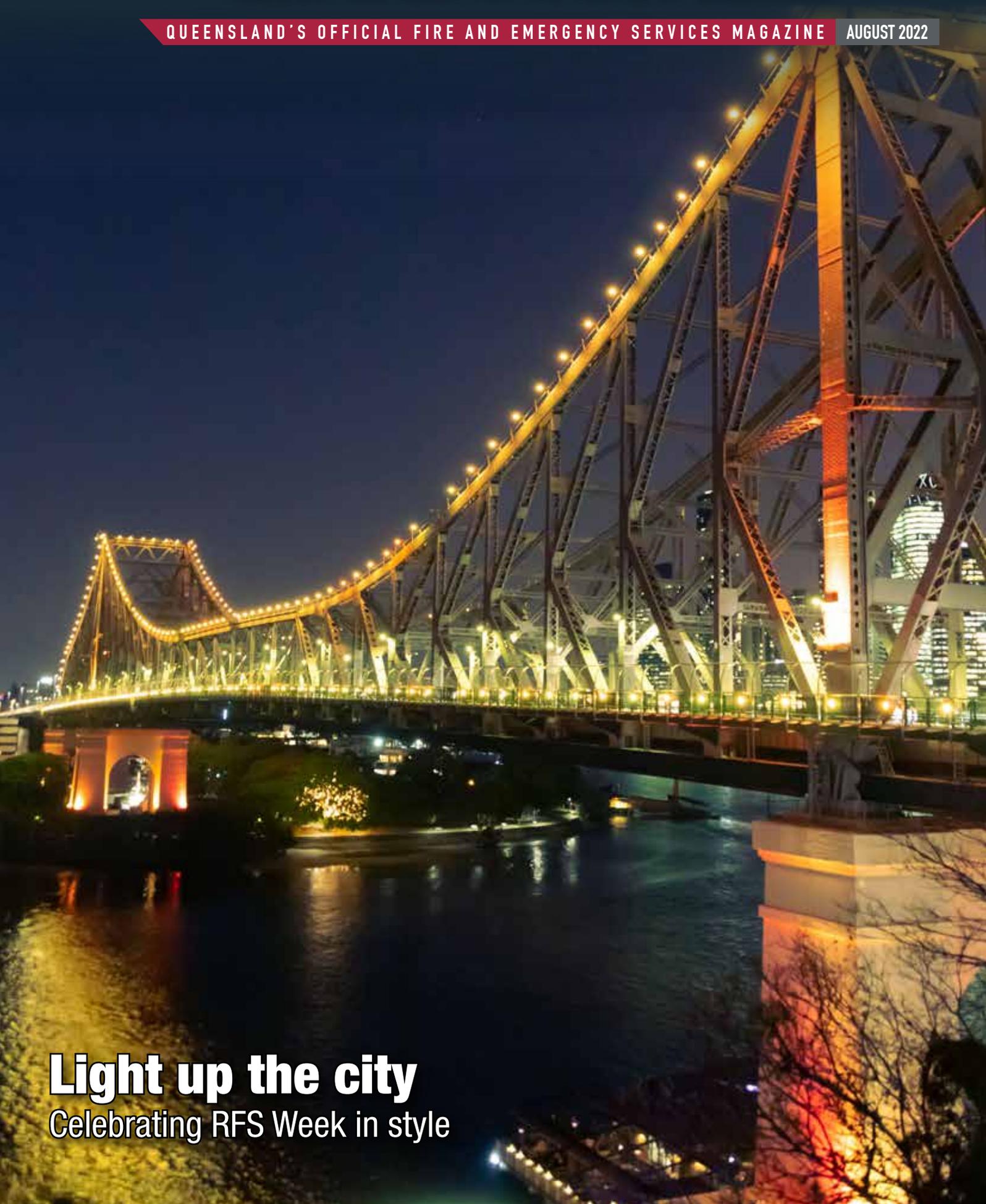


RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE AUGUST 2022



Light up the city
Celebrating RFS Week in style

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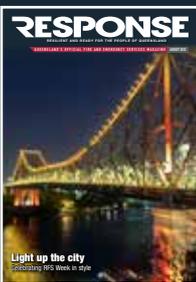
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30 YEARS OF FESSN

Celebrating our support services

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ON THE COVER

During RFS Week in August, iconic sites around Brisbane were lit up in yellow to honour RFS volunteers.

