

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE AUGUST 2021



**Operation
Cool Burn**
Preparing for
bushfire season

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ON THE COVER

Firefighter Aston Benjamin Le Cornu from Ilkley and District Rural Fire Brigade conducting a hazard reduction burn at Buderim as part of Operation Cool Burn. Photo by Strategic Content Services.

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QFES acknowledges and recognises Traditional Owners as custodians of the lands where we work together with the communities of Queensland. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors of these lands, their spirits and their legacy.

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FOREWORDS



GREG LEACH
Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Over the past 12 months I've spoken with more than 600 staff and volunteers during my regional visits, which are almost complete. It was a pleasure to meet so many of you and talk about what matters to you.

Our conversations have helped me understand better than ever what is working well at QFES and where we can improve. Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback with me and for being so open and honest.

More than anything, I was touched to see the immense pride you take in your duties, and your commitment to keeping your fellow community members safe.

In September, the annual Working for Queensland and Volunteering for Queensland surveys will be open. The surveys give you an opportunity to help shape QFES' future while improving your work and volunteering experiences.

Please take your time and give your honest feedback, so we can continue to make QFES a great place to work.

Reflecting on our work is an important part of staying relevant and increasing our efficiency. The QFES Independent Review is another opportunity to examine what we do. I look forward to the recommendations, which will guide how we deliver services to the Queensland community in the future.

Operationally, we have just commenced Operation Paratus for this year's bushfire season. While the outlook so far for the season indicates the risk of bushfires this year will be reasonably low, as we know Queensland weather patterns are unpredictable. That is not to say we won't be tested on days of high fire danger, as vegetation across the state cures.

As the lead agency for bushfire management in Queensland, it is QFES' responsibility to prepare our people, the community and our disaster management partners for the heightened bushfire risk period.

To improve how we deliver this responsibility our bushfire preparedness program has a specific focus on community preparedness and creating greater connectivity between QFES and our communities leading into days of heightened bushfire risk, and during bushfire incidents. The report for last year's bushfire season, Operation Quell, noted that despite a short and relatively quiet bushfire operational season for 2020-21 the K'gari fire lasted two months and attracted much media attention.

The recent lockdowns around Australia are a stark reminder the COVID threat is far from over. Outbreaks can happen quickly and without warning, so we must continue to be flexible.

Thank you for taking this in your stride and continuing to get the job done. I particularly want to thank our State Emergency Service members and auxiliary firefighters who are working hard at the borders and airports to help stop the spread of the virus. It can be hard to know what to expect when the situation is always changing, but here at QFES we pride ourselves on our adaptability.

We hold a privileged position in the community. Not only do they look to us for guidance and support when things go wrong, they see us as a model of resilient and responsible behaviour. I am more confident than ever that we will continue to rise to this challenge.



MARK ROCHE
Deputy Commissioner

READINESS AND RESPONSE SERVICES

I can confidently say the future is bright, after I attended the seventh annual Emergency Services Cadet Games in Brisbane last month. It was fantastic to see the teamwork and advanced skills on display among the 250 cadets.

I enjoyed talking with them about their goals and aspirations and I was impressed by their dedication to their communities. I am proud of our recently renewed partnership with PCYC to support the Emergency Services Cadets program.

QFES achieved another milestone recently with the largest firefighter recruit parade in our history. In all, 69 firefighters joined our ranks. Congratulations and welcome to the QFES family.

My hearty congratulations also to the three QFES leaders who received awards in this year's Queens Birthday Honours – Chief Superintendents Brad Commens AFSM and Tony Johnstone AFSM and Director Brian Cox ESM. All three have gone well and truly beyond the call of duty throughout their careers, and it's a pleasure to see their commitment recognised.

One of the latest examples of innovation is the construction of Australia's first contemporary timber fire and rescue station. The upgraded Maryborough Fire and Rescue Station and new QFES regional headquarters will be made with timber sourced from the Wide Bay area.

This is a great initiative that explores how we can make our infrastructure more sustainable and reduce our emissions.

Bushfire season will soon be upon us, but thankfully the weather patterns suggest it will be less intense than previous years. Our RFS volunteers have been out in force, working with our partners and the community to prepare, and have completed 560 mitigation activities so far.

Part of our firefighting arsenal is the Large Air Tanker (LAT), which has returned to Queensland and will be stationed in Bundaberg during bushfire seasons for the next four years. The LAT played a major role in containing fires last year and will no doubt be an integral part of our response in 2021.

Although the bushfire season is expected to be relatively quiet, the same may not be true of the severe weather season that follows it. Emergency Management Australia (EMA) will conduct the annual pre-season briefing on 20 September, where QFES will present alongside the Bureau of Meteorology and EMA.

This event will provide the outlook for the severe weather season, including the tropical cyclone outlook.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of staff and volunteers who continue to support COVID-19 operations. We are living in unprecedented times and it is commendable the commitment shown by staff and volunteers during recent lockdowns and our ability to adapt and support each other through these challenges.

Operation Cool Burn

Bushfire season commences on the first day of spring, and while it may not be as intense as in previous years, there are still risks. QFES is working hard with our partners and the community to be resilient and ready.

In 2021, QFES has adopted innovative approaches with partner agencies and local governments to assist in Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery when supporting our communities. Each year we adapt our strategies to reflect local risk while taking into account seasonal changes and infrastructure development.

QFES, with the Rural Fire Service (RFS) as the lead, works with many land management agencies and landholders at the local government level. These Area Fire Management Groups representing 77 local governments have identified 295 high-risk areas in 2021.

To address these high-risk locations, 560 mitigation activities have been planned, including hazard reduction burns, community engagement and education, construction and maintenance of fire breaks and fire trails.

Working with the community

Adam Moss, Executive Manager Office of Bushfire Mitigation Strategy and Policy, said it was important to remember QFES was not a principal landowner.

Many high-risk locations are public land, managed by federal, state and local government departments or authorities who are responsible for managing fire on their land. QFES as a partner assists in managing that risk.

QFES continues to forge and develop partnerships with local governments and major stakeholders such as the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Natural Resources Assessment unit (Vegetation Hub) from the Department of Resources, Local Government Association of Queensland, Department of Transport and Main Roads, HQ Plantations and many traditional owner groups.

“QFES’ goal is to be active within our local communities to help Queenslanders increase their resilience in bushfires,” Adam said. “It’s all about connecting with local knowledge and understanding how a community operates.”

“The RFS are recruiting seven mitigation inspectors, one for each region, who will also become the chief fire wardens. We are also recruiting eight First Nations Bushfire Safety Officers (BSO), recognising the traditional use of fire in the landscape and on country.”

“This means each region will have additional staff who will work with volunteer brigades, fire wardens, communities and stakeholders to better mitigate bushfire.”

“The rainfall, while favoured by farmers and gardeners, has made it hard for land managers to undertake significant mitigation burning activities.”





“For successful vegetation burning, the ground moisture needs to be within certain parameters – too wet and the fuel will not burn, too dry and you can damage the environment or lose control of the burn.”

Cultural burning

Adam said the new First Nations BSOs would allow QFES to better understand the methods behind cultural burning and managing country.

“Their ancestors have been managing the land for thousands of years,” he said.

“Some of our brigades are already working with Indigenous landholders and assisting with cultural burns. This is becoming more common and will eventually be part of business-as-usual for QFES.

“There’s so much to learn. For example, where and when fire is applied to the landscape allows native flora and fauna to reproduce and thrive. There is knowledge and culture behind it that we’re yet to understand.”

The power of volunteers

Adam, who is an RFS volunteer, said QFES relied on our RFS volunteers to conduct bushfire safety mitigation activities across the state.

“Volunteers are the backbone of our business,” he said.

“Mitigation is the key to building community resilience. Working cooperatively RFS, State Emergency Service, Fire and Rescue Service, QFES corporate support, local government and many of our Area Fire Management Group partners actively participate in engagement and education activities in schools, retirement villages, shopping centres, shows and parks throughout the year.

“Our fire wardens are crucial to bushfire mitigation. They are community-based and have a strong understanding of fire behaviour and local risks. They are the touchpoint between what we do and what’s happening in the community and the responsible use of fire in the landscape.”

Return of the Large Air Tanker

The Queensland Government recently announced the Large Air Tanker (LAT), which helped contain the K’gari fire and others in 2020, will be based at Bundaberg airport for four years as part of a co-sharing arrangement with Victoria.

The LAT has a carrying capacity of 10 000 litres of firefighting retardant or gel, significantly increasing our aerial firefighting capability until the end of the 2024 bushfire season. It is the latest



addition to QFES’ aerial fleet, which includes more than 150 call-when-needed aircraft.

During the 2020 bushfire season the LAT delivered 40 operational taskings to contain or halt running bushfires. In between bushfire seasons in Queensland, the LAT will be based in Victoria, where bushfires typically occur during Queensland’s severe weather season.

