lowered or carried down the mountain over several more hours.

The team recently took more than nine hours to rescue four climbers from Mount Beerwah.

"The rescuers assembled at the base of the mountain at 4pm and arrived back with the rescued party at almost 1am.

"It cannot be understated how important the remote rescue operators' fitness and skill level is to ensuring they stay safe."

Another eight QFES members, including SES volunteers, will complete the course this month to build capability in the region.



QFES members have rescued 190 people from mountains in the North Coast Region since the start of 2017.



A stretcher being lowered down Mount Beerwah about 120 metres from the ground.



# Troubled waters

Firefighters tested their skills in a joint maritime exercise, Operation Troubled Waters, at the Port of Gladstone in September.

The planning officer for the event, Station Officer Shane Austin, said the exercise aimed to test and develop the new Gladstone Maritime Hazard Emergency Response Plan as well as strengthen interagency relationships and maintain operational skills.

“Gladstone has one of the largest multi-commodity ports in Australia, handling over 30 different products,” Shane said.

“Several maritime incidents have taken place there, such as bushfires and structure fires on the islands, boat fires and chemical spills, as well as incidents with high-risk infrastructure such as gas plants and coal terminals.

“We decided to simulate a hazmat response on one of the barges that carry bulk dangerous goods to the natural gas plants on Curtis Island.”

In the scenario, the gas detection system on the barge was activated and a propane truck driver was found unconscious with a head injury and suspected spinal injuries.

More than 30 people participated in the exercise, including QFES auxiliary firefighters and new recruits and officers.

“We put into practice a whole suite of skills, ranging from basic firefighting through to incident command,” Shane said.

“One of the main skills was intercommunication between different agencies.

“Six agencies were involved – QFES, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ), SeaLink Queensland and Gladstone Ports Corporation – and they all worked together seamlessly.

“QFES also recently became a member of the monthly Marine Safety Forum run by MSQ, which has improved interagency relations when it comes to port operations.”

The exercise helped the agencies discover how to improve processes such as communication, to make sure everyone received the information they needed at the right time.

“Maritime response is a complex environment in terms of command and control,” Shane said.

“The ship’s master is in command of the ship and the harbour master is in command of the harbour. MSQ is the command agency until the ship reaches the berth, and then QFES assumes control.

“The exercise helped us develop a smooth transition between the lead agencies, and revealed some procedures that could support this in future.”

For example, one of QFES’ biggest challenges is gaining access to boats or islands when fire breaks out on them.

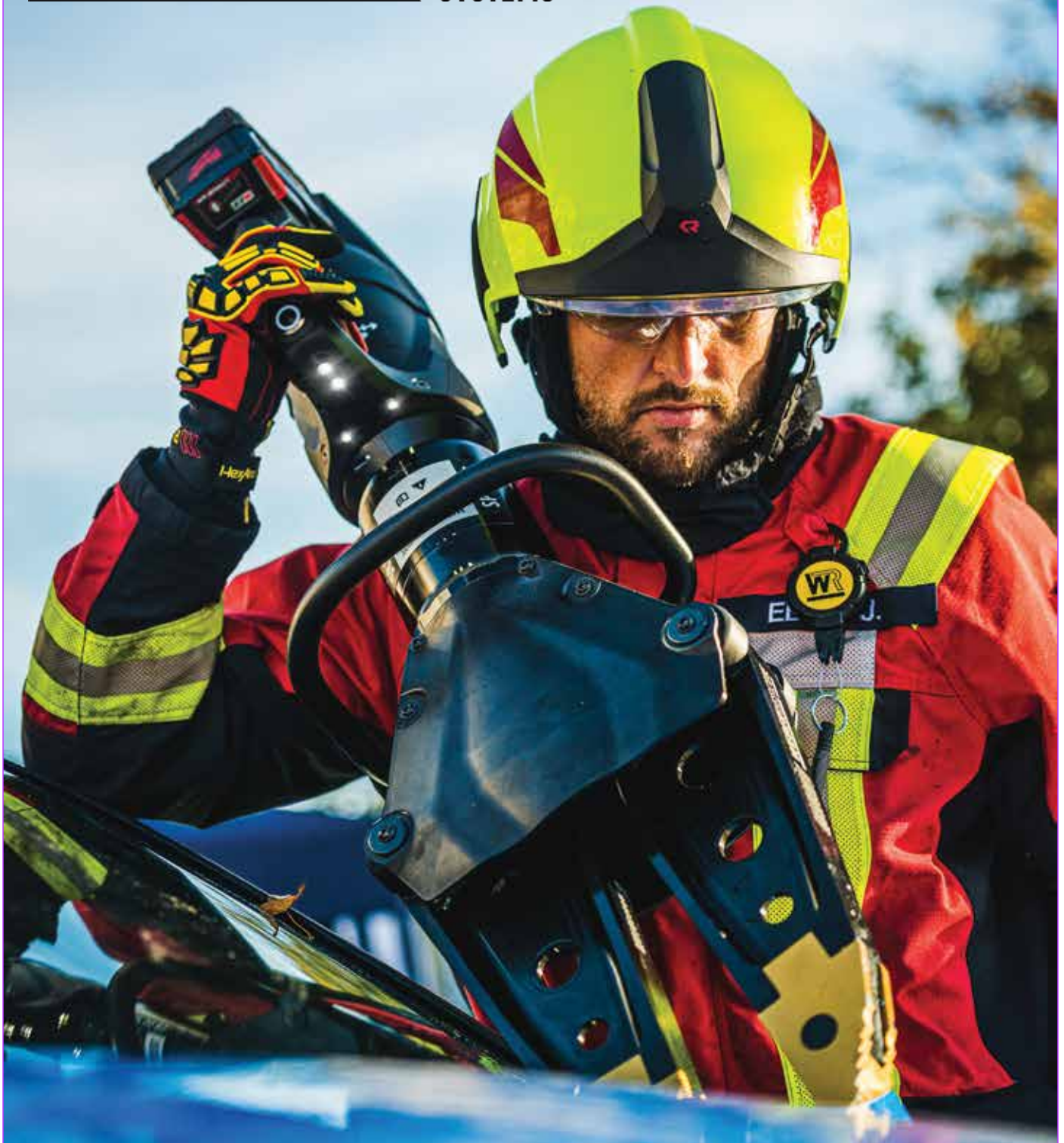
“We need access to vessels to attend these incidents, and thanks to our strong relationships with the other agencies, we now have contacts who will have a boat ready and waiting for us when we arrive at the marina,” Shane said.