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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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 AFSM

Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

It was fantastic, as always, to celebrate Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week this month. Every year we take the time to acknowledge our wonderful RFS volunteers, who donate precious time from their busy lives to do what needs to be done.

I'd particularly like to congratulate the winners of this year's RFS Week Awards. You can read more about them on page 14.

2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN). For three decades, they've been there to support our staff, volunteers and families, from traumatic incidents to workplace stresses, personal matters and everything in between.

Without FESSN supporting us, we wouldn't be able to support the community the way we do. Congratulations to the team – you can read more about their history on page 28.

The COVID situation may continue to change, but health and safety are always my first priority. Rest assured we will continue to monitor the situation and follow the advice from the Chief Health Officer.

Please keep up the good work and practise good hygiene, and if you haven't received your third or fourth dose of the vaccine, I encourage you to do so.

Thank you to all our personnel who travelled to New South Wales last month to lend a hand during their latest severe weather event. Your hard work alongside contingents from Victoria and South Australia made a huge difference to communities during a tough time.

I encourage everyone to remain vigilant as some parts of our state, such as the Burnett region, continue to experience flooding, and the Bureau of Meteorology has predicted a wetter August to October.

The 2022-23 State Budget delivered record spending for QFES, investing more than \$900 million across all services.

Historic additional funding has been granted to the State Emergency Service (SES), RFS and Marine Rescue Queensland. The Fire and Rescue Service will also receive new firefighters and equipment.

We welcome this investment, which will enable us to continue providing the best possible service to the people of Queensland.

Congratulations to SES volunteer Ali Lane, who was recently named Queensland Volunteer of the Year, a remarkable honour that reflects the hard work and dedication of all SES volunteers. Read more about her award on page 34.

In August we celebrate Multicultural Queensland Month, which is an opportunity to explore ways to help make our community more inclusive. Read more about QFES' multicultural events on page 7.

I am continuing to visit regions and state directorates across Queensland, getting to as many different places as possible, and I look forward to meeting more of you in the months ahead.



MIKE WASSING AFSM

Deputy Commissioner

READINESS AND RESPONSE SERVICES

I transitioned to the role of Deputy Commissioner, Readiness and Response Services in March when Deputy Commissioner Mark Roche started pre-retirement leave.

I was pleased to meet with each regional leadership team and many other teams and acknowledge the enormity of the work being done by our staff and volunteers.

As a result of these meetings, we are refocusing our planning for 2022/23 to align to regional frontline demands and we continue to work toward our 2030 strategic objectives.

This will include reviewing our delegations to further empower regional personnel, building our incident management capabilities, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers, and investing in new safety systems on fleet and facilities.

We will also continue developing cultural initiatives and working toward improved diversity, inclusion and equity across our workforce.

I'd like to thank everyone involved in the recent flooding events, including those behind the scenes in local headquarters, stations and incident management roles.

I've heard so many amazing stories of the work our staff and volunteers have done to save countless lives and support communities. We did all this while also supporting our NSW colleagues and managing our daily demands.

We're not expecting a big bushfire season this year, but QFES is still doing everything we can to reduce risk.

As part of Operation Sesbania, we're working with our partner agencies to perform mitigation activities. Read more about Operation Sesbania on page 5.

It was extremely pleasing to see the government commitment of \$20 million in 2022-23 to enhance operational capability and risk management for the State Emergency Service (SES).

This includes 40 additional staff to support SES activities and a \$10 million capital boost for equipment and facilities.

Regional services will work in partnership with state and local government to start building these capabilities and implementing priorities.

This will also include \$1.4 million to equip SES with swift water rescue equipment and Level 1 training, flood boat operator personal protective clothing, additional safety and operational equipment for flood boats and incident management training.

This year's Australasian Rescue Challenge was held in Tamworth, NSW from 21 to 24 July. Sixteen teams from across Australia and New Zealand competed in simulated road crash rescue challenges.

QFES had two teams – one from Cairns in Far Northern Region and the other from Wishart in Brisbane Region. Once again, both teams did us proud, with the Wishart team taking out the trauma challenge. Read more on page 17.

On a final note, a special thanks to those involved in the QFES Estimates preparation. The hard work and effort did not go unnoticed and is greatly appreciated.