The season ahead

The 2021-22 bushfire season is expected to be milder than normal with the Bureau of Meteorology predicting a wetter season. Recent rainfall has increased the amount of grassland vegetation and recent frosts have led to more grassland dry matter, increasing the potential for grassland fires.

The 2020 bushfire season was not significant overall but there were some substantial operations such as the K’gari fire. Queensland is a large area with variations in rainfall and vegetation, lightning strikes and other means of

ignition natural or accidental. Bushfires are a natural occurrence and we must always be prepared to protect our communities and environmental assets.

“We live in a country that’s supposed to burn. It’s a natural behaviour. We do our best by mitigating the risks, and we will work with stakeholders and landowners to better manage those fires if they occur.”

COVID-19 has affected mitigation preparations and response procedures.

“As we enter another season, we continue to adjust to the impact of the pandemic on our communities through lockdowns, availability of volunteer, full-time and part-time responders, and the support we traditionally receive and reciprocate from our interstate colleagues,” Adam said.

“We don’t know how COVID will affect things. If we’re told to lockdown, emergency operations will still need to happen. It just makes that already complex environment a little more difficult to work in.”

Caring for Country

During NAIDOC Week last month, we celebrated the history, cultures and achievements of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *Response* sat down with QFES Elder Uncle Norm Clarke to discuss his contributions to the fire service and his relationship with Country.

QFES Elder Uncle Norm Clarke, Queensland's first full-time Indigenous firefighter.

Uncle Norm was Queensland's first full-time Indigenous firefighter, joining the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Service in 1976.

"I started studying hard to improve my maths and English before I sat the entrance exam," he said. "I hadn't done much school – I'd only gone up to grade seven.

"It was an Anglo-Saxon, male-dominated service. There was great discipline, training and a family approach to teamwork, which appealed to me from my days of playing professional rugby league.

"Unfortunately, some personnel were not so friendly toward me once they found out I was of Aboriginal descent. This did not worry me at all as it had happened to me a lot before.

"Actually, all those negative comments made me even more determined to become a successful Aboriginal firefighter."

In the early 80s Uncle Norm passed the officer's exam and became a Station Officer.

"I wanted to show people I could do it. There were a lot of good friends of mine in the fire service, but it wasn't an easy walk.

"If I was riding on the truck and somebody put down Aboriginal people who were out marching or at Musgrave Park, I told them they needed to wake up."

From little things big things grow

Uncle Norm's mother and father were taken from their parents when they were three.

"They never saw them again," he said. "It happened to a lot of our people. When my parents were about 10 years old they were sent out to work on cattle stations. I said to myself, if they can come through all that, I'm not going to let them down."

He grew up in Cherbourg in Wakka Wakka Country. The town was originally established as an Aboriginal settlement by the Salvation Army in 1901. Indigenous people were forcibly removed from across Queensland and northern New South Wales and taken there.

"There's an Aboriginal song called 'From Little Things Big Things Grow'. I grew up in an Aboriginal camp with dirt floors and no electricity. There was one bed and we slept

head to toe, and each morning I'd make a fire before walking two miles to school barefoot.

"I went from that to winning the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in 2004, the highest fire service medal in Australia.

"I never in my wildest dreams imagined that. I was doing what any Aboriginal person would do."

Role model

Uncle Norm was also Queensland's first Indigenous Liaison Officer, supporting Indigenous recruitment in rural and auxiliary fire brigades across the state.

"I visited many remote, rural and urban communities," he said. "Our peoples in these areas had no idea someone like me existed, even though I'd already given 20 years of service to QFES."

He gave talks to children at the Murri School, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school established in 1986 in Highgate Hill and later moved to Acacia Ridge.



“After I told them about who I was and where I was from, one young boy asked me, ‘Hey Uncle, are you a real firefighter or a gammon one?’ Which means: Am I a real firefighter or just dressed up as one?”

“I told him I was a real firefighter and I arranged for the crew from the Acacia Ridge fire station to visit the Murri School with the trucks. I realised these Indigenous kids saw me as a role model and I let them know they could also become successful.”

“When I go to graduations now and do the Acknowledgement of Country, every Aboriginal person comes up to me and I congratulate them.”

“I’d love to see one of our mob become an Inspector, and then eventually Assistant Commissioner or Commissioner.”

Connection with Country

The theme of NAIDOC Week this year is ‘Heal Country’, calling for stronger measures to recognise, protect and maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

“To me, Country is my home,” Uncle Norm said. “It’s where my connection to this land we now call Australia lies.”

“I loved growing up on Country. I wouldn’t swap my upbringing for anything, it was so deadly to go down to the waterholes on weekends and swim or go fishing.”

“To me, when I go home to Gunggari Country (in the Maranoa region in south-west Queensland), I am at peace with everything. As I walk along the riverbank or in the bush, I hear the wind in the tress and the whispers of my Old People welcoming me back home.”

“Country is like a wonderful grandmother. She provides everything we need to live –



Uncle Norm (middle) with QFES Elder Aunty Lesley Williams (left) and Commissioner Greg Leach (right).

food, water, love, health, medicine, identity, and our cultural heritage as the oldest living culture in the world.

“We must all change our lifestyles and attitudes towards the negative impacts waste and development can have on both Country and people. Climate change is one of the biggest things that threatens Country and we need to respond to these threats in order to heal Country.”

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples protected this land for tens of thousands of years before European settlement. When settlers crossed the Great Dividing Range, they couldn’t believe how magnificent this land looked.”

“Caring for Country is about understanding all of the elements of land and waters and how everything works.”

“This had largely been lost, or taken away from us, since settlement. It’s necessary that everyone places value on our

traditional knowledge so we can keep this country alive.

“Australia has to tell the world all the atrocities that have happened to Indigenous people. Then this will be the best country in the world. The truth never hurts anybody.”

Uncle Norm said Indigenous fire management practices must be understood, acknowledged and accepted by governments and legislation as a way to manage the risk of bushfire into the future.

“QFES should employ more Indigenous-identified firefighters to protect Country, and we should support them to use their traditional knowledge for fire management.”

“I would like to thank QFES for giving me the opportunity to become a member of a great family. It is still the greatest job in the world.”



Uncle Norm at the Murri School in Brisbane.



Uncle Norm was Queensland's first full-time Indigenous firefighter.

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Drone to the rescue

When an elderly man went missing from his home among the sugar cane fields at night, the State Emergency Service (SES) used a drone with thermal imaging to find him. It was the first time they'd used a drone to locate a missing person.

At 5.40pm on Sunday 23 May, Burdekin SES Local Controller John Winn received a request from the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to assist with a land search for an 84-year-old man with dementia who was reported missing near Brandon in the Burdekin Shire.

It was getting dark, so John asked additional SES crews from Townsville to assist, including the QFES Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) pilot Tony Boyle and a trained observer. QFES Northern Region had received their drone, a Matrice 210, in August 2020.

At 9.30pm, the Townsville SES crew arrived at the search area to help the Burdekin crews search. The RPAS team set up the drone to livestream to a large-screen TV in the SES operations trailer and the police watched everything from there, guiding Tony to fly the drone in a pre-planned aerial search pattern.

When the drone took off they could easily see animals moving in the cane and long grass. After just 16 minutes in the air, Tony saw a heat signature and immediately advised QPS.

When he flew closer it became obvious the heat signature was a person lying down. Tony could even see him swatting at mosquitos with his right arm.

Tony gave the exact coordinates to QPS, who pulled up five metres away from the heat signature and found the man in good condition.

SES Regional Manager Daryl Camp said the man's family watched the retrieval on the TV, which raised their spirits.

"Search crews had already driven past the area only a few metres away, but they couldn't see the man," Daryl said. "He was lying in a small ditch and not moving or calling out. When they walked in, they almost stepped on the man because the grass was so high.

"The drone was invaluable because it allowed search crews to cover large areas quickly and it could see down into areas that were almost impossible to see from the ground. It helped us get the man to safety much faster and more efficiently."

Daryl said the options for using the drone for QFES operations were almost limitless.



SES crews used a thermal imaging camera attached to a drone to find a missing man hidden by tall grass.

"The SES plan to use them for reconnaissance of damaged houses before we send teams in and to look for hot spots on solar arrays that could cause electrocution," he said. "This could save lives before we put anyone on the roof.

"We will also use them during flood rescues to look for people in or near the water, and to assist Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) swiftwater rescue teams.

"Providing real-time situational awareness of an incident improves outcomes and keeps our crews safe," Daryl said.



RPAS pilot Tony Boyle (right) with trained observer Greg Maloney (left). Photo by Amanda McRae.

Queens Birthday Honours for community-minded leaders

Three QFES members have been recognised for their outstanding contributions to disaster response in this year's Queens Birthday Honours.

Chief Superintendents Brad Commens and Tony Johnstone received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) and State Emergency Service (SES) Director Brian Cox was awarded the Emergency Services Medal (ESM).

Commissioner Greg Leach commended their commitment to their roles and the community.