Firefighters also took the opportunity to put the area’s brand-new Combined Aerial Pumping Appliance (CAPA) into use for the first time.

“This will be the first of many maritime exercises to improve our service delivery in the event of a large-scale incident in the Port of Gladstone, which could cause significant economic impact,” Shane said.

# WEBER RESCUE

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# A system that supports our decision making

**QFES has helped develop innovative new features for a system used by first responders around the world to protect themselves and the community.**

The Emergency Response Decision Support System (ERDSS) supports firefighters' and other emergency responders' decision making at a wide range of incidents, such as HAZMAT, chemical spills, explosions, biological threats, nuclear accidents and illicit drug labs.

Over the past decade, QFES Research and Scientific Branch (RSB) has played a key role in the system's development in collaboration with the Australian Government, United States Government and partners.

The RSB's expertise underpinned the development of the latest version of ERDSS, which has just been released internationally.

The new version includes information on new hazardous materials, as well as new and updated tools, such as a radiation shielding tool.

RSB Director Dr Michael Logan said the system was used every day across QFES and Australia.

"It caters to a range of users, from an introductory level, right through to more sophisticated users who rely on it for all kinds of decision making," Michael said.

"The system protects responders and the community by making incident management more effective and consistent.

"It's an international system used by about 5000 agencies globally, so a QFES member has access to the same information as someone working in the US."

ERDSS is available free on the App Store for first responders. It works on Windows, iPad and Android tablets and doesn't need to be connected to the internet.

A common situation where QFES members use ERDSS is for acetylene gas cylinders involved in a fire.

"The tool walks you through the steps to manage the incident and make the cylinder safe," Michael said.

"You first have to cool it down from a safe distance, then observe it for an hour while spraying it with water and checking with a thermal imaging camera every 15 minutes for signs of steam or heating.

"You just click on the tool and it takes you through the actions and precautions to consider. It starts a clock to show how long you have to wait and what you need to do next."

QFES developed a new radiation shielding calculator for the system. This can be used for incidents, such as road crashes, where a package containing a source of radiation is damaged.

"Our new shielding tool allows us to calculate what materials QFES members can use to protect themselves and others from the radiation.

"For example, if a truck crashes carrying a load of radioactive caesium and firefighters find the damaged package is emitting radiation, we can enter the details into ERDSS and it will tell them what materials can block the radiation and how much they need to use.

"Containers of water might be enough to stop most of the radiation, or they could use other materials such as plastic, concrete or lead."

Senior Firefighter John Myles, who recently completed a degree in physics, ran through all the calculations to produce the shielding tool.

It was a long process, from developing the logic and collecting the information to translating the research, testing the code, conducting user trials and sharing it with volunteers.

The system's illicit drug lab detector has also been updated.

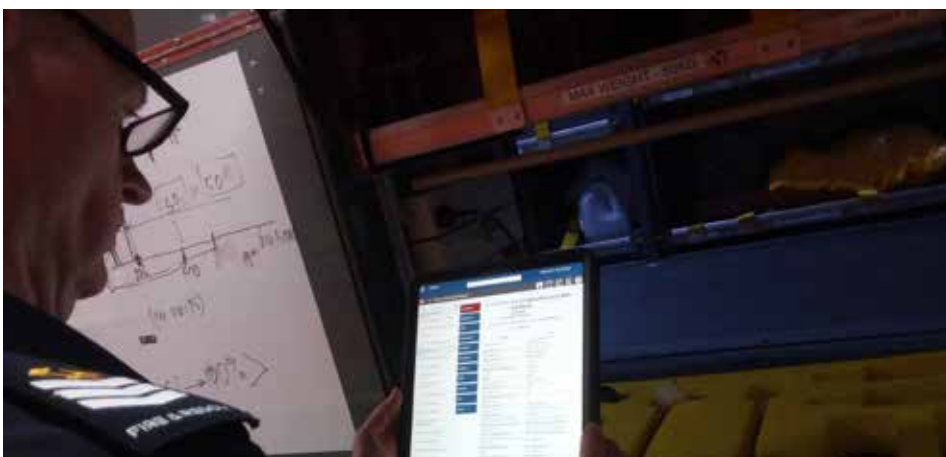
"If a QFES member or other emergency responder finds chemicals in a house that looks suspicious, they can enter them into ERDSS to see what kinds of drugs or explosives could be made with them.

"They can then protect themselves from those chemicals and make the scene safe."

Michael said one of the most exciting tools added in the new version of ERDSS is the Australian Initial Emergency Guidebook.

"The next time you attend a road crash involving hazardous chemicals, you can use it to guide your actions in those first few minutes until you can access more QFES expertise," he said.

Many more updates are planned in the next version of ERDSS, and QFES will continue to play a key role in their design and development.



Firefighters can use ERDSS at a wide range of incidents, from chemical spills to explosions and nuclear accidents.



The lounge room of the house investigated during Operation Ice Robe.

# Operation Ice Robe

A challenging operation that played out over several years shows how complex the science of fire investigation can be, and what it takes to pursue a case to completion.

## The scene

Fire Investigator Lindsay Spencer has investigated more than 250 fires over 12 years.

Operation Ice Robe, a fatal house fire in Kallangur in April 2010, was one of his most memorable investigations.

The home owner, whose wife died from smoke inhalation, was not at the scene during the fire and was suspected of foul play.

“It ended up being one of our most complex investigations in terms of the

amount of damage, unusual patterns at the scene, involvement with other agencies, research and testing, and ongoing communication with the Queensland Police Service (QPS),” Lindsay said.