Introducing Australia's new fire danger ratings

On 1 September, Australia will switch to the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) to improve how we forecast fire danger.

The new system will help communities better prepare for bushfires by improving the science behind the ratings and making them easier to understand.

The AFDRS, which was developed with input from all states and territories, will be nationally consistent, so all Australians will use the same system.

Throughout Queensland, existing fire danger rating signs will be removed from roadsides, with new electronic signage rolling out state-wide shortly after. The fire danger ratings will also be displayed on the QFES website.

Out with the old

The current fire danger ratings are based on the McArthur system, which was developed in the 1950s and has several limitations.

“The McArthur system doesn’t account for fuel states, fire behaviour science or Australia’s diverse ecosystems,” said Tim Chittenden, Program Manager of the AFDRS Implementation Team.

“The old system is very sensitive and tends to become inaccurate at the higher end of the ratings scale.”

Manually adjusting the ratings on the current signs was also time consuming and therefore often not done regularly.

Research conducted in 2018 showed that while most people recognised the fire danger rating system, most didn’t understand it.

“Most people thought it was a prediction of how likely it was for a fire to occur, but actually it predicts just how dangerous a fire could be if one was to occur. Most people surveyed said they had never taken an action based on the ratings.”

In with the new

The AFDRS uses the latest scientific understandings of weather, fuel, fire behaviour and vegetation types to make more reliable fire danger forecasts.

“The new system takes advantage of many decades of research about how fire behaves and better represents the full variety of Australian vegetation and fuel types,” Tim said.

The new ratings are easier to understand, providing a clear message about what people need to do as the fire danger rating level changes.

“We’ve simplified the signs so they only have four levels instead of six, and each level has a call-to-action that explains what to do,” Tim said. “The new signs will be electronic and will be updated automatically and remotely.”

The science of fire behaviour

The AFDRS will also introduce a Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) to support fire and land managers to make decisions.

The FBI provides guidance about when to conduct prescribed burns, which bushfire suppression strategies to use, when to avoid using equipment that could spark a fire and when Total Fire Bans may be needed.

The FBI is more precise than the current Fire Danger Index because it’s calculated using eight fire behaviour models based on 22 individual fuel types. It provides a numerical scale from 0 to 100+ of potential fire behaviour.

QFES has been engaging with the community to let them know about the changes to fire danger ratings in the lead-up to 1 September.



Operation Sesbania heals country

The implementation of Operation Sesbania has been well received by our partner agencies and the new dashboard provides a valuable snapshot of activities.

Wayne Ford, Manager Bushfire Safety, said partner agencies welcomed Operation Sesbania's new approach, which allows mitigation activities to be conducted 365 days of the year.

"The perception in the past was that Operation Cool Burn happened from April to August, so that was the only time you could do mitigation activities," Wayne said.

"The change to year-round mitigation activities is not just about reducing risk to the community, it's about healing country. If we look at Indigenous knowledge, a managed country means less fuel load."

Wayne explained that while QFES worked off a 12-month calendar, First Nations peoples used different calendars.

The Yirrganydji people from the coastal plains in Cairns and Port Douglas, for example, use a seasonal calendar with two major seasons: Kurrabana (wet season) spanning November to May, and Kurraminya (dry season) spanning May to November.

Kurrabana in turn has two minor seasons: Jawarranyji (storm time, from November to January) and Jimburralji (cyclone time, from January to May).

Kurraminya has three minor seasons: Jinjim (winter time, from May to July), Yiwanyji (windy time, from July to September), and Wumbulji (hot time, from September to November).

"Indigenous calendars are based on intricate knowledge of the environment built up over many thousands of years," Wayne said. "They describe when it's wet, when it's dry, when food sources are available, when plants flower, when the barramundi come out and so on."

"Operation Sesbania doesn't align to seasons; it aligns to business processes within the organisation and the state. But it also identifies the different seasons from Far North Queensland down to Brisbane."

"By doing so, Operation Sesbania gives our people the flexibility to tailor their mitigation activities to the environment in their region and their prescribed outcomes."

Data at our fingertips

The new Operation Sesbania dashboard gives QFES staff and volunteers a cross-section of bushfire mitigation activities, making it easier for everyone to stay on the same page.