"Brad's experience as the head of QFES' Specialist and Technical Response Branch has helped to ensure Queenslanders remain safe during tough times," Mr Leach said.

"Tony's experience in the design and implementation of strategic policies for the Rural Fire Service (RFS) across the state has been vital and he always goes above and beyond what is required to ensure the best outcome for staff, volunteers and the public.

"Brian is a passionate supporter of volunteerism and his work to enhance how we engage and support our volunteers is second to none."

The meaning of leadership

Brad Commens has been with QFES since 1989.

"Our PPE was a plastic helmet like a construction hard hat, a woollen turnout coat and the kind of gardening gloves you can buy for \$2.50 at Bunnings," Brad said. "We didn't have flash hoods – we used our ears to tell how hot the fire was.

"The steps QFES has made in 30 years are spectacular. As a single service, I think we're in a much better position."

His strongest memories include the Southport Honda Fire, where two firefighters were lost, and Tropical Cyclone Larry in 2006, the first deployment of QFES' Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team.

Brad said he'd been on more than 20 deployments for fires, rescues and storms, including an 11-day deployment after the Christchurch Earthquake in 2011.

"Every time you deploy, you have to take a good sense of humour and flexibility,

because not every state and country does things the same way," he said.

Brad introduced a new service – Motorised Swiftwater Rescue – following a recommendation by the Commission of Inquiry into the 2011 Brisbane floods.

"Now we have more than 110 people trained across the state and 27 boats with outboard motors. In the past, we only had paddle rafts."

Another of Brad's career highlights is his long-term involvement with the Australia-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (AUS-1 DART). He is currently the team leader for international deployments and has helped develop and improve global standards in USAR.

"The opportunity to engage with teams at the international level has allowed us to share the Australian perspective with the rest of the rescue world," he said.

"We've pushed for diversity, anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment in the rescue world. We try to influence



Brad Commens received the AFSM for his leadership and commitment to enhancing QFES' reputation and operational capability.



Tony Johnstone was awarded the AFSM for his leadership, policy work and command and coordination during times of disaster.

some of the other teams to acknowledge we all need to look after vulnerable people in disaster scenarios.

“In the end, we are all here to assist the community, and I have been fortunate to work with committed people who continually step up in the face of adversity.”

Making things better for volunteers

Tony Johnstone joined QFES in 2003 as a volunteer with the Wartburg Rural Fire Brigade in Central Region, while also serving as an SES Group Leader and Local Controller.

“One season I went from floods in Queensland to fires in NSW within 24 hours,” Tony said.

“I crossed a river in a floodboat so I could catch a bus to take me down to Brisbane, where I caught a plane to NSW to fight a fire. That experience reinforced to me that I wanted to be a staff member so I could support all our volunteers.”

In his current role as Chief Superintendent of the RFS, Tony is responsible for policies, procedures, audits and compliance.

“The biggest challenge I face is about the culture – some people want change, and some don’t,” Tony said. “I try to find a balance by ensuring new projects will work for the majority of brigades.”

He has served as both Commander of State Operations and as State Coordinator within the State Operations Centre during bushfires, floods and cyclones.

Tony said leadership was about empowering people and leading the way without micromanaging.

“You provide guidance so people can develop their skills,” he said.

“Leadership is also about not being scared to have a conversation if something’s not right, and being honest about the conversation.”

Tony said the RFS had made great progress over the years and there was plenty more to come.

“The RFS Blueprint maps out the work the service has to do to reach their desired future state.

“When I first started volunteering, I was fighting fires from the back of my own tractor. Now we have aircraft, mapping technology and drones. We’re investigating battery-operated vehicles and an electronic permit system for fire wardens.



Brian Cox was awarded the ESM for his exemplary resourcefulness, initiative and leadership.

“It’s about looking to the future but not forgetting about our past.”

Disaster management expertise

Brian Cox has more than 37 years’ experience in emergency management. He started with Defence, where he responded to the 1982 Ash Wednesday bushfires, and has since been involved in humanitarian affairs and disaster response operations in Europe and the South Pacific.

“I joined QFES after volunteering during the 2010 floods in Brisbane, where I met some amazing disaster management and response staff and volunteers, in particular the SES,” he said.

In 2013 Brian developed the concept of a National Emergency Assistance Team (EMAT), a group of disaster management practitioners who come together and share their experiences.

“There was a lot of disaster management knowledge, experience and professionalism invested in a few people in each state and territory, and I decided to develop a way for them to share it so we can all benefit.

“It can be a complex and fatiguing environment when you’re dealing with long-term disasters, especially at state level. Having a pool of experienced disaster management practitioners available to assist in times of crisis can be extremely beneficial.”

Dozens of EMAT deployments have since occurred within Australia and overseas, providing support during a range of major events and disasters.

Brian said one of his main struggles is the feeling of not doing enough for people on the frontline, especially volunteers.

“Sometimes, when you question whether or not the juice is worth the squeeze in arguing the volunteers’ case in the numerous committees, boards and working groups, you need to take the time to go and visit SES groups and RFS brigades for a reality check. When you meet the volunteers you quickly realise it’s worth it to keep going.

“SES volunteers represent the very best people in our communities. They leave their own homes and their own families to go out and help others in times of disaster.

“What value do you place on people like that? You can’t. They are ordinary people who volunteer to do extraordinary service – incredible.”

When asked about his perspective on leadership, Brian said, “Leadership is about inspiring others to do what needs to be done, not necessarily what they would like to do, which means making hard decisions and taking responsibility for your actions.”

Mapping out the future

All QFES volunteers and staff can now access live mapping of incidents, making it easier for everyone to stay up to date with our response.

Launched at the recent RFS Volunteer Summit, the Mobile Situational Overview (MSO) application shows all incidents, from fires to road crashes, as well as burnt area mapping, weather patterns, and the movement of QFES people and vehicles.

Chief Superintendent Tony Johnstone said the Rural Fire Service (RFS) worked with the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Unit to develop the technology so all QFES members could use it in the field on personal and work devices.

“The idea is to provide our people on the frontline with mapping intelligence like in an Incident Command Centre,” Tony said.

“The map can be filtered so it displays the most important information for each situation.

“The map is simplified so it will run on a tablet or phone, even with limited connection, and you don’t need to be an expert to understand it.

“Volunteers can see what their neighbouring brigades are doing, as well as Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service permits and jobs.”

Tony said MSO helped QFES make sure the right resources went to the right job.

“The app allows our members to plan better because they can see where fires and floods are heading,” he said.

The GIS Unit is also in the early stages of trialling offline maps with the RFS.

“A map of the whole state can be downloaded so it’s available offline,” Tony said. “If you’re connected to the internet, the bushfire warning areas will update. It’s a static map but some of the data layers are live.”

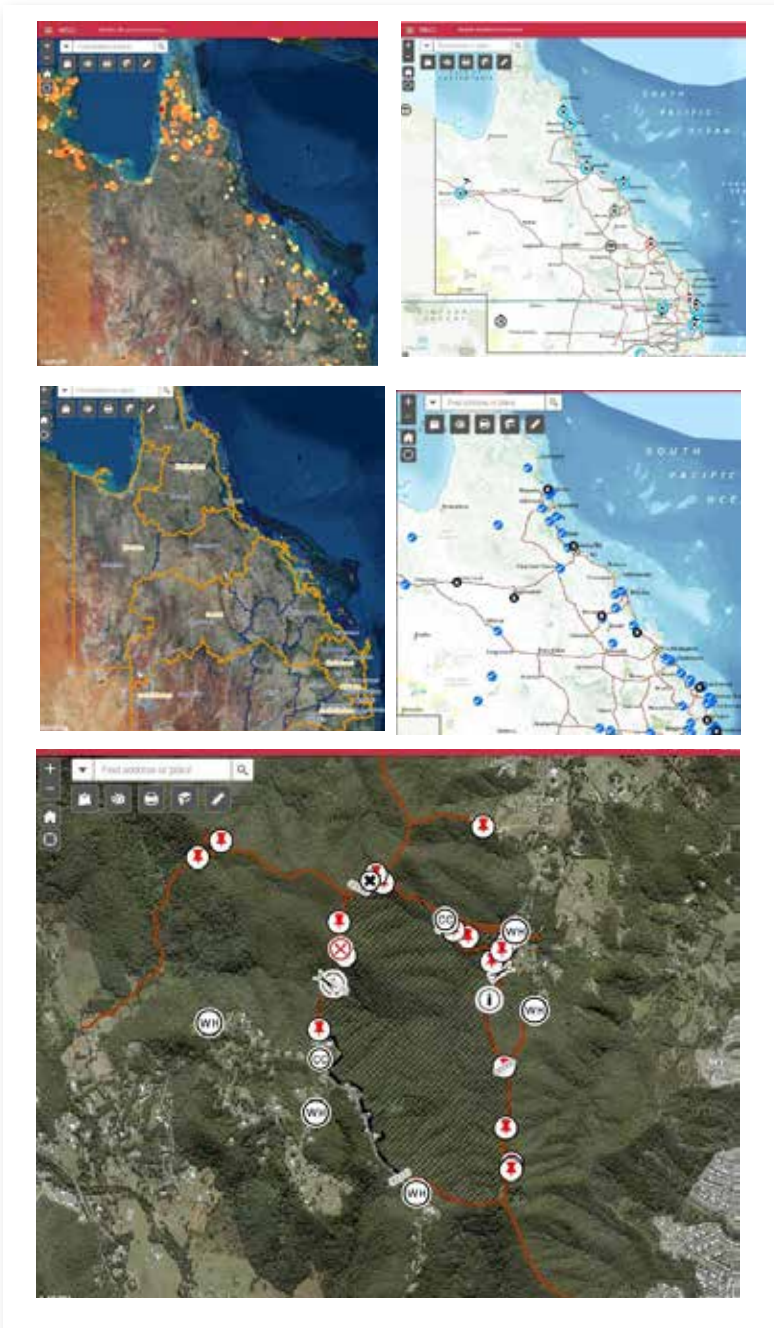
Principal GIS Solutions Officer Peter Timmers said his team provided many different mapping tools, from paper maps to the latest web apps.