“There were so many twists and turns. The case eventually led to a murder charge, and our evidence was crucial to that.”

## Sifting through the evidence

When fire investigators first arrive on a scene, they try to limit the information they receive from the attending crew.

“We try to avoid contextual bias – we don’t want external information to affect our judgement, so we try to see the damage for ourselves first,” Lindsay said.

“But with Operation Ice Robe, we knew something was wrong straight away from the sheer amount of smoke, its depth and colour, how low it was. We could tell it was an accelerated fire.”

First, fire investigators walk around the perimeter to consider all the external damage and see where it’s most concentrated.

They then enter the scene, moving from the least damaged areas to the most damaged until they find the room of origin, where they search for the source of the fire.

“In this case it was the front lounge room, in particular the couch, which was totally consumed by flames. I’ve never seen that level of consumptive damage to an item of furniture which was out of place against the remaining items,” Lindsay said.

“By the end of the day, the forensic investigators working alongside me had decided there was no more evidence to find, but I came back the next day.

The Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) investigates the cause and origin of structural fires, bushfires, explosions, transportation fires and hazardous material incidents across Queensland.

Three full-time investigators and a manager service the Brisbane Region and assist the other regions when needed.

They interpret patterns and damage to establish the fire ignition sequence and how the fire spread. It’s an extremely complex process, and analysing the scene is just the beginning.



“I did a layer search, carefully picking up layers and sifting debris, and I found a fuel can in the hallway, which turned out to be a second source of fire, suggesting it was lit intentionally.”

Lindsay ended up spending four days examining the house, and found two smoke alarms that were virtually undamaged because they'd been removed from the ceiling, despite being hardwired.

“I knew the batteries had been taken out before the fire, because the floor under them was clean.”

### Testing the findings

After locating the sources of the fire, the team runs tests to simulate the damage at the scene.

In the case of Operation Ice Robe, their goal was to simulate the destruction of the couch, possibly with a timing device that delayed ignition.

They conducted a series of test burns at the QFES Live Fire Campus at Whyte Island, using various types of improvised delayed ignition devices and fuel on a couch to discover if the owner could have lit the fire and given himself enough time to get away before the couch started to burn.

They found the fire could have been started by one of these ignition devices on top of the couch, which then ignited rags soaked in fuel at its base.

For complex cases, fire investigators draw on other experts, such as electrical safety officers who analyse whether the fire was caused by electrical activity, gas examiners who check for signs of damage from gas, and forensic locksmiths who can prove whether doors were locked during the fire.

### Presenting the case

Once the tests had confirmed the source of the fire in Operation Ice Robe, Lindsay appeared in court several times for inquests.

“There was a lot of pressure because apart from the detective investigating the case I was the only person giving evidence,” he said.

The owner of the house was eventually charged with arson, murder and fraud. The day before the fire, his insurance company had told him he'd only receive cash for his house contents if there was a major event such as a fire. He lodged a claim for the insurance within 24 hours of the blaze.

Fire investigators had proved the fire was deliberately lit, but questions remained around the complexity of the scene, the ambiguity of the timing and who had disabled the smoke alarms. QPS developed

six different scenarios for how the scene could have played out.

The suspect was not charged until 2018. When he didn't appear at his committal hearing, the magistrate ordered police to contact him, but he was found dead.

“It was a long and hard case,” Lindsay said, “but at least the evidence we presented in court was undisputed and went some way to clarifying what happened.”

### The nature of investigation

Daren Mallouk, Manager of the FIU, said fire investigation had been underestimated in the past, because it was considered to be based on flawed science.

“However, fire investigation evolved over time, embracing scientific principles that form the foundations of today's investigative process,” Daren said.

“We now have a much greater emphasis on fire science and fire dynamics, combined with sound fire engineering principles and a process that adheres to the scientific method.”

This commitment has seen 13 candidates start a two-year training course by the Canberra Institute of Technology to receive an Advanced Diploma of Public Safety (Fire Investigation).

“This course is highly regarded in the industry and is a first for QFES, which will see us well placed into the future,” Daren said.

According to Daren, fire investigators are a dedicated, passionate group.

“It takes a special kind of person to spend days conducting an investigation, then many more hours to document the report and face an aggressive defence lawyer in court, whose sole purpose is to discredit their findings and attack their credibility,” he said.



QFES fire investigators work closely with QPS.

The results from fire investigation inform many different areas of QFES, such as product recalls, legislation changes, community education and awareness, and operational response protocols.

### All worth it

Lindsay said the most rewarding part of the job was providing closure for people.

“If you find the reason for the fire, even if a family has lost someone, at least they're not wondering why or blaming themselves.

“I'll never forget this fire I investigated on Christmas Eve. No one was hurt but the house was gutted.

“When we finished investigating, this poor man who lived there was left alone, his possessions all gone. He wanted to go inside. I told him it was dangerous, but he insisted, so I offered to stay with him and show him where he could step so he wouldn't get hurt.

“He wanted to know what started the fire. He thought it was the washing machine, because he'd put a load on before he went out.

“He was blaming himself for the house burning down, but I told him it was just the Christmas tree – it wasn't his fault.

“I could see the relief on his face. He asked if I thought his washing would be safe, so I prised the machine open with a crowbar.

“His clothes were all wet because the machine had been halfway through the cycle when the fire started.

“It brought a tear to my eye to see him holding those clothes, which were the only thing he had left.

“Being able to spend a couple of hours with him, making sure he was okay and reassuring him the fire wasn't his fault, it brought a lot of joy.”



Fire investigators interpret patterns to determine a fire's cause and origin.



# CENTRAL REGION

## Windorah airport exercise

QFES recently facilitated a Barcoo Shire Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) Exercise at Windorah.

The exercise tested the Windorah Aerodrome Emergency Plan with a scenario that involved cascading events: an aircraft incident that affected airport operations, as well as a bushfire and COVID-19 considerations.