"Our staff, volunteers and partners have the opportunity to upload all planned and completed activities to the dashboard using an app," Wayne said.

"The dashboard highlights high-risk areas based on how many properties are there, how many roads lead in and out, and how much vegetation there is. This provides

guidance on where mitigation activities are planned to protect communities.

"The dashboard also shows what community engagement activities we've completed, along with hazard reduction burns by us and our partners, fire trails, and planned activities such as doorknocks."

"Capturing burnt areas or fire scarring across the landscape provides valuable data on vegetation regrowth for operational planning during bushfire responses. We can share this data with other departments, such as the Queensland Herbarium, which monitors biodiversity across the state."

"Our staff and volunteers can conduct fuel assessments in their area using their devices and upload them, which allows us to evaluate, monitor and record the fuel loads across the region."

"Using the tools helps validate other data-capturing technologies, provides situational awareness for brigades' local areas and helps monitor mitigation programs over time."

"All this information is updated live in the State Operations Centre, supporting the regions' fortnightly reports. It's all about planning, capturing and obtaining some history."



A hazard reduction burn at Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island).



Junior members of the Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade completed a pile burn under the supervision of their senior leaders. Photo by Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade.



First Nations group builds connections

Brisbane Region has set up a First People's Consultative Group to improve communications between First Nations peoples, the organisation and the community.

In 2020, Brisbane Region ran the Our People Yarning Circle to start a conversation about how to better engage our people and our community. This inspired the idea to establish the group.

The group meets monthly and supports our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel to share their experiences and knowledge.

They also aim to develop our personnel's knowledge of Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture, and support and empower Brisbane Region staff and volunteers to engage with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our community.

Response sat down with three members of the group – Mark Gillard, Andrew Renouf and Robert Reading – during NAIDOC Week in July to talk about their goals.

Robert, a Senior Firefighter from Chermside Fire and Rescue Station and a Yiman man from eastern central Queensland, said he wanted the group to widen knowledge of Indigenous peoples within QFES.

"Celebrations like NAIDOC Week could be more regularly advertised and widely celebrated," Robert said.

"I think we're a few steps behind in regard to Indigenous celebrations and knowledge within the department. Our group is trying to build momentum."

Mark is a Junior Firefighter in Brisbane Region and a Torres Strait Islander with connections to Thursday Island and Badu Island on his father's side.



Members of the First People's Consultative Group (left to right): Stephen De Pinto, Andrew Renouf, Robert Reading, Mark Gillard and Janine Taylor.

"We need to get to the stage where people ask us to come and join initiatives like NAIDOC Week instead of us asking them if we can be involved," Mark said.

Mark's current focus is on getting local Indigenous artwork in stations.

Andrew, a Senior Firefighter at Annerley Fire and Rescue Station, said it was valuable to connect with the younger generation to give them an opportunity for a career path.

"If we can tap into one family, one kid, then that's a branch to another family," Andrew said. "It's a step in the right direction."

Robert said it was important for the group to attend community engagement activities like Murri carnivals.

"A lot of Indigenous people don't know QFES is an option for a career. By getting out there in the community, we can show people it's a real opportunity for them."

Mark added, "People don't always have access to the internet or social media, so we need to physically be there."

Andrew said, "Having a badge with our name on it shows we're part of the department, we're not just there as a spokesperson, we're actually riding the trucks."

"When we had the Murri School come out, we put PPE on the kids, and you should have seen their confidence increase."

"Our mob is incredible at sport – like deadly as – but sport's not everything. So for example, you can get kids into a sporting career and then show them we have sporting teams within the emergency services. There are things in place, but trying to get change is hard."

Robert said, "Personally for me, I wasn't in touch with my Indigenous family growing up, so they were very distant from me, and it wasn't until later in life that I started to become familiar with the culture of Indigenous peoples and my family."

"It's important to me that my three children grow up knowing their culture and being proud of who they are. Events like NAIDOC Week are good because there are a lot of activities happening around Brisbane that I can take the kids to. I want them to be proud and take part in activities, because I never had that opportunity growing up."

Mark said NAIDOC Week contributes to positive change.

"From working in youth detention, secondary education and tertiary education, I really believe it just takes one person to make a difference."

You can find out more about the group on the Gateway by searching for 'First Peoples and Culture'.