“GIS has been around since the early 80s as a desktop product for cartographers and surveyors, whereas now it’s all web based,” Peter said.

“A lot of brigades are taking up the MSO app, with more than 1600 RFS volunteers already logged in.

“We can adjust the map depending on the situation. If there’s a big flood up north, the SES might ask us to add a flood layer.

“Other data layers include aircraft, vehicles, ambulances, hot spots, digital radios, command centres, photos uploaded from the fireground and so on.”



A particularly useful layer is called Geoscape, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to outline every building in Queensland.

“It automatically registers whether the building has solar panels, a nearby tree or a pool,” Peter said.

“Knowing if there are solar panels on a building is important for our people when responding to incidents because they can electrocute people if they’ve been damaged and there’s water on the roof. The roof could even become live if it’s metal.”

The GIS Unit has also been working with Brisbane Region to develop Field Maps, an app that provides firefighters with all the information they need to know when they turn out to an incident.

“When a fire crew gets an alarm they have to respond to, they receive a printout of where they’re supposed to go,” he said. “That information can now appear instantly on their phone, including the incident’s location, so they don’t have to search for the address.”

Peter said in the future mapping would use more AI, combined with satellites and drones, to analyse elements of the landscape such as fire scars.

New incident management system

QFES is using a new online system to make processing incident management information faster and easier than ever.

Our current system relies on handwritten documents and verbal or email communication to share information between teams and regions. To add further complexity, no two regions follow the same process.

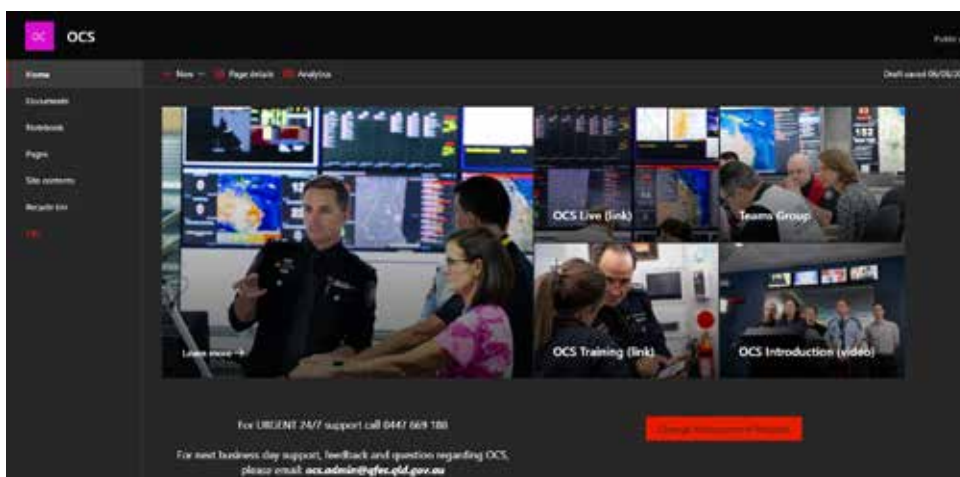
Assistant Commissioner Joanne Greenfield said, “A paper-based system like this makes it difficult to communicate effectively and efficiently from the Incident Control Centre (ICC), to the Regional and State Operations Centres (ROC and SOC).

“To ensure all incidents are managed effectively, we need to get accurate and consistent information in a timely manner.

“Without such information it is challenging to maintain situational awareness, especially during large-scale, multiple and complex operations.”

QFES is moving to the Operational Coordination System (OCS) to streamline the dissemination of bushfire warnings and reduce the burden of administration.

QFES will use OCS to generate bushfire warnings, manage logistics deployments and maintain records of technical rescue staff members’ training and competencies.



The OCS landing page on SharePoint includes training resources, background and contact details for the OCS team.

The warnings and logistics functions are already up and running.

The new system improves transparency and accountability for logistics, and provides improved visibility of incidents across the state via a common operating picture. It also uses automation to send instructions to staff being deployed.

The new warnings process is more user-friendly, includes built-in approvals, creates a permanent online record of all warnings

and automatically publishes to the QFES website.

OCS is cloud-based, so trained users can access it on all QFES computers. It may be available on other devices in the future.

Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche said, “OCS will allow real-time monitoring, integration and standardisation in an automated process.

“This is a new way of doing business for QFES. I’m confident we will be well prepared to meet the challenges of this bushfire and severe weather season as we always have.”

Assistant Commissioner Kevin Walsh said it was important all regions use the system.

“The benefits of accurate data entry cannot be underestimated. A more accurate common operating picture, which will be informed from OCS, will allow the SOC to better support ROCs. This support can then be translated to the coalface in ICCs,” Mr Walsh said.

The project team is holding regional engagement sessions to refine the logistics function and get feedback on how to develop future functions.

In 2022, they will introduce a new planning function and provide extensive training and online support.





A sustainable fire station for the future

QFES is building Australia's first contemporary timber fire station to help make our infrastructure more sustainable.

The Maryborough Fire Station is being redeveloped, alongside a new regional headquarters, with locally sourced timbers from the Wide Bay area. The building has been designed to meet the needs of first responders while protecting the site's heritage value.

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing said the project demonstrated how QFES was reducing emissions from our day-to-day operations, encouraging innovation and transitioning to low- and zero-carbon technologies.

"The new headquarters will include a purpose-built operations centre that will allow QFES members to more efficiently coordinate and plan our responses to emergencies across the region," Mr Wassing said.

QFES conducted research into timber facilities in Europe and North America to inform the building's design and ensure it was as fire-resistant as concrete and steel buildings.

The University of Queensland Centre for Future Timber Structures carried out a full 3D scan of the existing station and shared information with the design team.

Assistant Commissioner Gary McCormack said the existing station was a Maryborough landmark.

"The community was keen to see the iconic 1950s façade retained and restored as part of the design," he said.

"And of course we needed to make sure the design increased the resilience of our service delivery."

The station will contain about 500m³ of timber, all Australian grown in softwood plantations.

It only takes 38 minutes to grow back that much timber in the plantations, meaning timber has a much lower carbon footprint than other building materials.

This amount of timber stores 140 tons of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of taking 30 passenger cars off the road for a year.

A portion of the existing building will also be retained, reducing the amount of new materials required.

The project is due for completion in the second half of 2022. It could promote a broader understanding of these kinds of constructions and help increase the uptake of sustainable buildings into the future.

QFES is also improving sustainability by updating our Waste and Recycling Plan, which covers everything from plastics and organic waste to e-waste, vehicle waste and the by-products produced by clandestine drug labs.

For more information about QFES's response to climate change contact Matt Dyer, QFES Futures Branch at QFES.ClimateChange@qfes.qld.gov.au.

Vision from the frontline

Over the next 12 months, QFES will continue a trial of our Live Vision Capability, which allows Field Content Operators to share footage from incidents.

The collaboration between Strategic Content Services and volunteers in the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) enables a select group of QFES members to send footage from the frontline to be used for media, promotion and situational awareness.

SES and RFS volunteers who have put up their hand to become Field Content Operators will film incidents across the state using a range of devices.

QFES began a successful trial of the technology last year with 11 SES and RFS volunteers, as well as the Air Operations Unit. The trial produced a rich supply of content, showcasing the talent within our volunteer base.

Strategic Content Services Director Shona Cox said the trial's goal was to offer the Live Vision Capability within the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) so it could be activated during incidents.

"Field Content Operators can make use of devices QFES already has, from phones to bodycams, dashcams and GoPros, as well as the Windows tablets donated by the RFS," she said.

"This trial will provide a media and storytelling capability and test an intelligence capability. Ideally, an incident controller will be able to direct a Field Content Officer to record different parts of the incident – they can tell them to go somewhere, or film a particular street or scene. That footage can be relayed back live or on demand."