The council thanked the LDMG members, who are mostly volunteers from the local community, for their support and dedication to emergency services groups and public safety.

*Photos by Carla Adams.*



## Central Region gets behind R U OK? Day

Central Region staff and volunteers participated in R U OK? Day activities including morning teas, barbeques, paper plane flying and 'chuck-a-duck' competitions.

Central Region also conducted a competition for the best photo depicting the theme of R U OK? Day. Congratulations to Moura Emergency Services personnel and Lee Butler who took out the grand prize.

The Mackay QFES team held a barbeque and chuck-a-duck challenge (pictured above). Colourful ducks flew and bounced every which way. Unfortunately, one of the crews were called away after the first game, but their ducks were adopted by other players.

Good fun was had by all and \$85 was raised for the Mackay Grapevine Group.

## Multi-agency exercise at Emerald

During Operation Cool Burn, Iona Rural Fire Brigade collaborated with the local SES Unit, auxiliary crews and the Emerald Shire Council Local Disaster Management Group to organise a hazard reduction burn along the Nogoia River.

A total of 32 crew members attended the exercise, which was held in a controlled environment, and was a great training opportunity for the seven new Rural Fire Service members.

This multi-agency exercise displayed great community capabilities, interoperability and sustainability during the burn.





# NORTH COAST REGION

## Peregian fires anniversary event

On 12 September 2020, the Noosa Shire Council hosted a community recovery event to remember the fires that affected Peregian Beach 12 months ago.

More than 100 community members came along on the day, along with Sunshine Coast Council and Noosa Shire Council representatives.

Speakers recounted their experiences during the fires, including Regional Community Engagement Officer Julie Bruynius, who spoke about the need to be prepared. She challenged participants to finalise their emergency plans and take steps to be ready for unpredictable extreme weather events.

Inspector Robert Smith, who also spoke at the event, said there was a feeling of gratitude in the community.

“People were very thankful for QFES’ response to the fire,” he said.

“There was a real sense of support among the community, both for their peers and for the council and emergency services.

“The anniversary brought back memories and disbelief at what had happened. It helped people relive the experience in a healthy way.”

During the fires, Robert attended the scene as Deputy Incident Controller.

“The fires had such pure intensity in such a small period of time,” he said.

“I was impressed by how heavily QFES resourced our response in such a quick time. It’s a testament to QFES’ ability to provide those resources to keep Queenslanders safe.

“Because of the heavy resourcing, my role was to account for everyone on site, so I spent the whole night recording who was on scene.”

Robert said the anniversary event highlighted the positive outlook for Peregian moving forward.

“The speakers talked about the new growth they’ve seen, along with wildlife returning to the affected areas,” he said.

“Local wildlife groups also discovered that some patches of grassland forest actually held up substantially better than expected.

“I think this event gave the community some closure. It helped everyone realise that, yes, we have moved on from it.

“Even though Peregian forms a large area of the coast, it’s actually quite a small community, so the optimism at this event really helped those who were heavily impacted by the fires.”

Two storyboards filled with thank you cards to QFES were on display at the event, and the community were overwhelmed by the children’s messages and drawings, which showed the fire through their eyes.

Community members could access resources and talk to QFES members about getting ready and fire safety considerations.





# BRISBANE REGION

## Holistic approach to road safety

In 2019, Brisbane Region firefighters responded to more than 5000 road crashes.

To help change the narrative around road fatalities, Brisbane Region is taking a holistic approach to road safety. We are combining proactive community engagement with hands-on training for firefighters to support the community and ensure they understand the risk on the road.

### RAAP Program

Young people aged between 17 and 24 are over-represented in road crash fatalities and injuries. Brisbane Road Attitudes Action Planning (RAAP) is the only educational program that aims to change the attitudes of young drivers.

Brisbane RAAP Coordinator, Station Officer Alex Pearl, explained that, "As they move from L plates to P plates, they become the most dangerous drivers on the road.

"We're reducing the amount of road trauma emergency services have to contend with and reducing the ongoing trauma to families and friends who have to live with losing a loved one."

Highly trained operational firefighters in Brisbane Region with a passion for road safety have delivered 102 presentations to almost 15 000 students across Brisbane.

Drawing on his experiences as a paramedic, RAAP presenter Senior Firefighter Scott Harrison said, "The biggest benefit is students are hearing the message from frontline firefighters who are the ones dealing with the consequences of road trauma day to day."

### Road crash rescue training

Brisbane Region boasts an extensive capability for responding to road crashes, with a total of 456 operational firefighters



undertaking competency maintenance and an additional 71 trained in road crash rescue during 2019.

Station Officer Stuart Nivison explained that, "Firefighters are taken through the training to provide the fundamentals required for responding to a car accident and safely removing an entrapped person."

The course focuses on ensuring the safety of responding firefighters as well as the entrapped people.

In partnership with QUT School of Clinical Sciences, student paramedics worked alongside recruit firefighters to successfully perform a rescue of an entrapped person. The activity used students as actors to create a learning environment as realistic as possible.

### National Road Safety Week

Planning is underway across the region for National Road Safety Week from 15 to 22 November, encouraging the community to make a "pledge to drive so others survive".

Linking in with other agencies and local council, a focus is on creating COVID-19 safe engagement around road safety.

With RAAP presentations planned in the weeks leading up to National Road Safety Week, Brisbane Region is ensuring the conversation around road safety continues.



## USAR training day

Brisbane Region technical rescue staff conducted Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) training at the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy (QCESA) in September.

Even though this year's major Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) annual exercise was cancelled, the technical rescue staff, who are all members of DART, took the opportunity to use the training props designed for the exercise. These included a new

mobile training prop, which provided challenging scenarios for the crews.

They tested their knowledge and skills with a scenario involving the collapse of a small commercial building containing a basement carpark, with multiple people trapped.

Crews were confronted with complex rescues where they had to remove heavily trapped casualties from vehicles crushed by the collapse.

They established scene safety and conducted search and rescue operations to account for all casualties, using equipment from first responding appliances and Brisbane Region USAR support.