Inclusion in action

August is Multicultural Queensland Month and this year the theme of 'Inclusion in action' explored the many ways language helps build an inclusive Queensland. QFES took the opportunity to hold events celebrating our diversity.

QFES hosted the second Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Disaster Management Workshop in collaboration with Multicultural Australia, Red Cross Australia and Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT).

More than 50 community leaders met at the Emergency Services Complex Kedron, with several people travelling from outside of Brisbane, to discuss how to improve community wellbeing and outcomes.

Partnerships and Sponsorship Manager Leah Hornibrook said, "On the day, the honest conversations were so inspiring and we were grateful for insights we couldn't have received without having everyone together in the room."

Facilitators from QFES, QPASTT, Red Cross and Get Ready Queensland led conversations about disaster preparedness, response and recovery as the group reflected on the floods earlier in the year.

"We looked at what happened, who responded and how, particularly in terms of preparation and recovery," Leah said.

"Participants shared their personal experiences and advice, helping us look at what worked and what could be improved, so we could learn from each other and support communities to be resilient in the face of future challenges.

"Most importantly, the day was all about building relationships between emergency services and cultural communities. Through

stronger connections, we can work together to achieve anything.

"The next steps will involve a session with the organisers, facilitators and disaster management stakeholders to discuss outcomes. This will help us build skills and strategies to collaborate effectively before, during and after any type of disaster into the future.

"We've clearly heard this work can only happen in collaboration with cultural communities and we will be in touch with them through Multicultural Australia and QPASTT to plan about future engagements."

Event partner Suncorp provided a delicious morning tea and lunch, which were prepared by the Syrian community and Mu'ooz Restaurant respectively.

Sharing a meal

QFES also partnered with the Queensland Police Service, Multicultural Australia, the

Queensland Human Rights Commission and Rockhampton Regional Council to host the fifth annual Multi Faith Dinner at the Frenchville Sports Club in June.

The Multi Faith Dinner allows government and other agency representatives to sit down and share a meal with community leaders from our diverse community.

The dinner builds on existing community relationships through dialogue and partnership, with community and religious leaders standing together and promoting the shared values of all faiths.

Ninety-five guests representing 16 cultures and six named religions joined in the evening's festivities.

Guests were entertained by 'The Three Rockyteer' and First Nations performances by 'Wuru' and Michael Amber. They enjoyed an informative panel discussion themed 'How we celebrate key religious and cultural celebrations in Australia'.



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Finding focus with Mindarma

Earlier this year, QFES launched Mindarma, an online learning program that supports the psychological wellbeing of our volunteers.

Sponsored by NAB and Suncorp, Mindarma teaches a range of strategies to help manage stress in volunteering and daily life.

Hugh Strong, Crew Leader and Brigade Training Officer with the Glen Aplin Rural Fire Brigade, said Mindarma taught skills that could help every volunteer.

“When we’re engaged in an incident, it’s all well and good to have the skills to make sure we walk away from it, but we need to be able to leave that incident behind,” Hugh said.

“The traumas we face as volunteers can be overwhelming. Mindarma gives you the skills to process mentally and emotionally

the aspects of trauma that many people struggle to deal with.”

He said Mindarma also helped him beyond his volunteer work.

“I work as a federal employee in the welfare sector. I deal with extremely vulnerable people who have been through traumatic events – horrific situations, domestic violence, the whole lot. And I’m seeing that day in, day out.

“Mindarma gives me the ability to be self-aware of my own triggers and things that may lead me to vicariously take on a customer’s trauma.

“As a self-defence and martial arts instructor, many of my students are

survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Having the skills to bring them back to the here and now and help them disarm their own triggers, so they can help process and heal, is so vital.”

Hugh said mindfulness gave him the breathing space he needed in a critical incident.

“It helps reduce your stress and opens up your field of vision. Mindarma’s mindfulness training will help out a lot of volunteers in a big way.

“Make a rash decision, particularly as a Rural Fire Service volunteer, and it doesn’t just hurt you: it hurts your crew. So any skill that can help keep you safe also keeps your crew safe. The biggest rule is everybody comes home.

“If people are caught up in the past, they become fearful of the future. They need to be in the present so they can make decisions.

“In two weeks’ time, in a month’s time, when you need your crew again, can they still face what you’ve faced previously?”