Principal Video Technician Brendan Bowen said software allowed Field Content Operators to film, edit and distribute their footage, all on the same phone.

"Some units already record footage through drones and other devices, but they need a way to send it securely," Brendan said.

"With this new system, all the data is collected, labelled, stored and archived securely."

Brendan said the K'gari fire last year was a perfect example of how the Live Vision Capability allowed Field Content Operators to record in hard-to-reach places.

"One of our RFS members on the Sunshine Coast had a dashcam in a vehicle on K'gari," Brendan said.

"He was there for four days during a time when no media could reach the island, and what's more, he understood the local environment and knew how to act in a safe manner.

"He sent the footage back to us and, after a thorough editing and approvals process, we passed it on to media outlets and published it on our social media."

Shona said live video from operations was only one part of the Live Vision Capability.

"The Field Content Operators collect content to be shared with the media, such as local stories and events, training exercises and community projects," she said.

"It means we can publish community stories from regions in Queensland we wouldn't normally be able to get to."

She said most of the QFES members who applied to become Field Content Operators were trained camera operators, photographers, videographers or journalists.

"They're volunteers with really high skillsets," she said. "They know what to shoot, how to shoot it and how to transmit it."



A Field Content Operator's footage of an SES rescue.

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Trailblazing women of volunteer marine rescue

Women make an invaluable contribution to marine rescue services in Queensland, whether attending search and rescue incidents, being out in the community or behind the scenes. *Response* met with two female leaders within the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland (VMRAQ) and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association (AVCGA).

Leading the way

Liz Radajewski became the first female Commodore of Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) Bribie Island in 2018.

"I joined in 2004 as a boatie because we had moved to Bribie Island, had two boats and for the coverage and having the option of joining a club, it made sense to us," she said.

After being a member for a few years, she made the decision to become more involved and in 2008 became a crew member before moving up the ranks.

"Don't ask me how it happened. I wasn't looking to be anything fantastic and I never imagined I would end up as Commodore."

Liz said there were many challenges that came with being a Commodore, but the biggest was being across all areas from administration to IT, keeping up-to-date with boating knowledge and working as a team.

"It's a team game, I have a fabulous committee," she said. "And that makes life so easy."

Women play an active role at VMR Bribie Island from crew and social activities to fundraising, administration and radio



Susie King, first female Commander of QF1 Southport Coast Guard.

operations, but Liz said more women should join marine rescue.

"There are a few here but there is room for more and we encourage them to join."

A Coast Guard pioneer

When Susie King joined the QF1 Southport Coast Guard in 2009, she wanted to become a radio operator for the flotilla.

Before long she was a crew member and on 8 June 2021 became Commander and the first woman to hold the position at QF1 Southport.

For Susie, rescues and assistance are a part of the job but it's also about the people Coast Guard helps.

"There are a lot of good memories with doing rescues and meeting a lot of good people in adverse situations requiring our assistance," she said.

Susie hopes that becoming the first female Commander at QF1 will motivate more women to put themselves forward for leadership positions.

"I would like to encourage more women to become involved in all aspects of flotilla operations including administration and radio."



Liz Radajewski, first female Commodore of VMR Bribie Island.

Susie said the role of marine rescue services in the community was vital.

"It's extremely important given that most of our assistance is given to people in difficult situations."

The future of marine rescue

QFES continues to work in collaboration with the VMRAQ and AVCGA following the Queensland Government's commitment in October 2020 to establish an integrated marine rescue service.

In particular, we are advancing the Resource to Risk project, which will implement a standard approach to evaluating risk and assessing future capability needs for each squadron and flotilla. This will be crucial to guiding government investment into fleet in the future.

Over the past three months, the Marine Rescue Implementation team has continued the statewide rollout of the integration through surveys and consultations with VMRAQ, AVCGA, Queensland Police Service (QPS) and QFES staff.

Frontline marine rescue volunteers have given their feedback on local needs now and into the future. Squadrons and flotillas who have participated have enjoyed the process, with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Consultations will continue throughout August.

Shining a light on RFS volunteers

During Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week this month, we celebrated the dedication of our 30 000 volunteers who work so hard to keep Queenslanders safe.

This year, we introduced a new award – the RFS Regional and State Young Volunteer of the Year, which recognises volunteers aged between 16 and 25 who have made a special contribution to the RFS.

Forging a new path

The inaugural State Young Volunteer of the Year Award was given to Wanda Kropp for her commitment to the Hazeldean Rural Fire Brigade (RFB).

Last year, Wanda completed a school-based program in Year 12 and gained her Certificate II in Public Safety (Firefighting Operations).

“When I signed up, I had no idea what I was getting into, but I really wanted to challenge myself,” she said.

“We hear so much about what women can and can’t do. I wanted to challenge myself and I wanted to challenge the stereotype – just watch. Look what we can do.”

Wanda joined the Hazeldean RFB in March 2020, became the Brigade Secretary on 28 July 2020, and became an official firefighter the next day.

“It’s been a crazy experience – so much has happened in such a short time,” she said. “I love it so much.”

Wanda was chosen to represent RFS at the Police-Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) ESCape Games for Emergency Services Cadets.

“It was such an incredible and eye-opening week,” she said. “So much goes on behind the scenes that not many people see.”

One of her most dramatic experiences was at a callout while her brigade was training.

“I thought it was part of the training at first, but there was an actual grassfire at a farm,” she said.

“We ran at the fire with the hoses. I’ve never felt so much adrenaline. My brain switched into a mode – this is real, this isn’t training anymore. Mentally I was ready. My body just needed to catch up.”

Wanda said joining the RFS changed her life.

“I hope it can change others. Other girls from my school have asked me about the Cert II, and I say they can absolutely do it.

“One day during training I thought I wasn’t strong enough. I thought I couldn’t do it. It was too much. My mentor said, ‘Girl, you can do anything you want. If you want to do it, you can.’ I am forever in debt to QFES and RFS.

“I have an amazing and supportive employer. When they found out I won this award, they said they wanted to include it in their newsletter.”

The importance of local knowledge

David Spratling from Booyan Rural Fire Brigade was named State Volunteer of the Year for his outstanding compassion and commitment to the RFS.

He spent 21 years with the brigade, including 14 as First Officer.

“I joined because it was a way to meet people in the area,” he said. “We had no shed at the start and everything was scattered. We held meetings in a potato packing shed.”

From these humble beginnings, the brigade has grown to 15 members.

“The strength of brigades is their local knowledge of how fire operates in different areas,” David said.

“Bundaberg area works really well together. You know you can rely on your neighbours to come and help you.”

Of all the fires David has responded to, the Gaeta Valley fires in 2009 stand out.

“That was the biggest fire event I’ve ever attended,” he said. “It was a long and protracted campaign – 10 weeks in all. The fire boundary was about 800 or 900 kilometres.

“Local knowledge really came into play, but we also had huge support from NSW, including multiple units and air support.”

David was also part of Taskforce 72 deployment to the NSW town of Narrabri in 2006 to help fight a fire in the Pilliga Nature Reserve.

He is also a volunteer trainer for the RFS and facilitates basic training for new recruits.

“I enjoy that a lot. It’s good to meet all the new people and try and equip them with the knowledge that brings everyone back off the fire ground the same condition that they went out in.

“Volunteers come from all walks of life, and everyone has an immense amount they can contribute.”

David said the skills he learnt at the brigade helped him build confidence in public speaking and made him a better listener.

He resigned from the brigade this year due to personal reasons and, while he may not miss the paperwork and being on call, he certainly misses the people.



1. Assistant Commissioner State Volunteer of the Year – David Spratling, Booyan RFB
2. Assistant Commissioner State Young Volunteer of the Year – Wanda Kropp, Hazeldean RFB
3. Brisbane Regional Volunteer of the Year – Janet Blok, Clear Mountain RFB
4. Brisbane Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Lachlan Wright, Pumicestone RFB
5. South East Regional Volunteer of the Year – David Clarke, Mount Forbes RFB
6. South East Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Natus Barned, Chambers Flat RFB
7. South West Regional Volunteer of the Year – John Lemon, Glen Aplin RFB
8. South West Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Kirk Dorries, Jondaryan RFB
9. North Coast Regional Volunteer of the Year – Arthur (Wayne) Croydon, Kilkivan RFB
10. North Coast Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Shiedon Bailey, Sandy Straits RFB
11. Central Regional Volunteer of the Year – Glen Arrol, Jundah Town RFB
12. Central Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Christopher Noakes, Eurimbula RFB
13. Northern Regional Volunteer of the Year – Carleen Martin, Southern Cross and Charters Towers RFB
14. Northern Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Isabelle Lauder, Rangewood RFB
15. Far Northern Regional Volunteer of the Year – Janette Hodgkinson, Irvinebank RFB
16. Far Northern Regional Young Volunteer of the Year – Kailan Degnian, Tinaroo RFB

Volunteer Summits

The RFS had another chance to celebrate recently at the RFS Volunteer Summits at the Sunshine Coast and Cairns, attended by about 260 volunteers. The biennial event, which was postponed last year due to COVID-19, is a place for staff, volunteers and industry experts to meet, share ideas and take part in discussions and presentations.