Operations included structural monitoring and shoring, technical search, heavy lifting and moving, concrete cutting and breaching as well as road crash rescue.

The training also exposed the technicians to the newest generation in USAR equipment available to Brisbane Region. This included a new technical search camera, electrical concrete cutting equipment, wireless laser structural monitoring unit, and battery-operated rescue tools.

The training provided valuable skills maintenance and development, enhancing Brisbane Region's ability to respond to structural collapse incidents.



# SOUTH EASTERN REGION

## Esk Fire and Rescue Station opening

The new Esk Fire and Rescue Station was officially opened in September, with Acting Captain Denis Buckley receiving the keys.

The \$1.75 million facility replaces the original station, which was 42 years old, and will provide an improved service to the local and surrounding communities.

The station boasts state-of-the-art features including a duty office, training room, two engine bays, BA facilities and turnout clothing cupboards.



## St Carthage's Cathedral fire

Gold Coast crews were called to assist Fire and Rescue NSW with a fire at St Carthage's Cathedral in Lismore on 18 September.

To bring the fire under control and minimise damage to the cathedral, QFES crews worked alongside Fire and Rescue NSW crews from Lismore, Alstonville, Ballina, Casino, Coraki and Goonellabah, as well as NSW Ambulance Service and NSW Police Service.

The QFES crews monitored temperature ranges across the roof area and supplied aerial photos to the Incident Controller (IC).

They worked well within the IC's plan and maintained necessary COVID-19 precautions. They remained as a single unit at all times, operating within a 'bubble' to support fire ground operations. A register was established to record any unavoidable contact with non-QFES personnel.

The incident highlighted the value of having Automatic Fire Alarm systems installed. The rapid response of Fire and Rescue NSW, combined with an aggressive internal attack by first-arriving crews, permitted an early handover to NSW Police Service by midday.

NSW and Queensland officers tested solutions for cross-border communications, including testing new systems on the fire ground.

Future work is planned in this area to support the continual improvement in cross-border relationships between QFES and Fire and Rescue NSW.

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

## Somerset SES assist QPS

Somerset State Emergency Service (SES) was recently activated to support Queensland Police Service (QPS) for a somewhat unusual tasking.

QPS had been called to a trespassing incident at a rural property near Esk when the offender ran to a nearby dam and swam to the distant bank to elude police.

As police approached from around the bank, he swam back to the other side, repeating this tactic several times.

Growing tired of this game, QPS called for an SES flood boat to assist in capturing the trespasser.

When he saw the flood boat arrive, he surrendered to QPS without the boat even getting wet.



## SES Volunteer Community Educator training

A small group of Ipswich State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers came together in August for the first South Eastern Region SES Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) course, conducted by Acting Local Controller Amy Hartness.

VCEs provide a vital operational support role, dedicated to educating and supporting communities, delivering QFES key messages and fostering community participation.

The course was well received and built on the skills already held by the members who attended. South Eastern Region SES are looking forward to bringing in VCE trainers for a small workshop and rolling out more courses for SES across the region.



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# SOUTH WESTERN REGION

## New appliances for South Western Region

The region has received about \$4 million in new appliances to boost firefighting capabilities.

Killarney, Warwick and Highfields Fire and Rescue Stations received three new Type 2 Urban Pumpers.

The appliances are equipped with the latest road crash rescue and recovery equipment, as well as Compressed Air Foam Systems and Post Pump Foam Injection Systems to enhance firefighting operations and reduce water usage.

Anzac Avenue Fire and Rescue Station in Toowoomba also received a type 3 Urban Pumper worth \$1.8 million.

This aerial unit is one of the most sophisticated appliances in the Asia Pacific Region and is capable of rapid deployment to a full height of 32 metres in 90 seconds.

The unit can aide rescues up to 10 storeys high, or reach down into swollen rivers and creeks. It will service Toowoomba and surrounding areas.



## Road Safety Week

QFES joined forces with the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Department of Transport and Main Roads and Toowoomba Regional Council at the official launch of Road Safety Week at Highfields Shopping Centre in August.

QFES members engaged with the community to help them understand the Fatal Five and think about their actions while driving.

The Assistant Commissioners for the Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service and Fire and Rescue Service spoke about reducing speed, wearing a seatbelt, driver fatigue, alcohol and distraction caused by mobile phones.

Road Safety Week events around the region included displays at Grand Central Shopping Centre, Fatal Five Awareness and Road Attitude and Action Planning Presentations at schools, and engagement with local drivers.

Although COVID-19 limited the number of face-to-face events this year, online activities included an interactive Street Smarts program through Toowoomba Main Roads.

Feedback from the community was positive, with many drivers admitting they hadn't always followed the Fatal Five and appreciated the reminder to stay safe on the roads.





# FAR NORTHERN REGION

## Garry Pickering named Regional Volunteer of the Year

First Officer Garry Pickering (pictured second from right) was recently presented with his 2020 Far Northern Regional Volunteer of the Year Certificate by Assistant Commissioner John Bolger.

Garry demonstrated exemplary service when responding to structural fires within the remote rural township of Croydon.

Even though most of his experience was with wildfires, Garry responded quickly and efficiently to a house fire in May 2018. He ensured all occupants were accounted for and isolated power to the property.

Garry then retrieved an extinguisher from his vehicle and fought the fire until other members of the brigade arrived to assist. His quick actions minimised damage to the property and prevented further harm to the residents.

In December 2018, Garry responded to another structure fire at Queensland's oldest operating general store, established in 1894. The nearest supporting brigade was several hours away.

Garry directed his crew to fight the fire while he ensured the adjoining accommodation buildings had been evacuated and all occupants accounted for.

Aside from containing and extinguishing the fire, firefighters immediately commenced exposure protection for petrochemical products stored on a neighbouring property.

In his role as leader and mentor, Garry has demonstrated his commitment to the Rural Fire Service while operating under pressure to preserve life and property.