“Mindarma opens a doorway to make sure you can self-care, on the field and off the field.”

Hugh said he found the Brain Food section most useful.

“My background means I look at the research paperwork and everything’s peer-reviewed, so there’s evidence to back it up. The webinars are fantastic as well, because they give practical aspects to the research.”

“It’s a few minutes, over a few sessions, but what you learn and how you apply that could be the difference between a brigade member turning up to training, being safe on an incident ground or simply surviving in life.”

You can register for Mindarma by visiting:

- RFS: mindarma.com/courses/QFES_RFS/register/
- SES: mindarma.com/courses/QFES_SES/register/
- FRS and all other QFES volunteers: mindarma.com/courses/QFES/register/



Hugh Strong said Mindarma taught practical techniques first responders could take with them into the field.



Top honours for QFES

Three QFES staff were recognised with the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) and Emergency Service Medal (ESM) – the highest honours that can be granted to QFES personnel – in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List.

Greg Leach AFSM Commissioner

After an extensive 35-year firefighting career in Victoria and Queensland, Commissioner Leach was bestowed the AFSM in recognition of his leadership and distinguished service.

Commissioner Leach has worked for multiple emergency agencies in senior executive positions, such as Victoria’s Country Fire Authority, Ambulance Victoria and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, before becoming QFES’ Commissioner in 2019.

“I started here on 2 December 2019, and we were in the midst of a really severe bushfire season, then we moved into COVID-19 response and isolation, and then severe weather,” Commissioner Leach said.

“It’s been a challenging time for QFES – we’ve been in almost continuous response mode the whole time I’ve been here, as well as running the business-as-usual aspects of QFES.”

Throughout his career, Commissioner Leach has kept a strong focus on frontline capability, operational excellence and safety for firefighters.

“Firefighter safety has been a key element all the way through. I have this fundamental philosophy that every firefighter and emergency services responder should go home safely at the end of a shift.

“Unfortunately, I’ve been involved in a number of line of duty deaths. The most significant was the Linton fire on 2 December 1998, where five volunteer firefighters lost their lives at a bushfire in south-west Victoria.



“That was a significant turning point for firefighter safety, not only in Victoria but across Australia, and so many of the ways we fight fires today – training, protective clothing, safety features on appliances – had their genesis in the Linton fire. That’s what drives me, no one should lose their life in the line of duty.”

Commissioner Leach was surprised and humbled to be nominated for the award and reflected on the people who have inspired him and shaped his leadership style.

“I’ve been fortunate to be in the company of some really great people I’ve worked with, looked up to and respected over a long period of time.

“Leadership’s about making a connection with people. You don’t choose to lead – people choose whether they’ll follow you. In an emergency situation we move to a more autocratic leadership style, but in terms of leading a big complex organisation, you’ve got to be people focused – you can’t afford to be disconnected from your organisation.

“That’s why my regional tours are so important, to get out and about and connect with people at all levels of the organisation, get their input about how things are going and what we need to do to change.”

Mark Doble AFSM Rural Fire Service Inspector

After joining his local Rural Fire Brigade in 2007, Mark quickly established himself as a leader among his peers – a trait he has carried into his full-time role as an Inspector.





“As a volunteer, I love being in the privileged position to help not only my fellow crew members but the community in which I live,” Mark said.

“That’s where a lot of the satisfaction comes from – when someone’s having a bad day and there’s something you can do to help.

“As a staff member in the training space, there’s nothing more fulfilling than having knowledge of something that you can pass on to somebody else.”

Mark was instrumental in increasing his brigade’s membership, which was dwindling when he joined.

“In 2007, a lot of people like me were moving to south-east Queensland who didn’t have a great understanding of how to prepare their properties for bushfires,” he said.

“People were predicting some big bushfire seasons in the near future. I wanted to support my officers to reinvigorate training and get people motivated to train so they could protect their communities.”

Mark took the opportunity to volunteer in the State Air Operations unit, developing his skills as a volunteer Air Base Manager and Air Observer and producing initiatives to improve safety and compliance.

He also played a major role in implementing the Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) program in 2009, committing many evenings and weekends to build the resources and capability and train the volunteers.

“The VCE role was created to provide an opportunity for brigade members with lots of experience who didn’t want to be on the end of a hose anymore to stay involved and pass on their knowledge.”