Brooke Stafford, Manager of RFS Volunteer and Frontline Support Services, said the summits reinforced the close relationships between volunteers and other RFS counterparts. She said the 2021 program was packed, with presentations given by staff and volunteers alike.

“The theme of the event aligned with the volunteer launch of the RFS Blueprint, with an emphasis on the future of RFS, volunteer training and technology.”

Brooke said the Sunshine Coast event saw the official signing of the new RFS Volunteer Brigades’ Charter.

“The charter is an agreement between the State of Queensland, QFES and the Rural Fire Brigade Association Queensland (RFBAQ). It ensures QFES will consult with volunteers about matters that affect them.”

Another major announcement was that post-traumatic stress is now identified as a deemed disease.

“The presumption of injury will apply to defined first responders and other eligible employees, including RFS, Fire and Rescue Service, State Emergency Service and departmental employees who are exposed to traumatic incidents,” Brooke said.

“This is a huge leap forward in supporting first responders and their families.”

Assistant Commissioner John Bolger said, “RFS volunteers are all driven by a shared desire to contribute to and support their local communities. They spend countless hours on the frontline or undertaking support activities to ensure the safety of those around them and to give back.

“RFS volunteers are a diverse team, from a variety of backgrounds, and with a broad range of skills. I am honoured to lead such an amazing and committed group of people, who always come together during times of need.

“The summits were a reminder to me of the strength and resilience of our volunteers and in turn, our communities.”



BRISBANE REGION

Operation Blast

In May, Caboolture Group Rural Fire Brigade hosted a fun morning of skills and drill activities.

Rural firefighters and support members from Delaney's Creek, Narangba, Pumicestone, Rocksberg, Toorbul, Wamuran and Woodford joined in, along with Fire and Rescue Service Caboolture. The Stanley Rivers Group and Area Office provided excellent support.

It was a wonderful opportunity for firefighters from across the region to gather in a fun environment and work with a variety of appliances and command vehicles, including from South Western and South Eastern regions.



Exercise with mountain bike casualties

QFES, State Emergency Service and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) participated in a joint exercise simulating multiple mountain bike casualties in the Mt Cotton Eastern Escarpment.

This type of rescue has become common over the last 18 months due to the increasing popularity of mountain biking.

QAS used the exercise to formulate an operational plan for the area. The 502L stretcher with its 'big wheel' attachment is proving invaluable in these scenarios.



Aged care evacuation exercise

Staff and volunteers from Brisbane Region State Emergency Service (SES), Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) took part in a simulated evacuation of a multi-storey aged care centre.

SES members supported the QAS and Queensland Health staff under the direction of QPS. They helped move the residents down three floors to the triage area where QAS assessed and assigned priority transport notes for each resident.

A representative from the aged care industry gave SES members a brief on the mobility and care required for elderly residents. A team of 10 observers evaluated the exercise.



SOUTH EASTERN REGION

Yarrabilba station opening

South Eastern Region celebrated the official opening of Yarrabilba Fire and Rescue Station on 15 July.

Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Mark Ryan MP, Member for Logan Linus Power and Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche officially opened the \$4.75 million facility, which will boost vital services to the community of Yarrabilba and surrounding areas.



Mount Tamborine rescue

QFES crews helped the Queensland Police Service (QPS) locate an elderly man who had been missing for two days in Mount Tamborine.

A nearby resident heard calls for help late at night from dense bushland and raised the alarm. QFES Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Operators helped search, along with Tamborine Mountain and Nerang Fire and Rescue Stations, State Emergency Service and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS).

Once the RPAS Operators located the man, vertical rescue technicians and a QAS paramedic descended about 90 metres down a steep hill to treat him and move him to safety, where he was winched out by Rescue 500 and transported to hospital.

The rescue took about four hours and is a great example of interagency cooperation.



Ipswich SES leadership workshop

Senior members of the Ipswich State Emergency Service (SES) Unit took part in a one-day leadership workshop at the Goodna SES depot.

The workshop aimed to inspire 'autonomy, competence, accountability and initiative'. The participants explored topics such as emotional intelligence for leaders, leadership in crisis, engagement with the public, training leadership, and leadership in exercising.

In the afternoon, participants broke into small groups to discuss operations, training, policy-procedure-strategy, and leading through self.

These discussions will support the current and emerging SES leaders within the unit.



Monster Machinery Day

The Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigades Group attended the annual City of Gold Coast Monster Machinery Day at Broadwater Parkland.

Crews enjoyed engaging with thousands of kids and families and provided information about bushfire safety, the role of the Rural Fire Service and volunteering opportunities.



SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Cultural burn workshops

Rural Fire Service (RFS) personnel attended cultural burning workshops at various sites in Lockyer Valley and Southern Downs. They gained a different perspective on what good fire management looks like and how they can apply it to their own communities.

Attendees were shown how the cultural burning themes closely align with RFS key messages, particularly the need to be proactive with fire management and keep it front of mind all year round.

This work builds on our strong relationships with our Indigenous partners, the Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corporation and the Queensland Murray Darling Catchment Ltd.



Indigenous Rangers are already active members of the South Western Area Fire Management Groups and contribute to fulfilling the groups' responsibilities for managing bushfires.

This collaboration will continue to encourage the use of fire in the landscape. Over time, the goal is to change the ideology that bushfires only have a negative impact. Good fire management leads to good land management which is beneficial for the landholder, their neighbours, the brigade and their community.



SES Executive Workshop

State Emergency Service (SES) executives from across South Western Region gathered at Charleville in June for the SES Executive Workshop. This is the first time Toowoomba Area Office and Roma Area Office have joined together in a single meeting.

The two-day gathering included presentations from Assistant Commissioners Andrew Short and David Hermann, representatives from the Uniforms and Logistics Unit and fellow volunteers.

Far Northern Region SES Director Wayne Coutts also joined the group via Teams to share a detailed briefing on the iAuditor and its benefits for SES volunteers, as well as the rollout of mobile phones to all regions.

The gathering provided the perfect opportunity for the handover of a new Swift Marine Flood Boat to the Charleville SES Group.

Getting bushfire ready

Despite the regular rainfall across South Western Region, Rural Fire Service personnel have been out and about engaging with local communities. In preparation for the upcoming fire season, brigades and staff worked with Area Fire Management Group partner agencies to host several emergency services events in bushfire-prone areas.

Events have taken place at Crows Nest, Ravensbourne, Mount Lofty, Warwick, Amiens, Stanthorpe and Glen Aplin, and more are planned for Millmerran and Eukey.





FAR NORTHERN REGION



Regional show engagement

Far Northern Region worked with our Disaster Management and Resilience partners, Cairns Regional Council, at the recent agricultural show circuit to create some long-awaited face-to-face engagement.

QFES members worked to COVID Safe Plans, which was a great opportunity to try some different engagement methods, such as providing information via QR codes.

However, the age-old face-to-face conversations promoting smoke alarms legislation and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers were still the most popular.

Information and Warnings training

Far Northern Region staff undertook Intermediate Public Information and Warnings training to assist the rollout of the new national approach to Information and Warnings products using the Operational Coordination System (OCS).

The intermediate training will give our region the capability to issue Advice and Watch and Act warnings and cancel those warnings within the region.



Exercise Northern Approach

A biannual emergency response exercise took place at Cairns International Airport last month.

All Far Northern Region QFES services and capabilities joined both Federal and State Police, Environmental Officers, Airport Fire and Rescue, Border Security Officers and a long list of airline observers.

Exercising the response plan is part of the emergency management procedures and response functions and roles for each agency, should any event warrant the unintended grounding of aircraft.





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NORTHERN REGION



Aviation exercise

Mount Isa staff and volunteers from the Fire and Rescue Service, State Emergency Service and Emergency Management participated in an aviation exercise at Mount Isa Airport alongside the Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, Royal Flying Doctor Service, LifeFlight and airport staff.

The scenario involved a collision between two aircraft with more than 20 casualties, played by members of a local church group.

Queensland Health conducted a parallel exercise that activated their coordination centre and initiated a mass casualty response from the health sector.

Mount Isa's remoteness added unique logistical complications to the response. The only sealed runway for 120 kilometres was closed, so transporting casualties to larger hospitals required additional planning and resources. In Mount Isa, additional support is hours away so the situation must be managed with what is on hand.

With a focus on command, control, coordination, communications and information, participating agencies identified several areas for future exercises and training.

Mount Isa complex opening

The new Mount Isa QFES complex was officially opened on 8 June by the Honourable Mark Ryan MP, with Commissioner Greg Leach, Assistant Commissioner Michael O'Neil, local dignitaries, staff and volunteers in attendance.

The facility is now home to State Emergency Service (SES) and Rural Fire Service (RFS) staff and volunteers as well as Fire and Rescue Service and Emergency Management staff. The building boasts modern facilities for volunteers, expanded HazMat stores and office space, and a training room, which is also used by the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and other departments in Mount Isa.