## Vale Paul Russell, 11 December 1950 – 4 September 2020

Paul Russell joined the Atherton SES Group on 19 September 1977 and gave many years of dedicated service.

He was appointed Local Controller on 29 June 1992 and remained in this position until retiring from the role on 29 June 2017.

Before joining the SES, Paul was a member of the fire service and participated in many exercises including bush fires, road crash rescue, road closures, airport and maritime scenarios.

Paul always displayed a positive and encouraging demeanour around 'the troops' and was very supportive when members were exposed to potentially traumatic operations.

He was a strong believer in working together with other SES Units and emergency services, both operationally in the field and through combined training activities.

Paul played a leading role for many weeks in the coordination of responses to Tropical Cyclone Larry and Tropical Cyclone Yasi when the effects of both were felt across the Atherton Tablelands.

He coordinated numerous activations over the years, including missing person searches, traffic management at road crashes, land and forensic searches and agency support requests.

Paul also held various positions within Scouts Queensland from 1967 to 2015, rising to the position of District Commissioner for the Tablelands District.



## Trinity Bay High School cultural collaboration

Acting Community Engagement Officer Peta Staples has been visiting the English as an Additional Language (EAL) class at Trinity Bay High School as part of a program to raise awareness around prevention and preparation for emergencies.

Peta, who originates from New Zealand, engaged with the students by opening the presentation with a Pepeha, a Maori greeting, in her native language, introducing herself and her cultural background.

She translated this into English and it was then translated to Swahili and Nepali for the students, who originate from Africa and Nepal and now reside in Cairns.

Peta helped the students understand the differences between the emergency services so they knew who to call in certain emergency situations.



# NORTHERN REGION

## Round Mountain Rural Fire Station opening

In June 2016, Round Mountain made the step up from a Primary Producer Brigade to a Rural Fire Brigade.

At that time, the brigade had nine members, trained at members' properties and held meetings around a fire in the middle of Round Mountain Road.

As a non-levy brigade, a hectic three years of fundraising and grant writing culminated in September of 2019, when the brigade moved into its newly constructed station, complete with a new appliance and now boasting 70 active members.

The official opening of the station was originally set for November 2019. Unfortunately, the national fire emergency saw members deployed to south-east Queensland, Victoria and the ACT, and the opening had to be postponed.

The rescheduled opening was then set for March 2020, but was again postponed due to COVID-19.

Third time lucky — the opening was scheduled for 22 August 2020 and successfully went ahead.

Official guests included Commissioner Greg Leach, Assistant Commissioner Northern Region Steve Barber, and representatives from the businesses and community groups that assisted with constructing the station.

First Officer Ian Hemerik said, "It's been a long journey. We have finally had the official opening and Round Mountain Rural Fire Brigade is well placed to continue to support our local community."



## COVID coping

When COVID-19 hit, many of us found ourselves in unsettling times. It soon became apparent things were going to get worse before they got better.

Northern Region chose a split workforce strategy to mitigate the risk to staff in the regional office, creating red and blue teams.

Staff created Microsoft Teams sites to communicate and collaborate while working from home. The sites quickly became a positive way to interact and engage with colleagues.

The blue team raised the ante when they decided to have a weekly dress-up meeting, with some staff going above and beyond the call.

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



## A surprise in the mail

Mt Isa Fire and Rescue Station recently received an unusual package, weighing about 10 kilograms.

Area Commander, Acting Inspector Corrie Benson opened it to discover an old fire service bell, made of cast iron. An accompanying letter described where it had come from:

*"Dear Chief Fire Officer,*

*This letter is to explain a parcel (bag) I have sent to your station [...]*

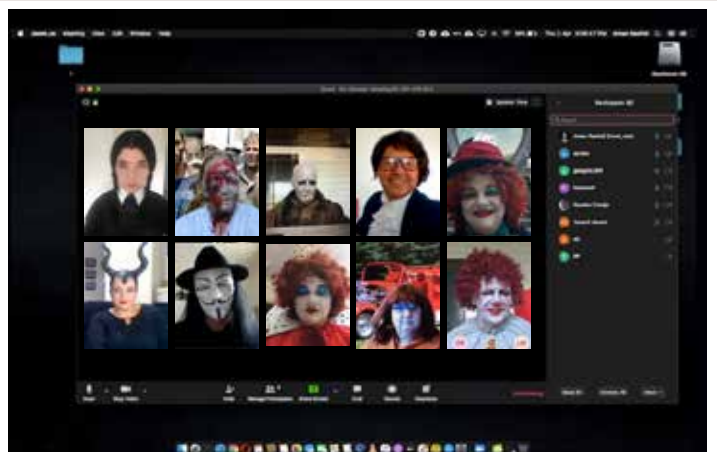
*In the early 70's my brother and myself were 15 years old and 17 years old doing apprenticeships + cadetships at Mount Isa and stayed in the old BSD Barracks! Drinking was about the only activity available apart from sport.*

*One night near the barracks there was a big party at one of the houses. Next morning, we "had acquired" a "Trophy". A long story short my brother was killed in a mine at Blackwater Qld. I was in the coal mines in NSW. We shifted his widow to Mackay Qld. Recently my other brother died and his widow rang me and said what was I going to do with "THIS BELL"? I don't know how she came to have this bell 50 or so years later.*

*Anyway, I think this bell was a fire bell stored while renovations were being done at your station.*

*Apologies unlimited for our misdemeanour [...]"*

The return of the bell is very timely, with the new Mt Isa Fire Station expected to be opened in early October, where the bell will be displayed in the station foyer.



# Many ways to make a difference

Many people at QFES wear more than one hat, serving the people of Queensland through multiple roles across the State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS) and Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). We spoke to three multi-talented people about the different ways they contribute to their communities through their QFES roles.

## KYLIE BENNETT

**South Eastern Region**

*RFS volunteer, auxiliary firefighter, FRS firefighter and FireCom Officer*

### What led you to work with QFES?

I wanted to work in an organisation that had strong values, helped the community and had many career options. I had a friend who worked as a firefighter and when I was looking for a new career outside veterinary nursing, they suggested QFES. The more I learnt, the more I wanted to be involved.