The facility is next to the existing station on a block of land that originally had two houses for visiting staff. The joint facility has enabled greater coordination and collaboration between the services, especially given several volunteers are active members of both SES and RFS.





CENTRAL REGION

Supporting outback Queensland events

During the week of the 2021 Big Red Bash, four auxiliary firefighters from Central Region were staged at the Windorah State Emergency Service (SES) shed to provide support and response capabilities.

The crew engaged in community outreach and was responsible for a response area of nearly 60 000 square kilometres.

Towards the end of the week, two of the firefighters conducted cross-service training with SES and Rural Fire Service Jundah members to develop their road crash rescue and firefighting capabilities. All three services worked well together for the benefit of their communities.



Gracemere SES Group open day

Community members came down to the Gracemere State Emergency Service (SES) facility for a range of activities including knot tying and basic first aid, as well as learning all about disaster readiness.

The younger visitors particularly liked meeting Paddy the SES mascot and checking out the floodboat, vehicles and gear. The sausage sizzle was a big hit too.



Emergency rescue plans put to the test

Gladstone QFES members and Monadelphous Engineering Pty Ltd joined forces to test emergency rescue plans at the Monadelphous site. They participated in an exercise where an injured person was trapped inside a heater furnace.

The QFES team familiarised themselves with the traffic management plan beforehand to understand site access requirements. Then, on rescue day, they successfully saved the injured person from the heater furnace. The exercise brought to light improvements that could be made to the plans.



Practical Learning in Central Region

Mackay hosted an element of the Officer Development Program – Practical Learning #3. This was a wonderful opportunity for regional Queensland to showcase their capability to help run state-based programs.

The Officer Development Program 1 is a 12-month elective program designed to train and assess candidates to enhance their skills and knowledge from the rank of a Senior Firefighter to Station Officer.

Candidates assumed the role of an Incident Controller for an assessment scenario demonstrating their capacity to manage three urban appliances. This assessment determined if they were at the required standard to attend the residential part of the program.



NORTH COAST REGION

Operation Talisman Sabre 2021 in Bundaberg

In July, the Bundaberg State Emergency Service (SES) Unit worked closely with the United States Marine Corps, providing facilities and vital assistance while they were in Bundaberg for Operation Talisman Sabre 2021, the largest combined training activity between them and the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The operation is designed to test our respective forces in planning and conducting Combined and Joint Task

Force operations and improve our combat readiness and interoperability.

SES forged a strong relationship with defence force personnel and learnt vital skills in medical trauma response, communications and reconnaissance.

The United States Marine Corps gained new friends abroad and learnt how the SES support their communities.



Deaf community workshop

QFES recently collaborated with the Sunshine Coast Council and Deaf Services Queensland to hold the Sunshine Coast Disaster Preparedness Deaf Community Workshop.

The purpose of the workshop was to assist the deaf community to better prepare for disasters. The idea came from Rural Fire Service Volunteer Community Educators Tony Thompson and Julie Anderson.

Both have a connection with the deaf community and heard feedback about their experiences during the Peregian fire in

2019. This made Tony and Julie realise the deaf community faced specific challenges in times of disaster, particularly in terms of communications and knowing where to find information.

Auslan interpreters and Real Time Captioning ensured the messages were clearly delivered to the participants.

Thanks to Linda Williams, Cathy Buck and Fiona Sharp from Sunshine Coast Council for the venue, catering, prizes, interpreters and the organising of the event as well as Tabatha McCurdie and Twyan Grace from Deaf Services and Andrew Marnie from QFES.



Cadets shine at annual games

More than 250 future emergency responders took part in the seventh annual Cadet Games in Brisbane and Townsville, with Rural Fire Service (RFS) cadets celebrating their first ever victory.

Cadets competed from many different services, including the RFS, Emergency Services Cadets, Australian Army, Australian Air Force, Military Cadets and Surf Life Saving Queensland. The first all-female Emergency Services Cadets team came from Thursday Island to participate in the Townsville games.

The event organising team included Jack Leeson, Jade Burgess, Emily Dowling-Mentz and Storm Richter. Jade said the cadets put their skills and teamwork to the test across six main events.

“We ran a frostbite exercise where they had to practise putting up a tent using teamwork,” Jade said.

“In the scenario, the cadets were impacted by snow-blindness or frostbite, so half the group were unable to see and the other half couldn’t use their hands.

“We also had a big obstacle course, including hurdles, tyre dragging, sandbag carrying and crawling under camo nets. It took up half a soccer field.”

Storm said the games helped cadets learn a lot of the attributes of QFES members.

“It was nice seeing them practise their first-aid skills under pressure,” he said.

“Another big event was marching, which is common to all emergency services. The cadets gave a parade and a dress inspection, followed by a freestyle performance where they put their own spin on it.”



Cadets put up tents using teamwork to combat frostbite and snow-blindness.

Emily said it was great to have Commissioner Greg Leach, Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche and Deputy Commissioner Adam Stevenson come to the events to talk with the cadets.

“They were very accessible and friendly, and their style of leadership made everyone feel valued,” Emily said.

“I heard the Commissioner talking to a boy from the RFS. The boy was saying, ‘This is my dream! I can’t believe I’m meeting you!’ He was just freaking out. It was really nice to see.”

Jade said she enjoyed it when all the different services mixed together for the second half of the day.



The games included an obstacle course that tested the cadets’ endurance.

“They all picked their own teams,” she said. “The team that won was the only team with one member from each service.”

At the Brisbane games, The Toowoomba Emergency Services Cadets came second, and the RFS cadets received the Award of Excellence. One of the RFS cadets, Ethan Arnold, placed first in the Mixed Teams Challenges. It’s the first time RFS cadets have won an award at the games.

Acting Brigade Training and Support Officer Matt Poor leads the RFS cadets, who all participated in a program to gain their Certificate II in Public Safety (Firefighting Operations) at Kilcoy State High School.

It was fantastic when the cadets won the award,” Matt said. “Everyone was excited. They’ve only been working together for about six months, so they’ve done really well.

“They’ve become junior members of local brigades, so the program helps boost membership for rural areas.

“The cadets qualified as rural firefighters in the same week they participated in the Cadet Games. It was a big week for them.”

PCYC and QFES recently signed a new three-year service agreement, to continue the unique partnership and confirm future delivery of the Emergency Services Cadets program.



Emergency Services Cadets travelled from all over Queensland to compete in the annual Cadet Games.



Hands-on support

Chaplain Al Sage from the Moore Park State Emergency Service (SES) Group is always there for his fellow volunteers. In 2015 he became the first and still the only chaplain to receive the Olga Wilson Award, which is typically awarded to Peer Support Officers.

Al has supported QFES members and the community in the North and South Burnett for more than 10 years.

“I worked out recently that I cover an area half the size of Tasmania,” he said.

“I used to be a pastor for several churches in rural Queensland and the Northern Territory, but I left that behind to take on chaplaincy full-time, because I believe it’s my calling.

“When I first started, there were only six chaplains in the whole of Queensland, along with a few Peer Support Officers.

“At QFES, people see a lot of stuff. Chaplains are here as a support group. We’re not out there to preach to people.

“Suicide prevention is an important part of my role – not only for trauma from operations, but from within people’s homes. I’m able to just be there for people when they’re on the edge.

“As a chaplain, I want to know how everyone operates within SES, so I’ve done every course I can possibly do.”

Another part of Al’s role is speaking at weddings and christenings, as well as funerals for his fellow SES and Rural Fire Service (RFS) members.

“It’s quite a privilege, that people would invite me into their time of grief,” Al said.

“I sit down with the family and walk them through the process. When someone passes away, their loved ones sometimes don’t know which way to turn, so it’s good to have someone who can help steer them through it.”

Al also served as group leader of the Wondai SES Group a few years ago.

“The group lay dormant for a couple of years after the previous group leader passed away. I heard about it when I conducted his funeral. Later on I had a chat with the local controller about building the group back up.

“There were no members, but we grew it to just under 30 in a year. I was privileged to be named Regional Member of the Year for that, and the group was named North Coast Region Group of the Year.”

Al went to Roma, Rockhampton and Yeppoon a few years ago when tropical cyclones hit.

“In Roma, a lot of houses were inundated and emergency housing and other services were set up in the civic centre. I came across a couple in their 80s who had nowhere to stay. They were distraught so I went back and organised for them to get housing, food and transport.

“During the floods in Yeppoon and Rockhampton, I went around

with a peer support officer from the RFS and we made sure all our crews were ok. We brought them water and meals and kept an eye on them.”

It runs in the family. Al’s son Cameron is also an SES member with the Moore Park Group and was also named Regional Member of the Year a few years ago.

“I’m so privileged to be part of the chaplaincy team,” Al said. “I see so many volunteers who put in the hard yards. If I were lost in the bush, I’d want a whole pile of orange people to be out there looking for me.”