### How did you transition from one role to another?

I started out wanting to be a firefighter. I completed four years of applications to become successful. During that four years I wanted to get involved as much as possible. I joined my local rural fire brigade and after completing my Fire Minimum Skills I conducted hazard reduction burns for the Gold Coast City Council.

During RFS training one night, we visited FireCom, and from that I thought it would be something I could do. I applied and after six months started my recruit course. I was successful at the end of 2019 for both an urban firefighter and auxiliary firefighter position.

### What do you like most about your roles?

The variety, the people, the community, the learning. There is never a day that is the same. There are so many ways to help and to learn.

Being a rural firefighter gets you out among your community and helps build their resilience.

At FireCom you are the first point of contact on someone's worst day – they trust you to get them the help they need asap. As an urban and auxiliary firefighter you become this help, you become their support and their teacher.

No two jobs are the same – you have a toolbox of skills and then you apply these to each situation. The people you work with become your extended family. You get to build a relationship and trust with your community young and old.

### What attributes make a good QFES member?

You need self-awareness both physically and mentally, but most important is a big heart. If you have a big heart you can achieve anything.

**“You get to build a relationship and trust with your community young and old.”**

*Kylie Bennett*



# MATTHEW CUTBUSH

## South Eastern Region

*RFS volunteer, auxiliary firefighter and FRS firefighter*

### What led you to work with QFES?

During high school I always knew I wanted to help people in my local and greater community. I saw an advertisement for volunteer rural firefighters and applied within a week of turning 16.

After gaining a position I was hooked and made a plan to attain my current position as a full-time career firefighter.

### How did you transition from one role to another?

As an RFS volunteer, I got a taste of the organisation and the kind of work we do. While continually progressing through volunteer firefighter development courses and ranks for three years, I became an auxiliary firefighter.

Using my volunteer background, I gained a new set of skills as an auxiliary and served as both for a further three years, before combining my experience in both roles to produce the building blocks to become a career firefighter.

### What do you like most about your role?

Making a difference. As a firefighter I have been trained to help people during the most stressful and sometimes worst times of their lives.

### Could you describe any moments that made you proud to work for QFES?

There are too many moments to count. However, the proudest moment of my QFES career was a young boy thanking me for saving his mother after my crew and I responded to her car crash.

### What attributes make a good firefighter?

Empathetic, compassionate, dedicated and driven.



# CHRIS WEGGER

## Far Northern Region

*SES volunteer, RFS volunteer and public servant*

### What led you to work with QFES?

Back in 2011 the Disaster Management space was looking for people with engagement, teaching and natural hazard management skills. I figured my skills and previous roles would be advantageous.

### How did you transition from one role to another?

Using my previous knowledge and skills, I successfully managed to work in many roles across QFES. My substantive role is a Regional Community Engagement Officer, but I've also performed roles such as Bushfire Safety Officer, Area Training Support Officer and I am currently acting as an Emergency Management Coordinator. I'm also an RFS volunteer firefighter with my local brigade.

### What does your role involve?

As an Acting Emergency Management Coordinator, I provide advice to local governments, communities and stakeholders in relation to working within the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements in its many areas of Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR).

### What do you like most about the role?

Being able to help people, whether it's navigating legislation or government process, assisting communities to understand hazards and how to mitigate the risk or just having a chat about the weather! I do like a challenge and love working in Incident Management Teams (IMT) or responding to bushfires.

### Could you describe any moments that made you proud to work for QFES?

Working in local communities, creating or implementing process or advising on a topic and seeing the end results – how it actually assists people or empowers the community.

### What attributes make a good QFES member?

Be yourself, understand what it is to be citizen centric. Be empathetic and courageous – speak out about what's right, not who's right.



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# Epic ride for a good cause

**Maroochydore firefighter Sam Cooke rode his bike on a solo journey from Brisbane to Cairns over 12 days to raise funds for cancer research.**

Sam has participated in group charity rides since 2003, and has focused his efforts on fundraising for cancer research since 2016, after his mum died from cancer.

Many of the group rides couldn't go ahead this year due to COVID-19, but Sam was determined to find a way to continue his fundraising, so he decided to do a solo ride.

QBank quickly came on board as the major sponsor, donating \$5000 to the cause, and the QBank for Cancer Ride was born.

Sam has long been an avid cyclist, having once cycled across Cuba and participated in several Bike 4 Burns rides.

"Riding by yourself is harder in some ways, but it gives you independence," he said.

"If you're having a hard day, you can just stop and have a coffee. The only thing I had to worry about was getting to my accommodation in time each night.

"The first few days were the hardest, and then my legs got used to it."

Sam managed to avoid getting a single blister or scrape on his journey, and only had one flat tyre. He only took what he needed so the weight wouldn't slow him down.

"All I had was the pockets in my jersey, where I fit a spare pair of clothes in a zip lock bag, sunscreen, charging cables, toothbrush, phone, lip protector and wind vest."

Sam covered almost 2000 kilometres, and his biggest day was day three, when he rode 240 kilometres from Hervey Bay to Miriamvale, with 1500 metres of elevation.

"I was going ok for the first 180 kilometres, and then I started to fade, particularly with the wind blowing in my face," Sam said.

"By 215 kilometres I was shattered and wondering how I was going to make it. I thought of many things as I rolled along to try and take the pain in my legs away.

"Luckily I took a hard left with 25 kilometres to go and I felt so much better with the wind behind me.



*The end of the ride at the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon.*

"But the thing is, people with cancer don't get to just turn a corner and feel better."

He had great weather most of the way, but his fifth day was stalled in the morning due to fog in Rockhampton.

On day six, he rode 165 kilometres from Saint Lawrence to Mackay through heavy wind and rain, with spray from trucks and caravans whizzing past.

He rode the final 60 kilometres from Babinda to Cairns on 15 August.

"I couldn't have picked a better day to finish the ride. It was sunny, blue skies and tailwinds all the way," Sam said.

"One of my favourite parts of the ride was the supportive attitude of people along the way, even strangers who wanted to help wherever they could.

"I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has donated. Every little bit helps the search for a cure for cancer and the most effective ways to treat this miserable disease."

More than \$15 000 has been donated so far but Sam hopes to keep raising more

funds for the research of causes, treatment, and prevention of cancer through the work of Mater Research.

You can read more about Sam's adventures, and find out how to donate, on the QBank for Cancer Ride Facebook page.



*Sam at the Golden Gumboot in Tully.*



North Coast Regional Manager Peter Hollier was announced as the inaugural ABC Wide Bay Media Award winner at the 2020 Brian Prince Awards. He was recognised for his leadership in establishing strong relationships between the Rural Fire Service and local media, and coordinating special community service radio announcements.



Innisfail Fire and Rescue Service B Shift crew got more than they bargained for when they were called to assist Queensland Ambulance Service in Belvedere and ended up helping deliver a healthy baby boy.



QFES members marked the start of the Darkness to Daylight challenge on 1 October with a walk along Kedron Brook. This year, participants will join a 110-kilometre virtual run, with each kilometre symbolising a life lost to domestic and family violence in Australia each year.



In September we welcomed Suncorp as our Principal Community Partner ahead of a potentially busy storm and cyclone season. SES volunteers abseiled down Suncorp Stadium in celebration.



The Mission Beach, Tully and Cardwell SES Groups were awarded an Assistant Commissioner's Certificate at a presentation at Tully Police Station, acknowledging their efforts in response to a triple fatality parachuting incident at Mission Beach in October 2017. SES teams provided emergency lighting, gazebos and other support for the initial response and forensics team.



Volunteer handlers and their operational dogs undertook Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) training at Whyte Island.





Far Northern Region celebrating Yellow Ribbon Day.

Rural Fire Service Assistant Commissioner John Bolger presented Islay Robertson, departing Chief Operating Officer HQ Plantations, with a Commendation recognising his commitment to improving cooperation and interoperability at fires and strengthening our partnership.



Widgee Rural Fire Brigade volunteer Chris Lhotka received an Order of Australia Medal for his service to the community.



Assistant Commissioner John Bolger wore his purple tie in support of the tenth Wear it Purple day on Friday 28 August. QFES and Wear it Purple strive to foster supportive, safe, empowering and inclusive environments for LGBTIQ+ young people.



Christopher Clemence (left) won the Fire Communications Recruit Course Commissioner's Dux Award at the Fire Communications Officers graduation in August.



The new Fire and Rescue Service insignia was unveiled at a ceremony in September, the culmination of years of work by the Uniforms and Logistics team.



On Firefighters' Remembrance Day on 10 October, Queenslanders paid tribute to the 53 firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty since 1877.



# Celebrating 40 years of service

Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche AFSM has celebrated his 40-year anniversary with QFES. He reflects on a long and varied career where the one constant has been his dedication to protecting Queensland communities.

A lot has changed in 40 years, from geographical boundaries, to the services QFES provides, and the intensity of the fire season.

For Mark Roche, it has seen him progress from an auxiliary firefighter in Ipswich in 1979 to QFES' Deputy Commissioner of Readiness and Response Services and the Chief Officer of the Fire and Rescue Service, responsible for leading and managing operations for QFES across Queensland.

Mr Roche's career has evolved through several leadership roles, including Assistant Commissioner, Far Northern Region, and Assistant Commissioner, Community Safety and Training.

But he said he still remembered every job he attended as a firefighter.

"I have vivid memories of all the people who were there, all the activities.

"I'll be driving down the road and look over to the side and think about how I responded to a burning house or road crash.

"These things stay with you."

One of his personal highlights while in New York last year was being part of the QFES contingent who marched to the Twin Towers for the 9/11 commemorative services. Travelling around Queensland and interstate for operational deployments has also helped him see the bigger picture.

Mr Roche said when he started at QFES there was a strong focus on geographical areas.

"It was almost at a point where the white line in the middle of the road between one town and another was the delineation and you'd never cross it," he said.

"Now there are no boundaries at all. We deploy anywhere within the state, as well as nationally and internationally. Once upon a time that was never even thought of.

"We've got some really good relationships with Queensland Police Service, Queensland Reconstruction Authority, local governments and other state departments.

"The assistance we provide, for example during COVID-19, is something that 20 years ago we would never have done. Now it's almost seamless," Mr Roche said.

Reflecting on 40 years' worth of achievements, there are many proud moments for Mr Roche.

"We have an important role in influencing legislation and making sure people are safe in their communities. A lot of work has been done to strengthen our building compliance and approval process over the past 20 years.

"I'm really pleased with improvements in road crash rescue. We attend about 14 000 incidents each year, and the amount of people who lose their lives is probably, in the last few years, the lowest it's ever been.

"Our people have saved many lives through their training and expertise in getting to incidents and extracting people from their vehicles."

Mr Roche said he'd learnt from everybody in the organisation at every level.

"I always see the good in people, and I always believe people have the best interest of QFES at heart.

"I know some people every now and then fall off the rails, but you pick them up and dust them off."

Mr Roche said QFES will look very different in another 40 years.

"Climate change is causing longer fire seasons. Once upon a time we'd go to a fire for a couple of hours or half a day. Now we've had our State Operations Centre open for more than 400 days.

"We're living climate change now," he said.

"I don't necessarily know what the future holds, but I think we need to be agile and open to change and also challenge things if we're going down the wrong path.

"For example, we need to consider how we live and the economies of alternative forms of energy. I have no doubt we'll have electric fire appliances in the future, and we need to be part of the innovation that brings that forward."

Mr Roche said he was proud of how the whole department was open to change.

"We are now three operational services – Fire and Rescue Service, State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service.

"We have the strength of the individual services, and their skills and their culture, but we can also combine them.

"I think the future's bright. If we follow our values of respect, integrity, courage, loyalty and trust, our organisation can go anywhere."



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