You can talk with your local chaplain anytime face-to-face, on the phone or by email. Their contact details are on the chaplaincy page of the Gateway.



Chaplain Al Sage maintains his SES skills, including floodboat operations, so he can relate to his fellow volunteers.



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Unearthing stories of fallen firefighters

Two firefighters who lost their lives around the turn of the 20th century have been added to the QFES Honour Roll after their stories were uncovered from the archives by QFES members.

Superintendent Nicholas F Peut and Firefighter Benjamin James Hitchings are now featured on the Honour Roll, which commemorates firefighters who died in the line of duty.

Superintendent Peut died on Monday 5 December 1892. He was a member of the South Brisbane Fire Brigade, which he'd founded four years previously.

He was carrying out fire brigade duties with a horse and cart when the horse got spooked and threw him to the ground. He struck his head on a gatepost and the cart's front wheel struck him in the face. His skull was badly fractured and he died within a few hours. He was survived by his wife and four children.

"The news of the fearfully sudden death of this well-known officer will be received throughout Brisbane with very general regret," reported The Brisbane Courier the next day.

Firefighter Hitchings from the Brisbane Metropolitan Fire Brigade died on 22 November 1933.

He'd attended a fire that destroyed the Forsyth Ropeworks in East Brisbane seven months earlier, and became ill as a result of the fumes. His widow filed for compensation, which was settled in the Industrial Magistrate Court, where the magistrate ordered the insurance company to pay £738.

These stories were lost to obscurity until Superintendent Simon Ball and Administration Officer Tracey Olivieri researched the history of fires in Brisbane.

Simon spent his early career with the Hampshire Fire Brigade in the UK, where tradition and history were very strong.

"You were surrounded by artefacts and stories of earlier years," he said. "We've been through many changes in Queensland too, and as QFES modernises, we need to make a greater effort to hold onto some of the stories, culture and traditions that have shaped us."

Tracey said she'd been interested in history as long as she could remember, and her childhood dream was to be an archaeologist.

"I founded the Friends of South Brisbane Cemetery in 2005 to help protect and preserve an important heritage site," Tracey said.

She recently received the prestigious John Oxley Library Award for her work with the group.

"Cemeteries hold thousands of stories that help form the history of their local area," Tracey said. "I have written and co-written books on local history and cemeteries.

"The South Brisbane Cemetery is the resting place for a number of firefighters including Ellis Baxter Crampton and John E Hinton, the father of the fire service."

Tracey discovered Hitchings and Peut through magistrate court records in the newspaper archives while looking for stories for the Brisbane Region Firefighter Remembrance Day service.

Simon said, "When you dig into incidents like these, the firefighters become more than a name on a board.

"It's important that when new firefighters begin their service, they recognise they are following in the footsteps of those who have gone before them, and the contributions and sacrifices made."

Simon has officiated the Brisbane Region Firefighter Remembrance Day services for several years.

"I find it humbling to stand in front of everyone and deliver the Honour Roll address. In front of me are the honour guard in their brass helmets and historic tunics.

"To my left, I see the flags and flag bearers, the large silver bell, the choir, and behind them, all the families hugging each other.

"When I start to read out the names of the fallen, and the bell rings for each one, there is a sense of shared grief, but it's a very personal time for the families."



Tracey Olivieri and Simon Ball are researching the stories behind the QFES Honour Roll.



Firefighters showed the future lifeguards of Airlie Beach around one of their fire trucks. QFES is collaborating with Volunteer Marine Rescue Airlie Beach, the Royal Life Saving Society Queensland and the Whitsunday Regional Council to re-launch the Airlie Beach Life Saving Club.



The Mackay Fire and Rescue Service swiftwater rescue team and Air Operations Unit completed helicopter underwater escape and sea survival training.

State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers attended the Luminous Lantern Parade at South Bank to celebrate cultural diversity. They were guests of our SES Principal Community Partner, Suncorp.



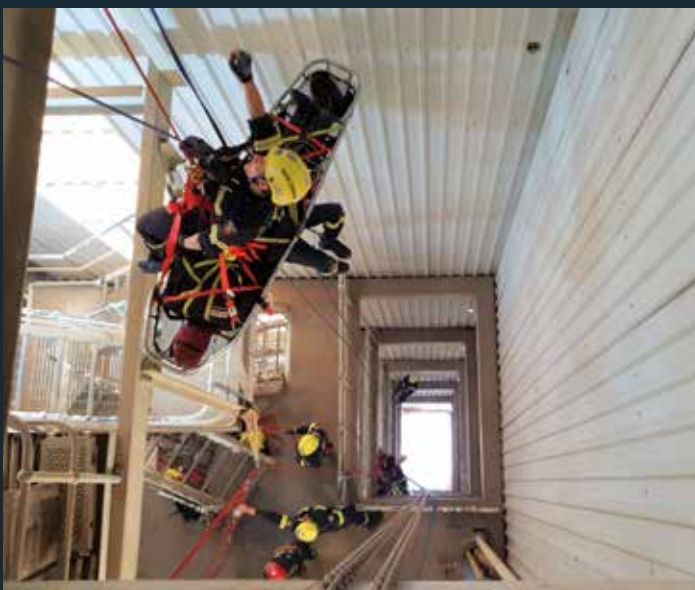
The largest recruit parade in QFES history celebrated 69 future firefighters from six recruit courses.



Twelve Fire and Rescue Service and Rural Fire Service personnel attended Fire Behaviour Analyst training run by the Predictive Services Unit. They analysed Level 2 wildfire behaviour and suppression options to get ready for bushfire season.



QFES members gave blood as part of the Emergency Services Blood Challenge from 1 June to 31 August.



As part of their training to become technical rescue technicians, 18 Fire and Rescue Service members completed a Level 2 Vertical Rescue course.



During NAIDOC Week, staff and volunteers at Kedron held a Floral Friday Fundraiser. Wearing floral clothing on Fridays is a tradition in Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Funds raised went to the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation (QATSIF), a not-for-profit trust that supports First Nations children to complete high school and gain a brighter future.



Auxiliary firefighters engaged with the community at the annual Big Red Bash near Birdsville.



The crew at Bowen Fire and Rescue Station held a road crash rescue exercise to increase inter-agency efficiency.



Looking out for Lamb Island

Kay and Colin McInnes have spent the last 21 years on Ngudooroo (Lamb Island) in southern Moreton Bay, where they help keep the population of 450 people connected and safe.

Kay and Colin, both in their seventies, are Volunteer Community Educators (VCE) with the Lamb Island Rural Fire Brigade.

For the last three years, Kay has been the VCE Coordinator, managing engagement activities not only for Lamb Island, but three other nearby islands: Jencoomercha (Macleay), Canaipa (Russel) and Karragarra.

Kay said the VCEs had many tasks, from ordering and distributing information on fires and storms to organising open days and talking to the public.

“When there’s a fire, we let neighbours know what’s going on, manage traffic and run messages for the Incident Controller,” she said.

Kay said their brigade had many older members who lived on their own, because people tended to move to the island when they retired. She and Colin looked out for them during the COVID-19 lockdowns last year.

“We wrote them a letter saying if they needed to talk to somebody or if they were running out of food or medication, they could ring us,” she said.

“On Easter we delivered eggs, on Mother’s Day we gave all the mothers a card and some chocolates, and on Anzac Day we distributed Anzac biscuits.”

Kay and Colin have done a lot of training for suicide prevention after their daughter took her own life 10 years ago.

“We lost our eldest son 20 years ago from a brain tumour,” Kay said. “And since our daughter died I lost both my parents.

“I run a bereavement support group once a month. When somebody dies, people don’t want to talk to you because they don’t know what to say, but if you’re in a group where everyone’s been through similar things, you can say how you feel and no one will judge you.

“At first people are completely immersed in grief, but they gradually open up. The group helps them get through that bad stage and come out the other end.”

Kay also volunteers with Bay Island Community Services and with encouragement from her First Officer, has applied to become a Peer Support Officer with QFES.

Colin said everyone in their brigade was part of a big team.

“I don’t roll hoses out anymore, but our First Officer Noel Walker appreciates the skills and expertise of VCEs,” he said.

“We play an incredibly important role. We’re like a golden oldies rugby team – after we’ve finished playing on the paddock as operative members, we help out in other ways.”

Colin has always done volunteer work for many organisations including the Lions Club and Rotary as well as the brigade and received in 2019, via the RFS, an Australia Medal (AM) for his volunteering service to the community.

He divides his spare time between the brigade and the Redlands Coast Suicide Prevention Network.

“Kay and I have done a lot of work in suicide prevention as well as suicide prevention,” Colin said. “Years ago, nobody talked about it. I call it a grub in the guts. You can’t deal with the problem until you get through the denial, accept the problem and get on with fixing it.

“Being part of the brigade is good for Kay and I because we have a common interest. Families that play together stay together. We’ve been married 53 years and I’m saving up for a diamond for our 60th anniversary.”



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