Mark said one challenge going from a volunteer to an Inspector in 2019 was imposter syndrome.

“I knew the organisation well, but coming into a role I had so much respect for, it took me a little time to adjust and find my niche where I’m comfortable to start doing all the things I want to achieve.

“I’ve worked with many wonderful staff and volunteers who give so much. If there was a way of dicing this award up and sharing it with other people around me I would.

“When you receive recognition like this, it’s for your family as well. I’ve missed birthday parties, anniversaries and school concerts because I’ve been helping the community through fire or flood. This recognises the people who’ve supported me to do what I do.”

Elliott Dunn ESM **Emergency Management** **Coordinator for Northern** **Region**

Elliott, who is based in Mount Isa, has spent 14 years supporting rural and remote communities and Indigenous Local Government Associations in north-west Queensland.



“We provide training, advice and support but the local governments do the heavy lifting. The communities are resilient, which makes my role so much easier,” Elliott said.

“We cover a large portion of the state, so I travel a lot and spend time in the communities. The district is just under 400,000 square kilometres but has a population of just over 30,000, so there’s no shortage of open space.

“It’s not unusual to drive five hours for a two-hour meeting. Just because communities are remote shouldn’t mean they get less of a service.”

Elliott’s district includes the Indigenous communities of Doomadgee and Mornington Island as well as other smaller Indigenous communities.

“Across the district we have a very high population of First Nations peoples,” he said.

“It’s a myth that you need to deal with Indigenous communities differently. It’s more about understanding and working with them.

“The misconception that Indigenous communities are vulnerable to natural disasters really couldn’t be further from the truth. There isn’t a mentality of ‘who is going to help us’ here – the communities just get on with it.”

Most years, the communities are isolated by floods, often for many weeks at a time, and Elliott is instrumental in ensuring continuity of supply.

“Some areas may be isolated for a day or two, others for a couple of months.

“For the more remote areas, being isolated is just part of the wet season and the rain is vital to the cattle industry. It’s rare to hear any complaints about rain.”

The 2019 floods brought massive devastation across north-west Queensland with severe disruption to communities and key infrastructure damaged. Thousands of people reached out for help and the floodwaters covered 15,000 square kilometres.

Elliott worked tirelessly for weeks on end to ensure local government leaders and their respective communities received full support.

“We saw areas affected that had never been affected before.

“The 2019 floods had a massive impact on the cattle industry. Out here, that has a direct impact on the community.

“Despite knowing what was happening there was absolutely nothing anyone could do about it. This affected graziers both emotionally and financially.”

Elliott recounted one moment that stands out – when a storm hit Boulia bringing down several trees, including one that blocked the entrance of the school. Before Elliott had the chance to check in, members of the community and council had already cleaned it up.

“This is one of my favourite parts of working with the communities here. If the community asks for help you can be certain they’ve tried everything to solve the problem and they really do need a hand.”



Working on the ice

When he's not volunteering for the Rockhampton State Emergency Service (SES), Doug McVeigh spends his time working on Antarctic research stations.

Doug has worked both summers and winters at four different stations – Mawson, Davis, Casey and Macquarie Island – since 2004.

As a Station Communications Technical Officer, he maintains all electronic equipment, including the satellite station, IT and phone systems, radios and cable networks.

“All wintering personnel on station also have secondary roles,” Doug said. “I’ve been a fire team member, deputy fire chief and a search and rescue (SAR) team member.

“I’ve also been a lay medical officer, environmental officer, hydroponics team member and yearbook compiler, and I’ve assisted in the home brewery.”

Doug also completes remote science work, assisting with magnetic observations, seismic monitoring and freshwater lake sampling. He helps maintain and repair equipment damaged by blizzards, such as penguin monitoring cameras and GPS.

The lay of the land

There are many separate buildings at each station because fire is one of the biggest hazards.

“The last thing we want is for a fire to spread to multiple areas,” Doug said. “We have a backup plan for everything in case there is a fire, so if we lose a building, there’s always somewhere else to go.

“Everyone has a room to themselves, which consists of a single bed, desk and chair and a cupboard. All accommodation is on station, but you can visit field huts to check out the local sights and get away from the station for a night or two.

“The main building is the Red Shed, which contains the accommodation, kitchen and mess, entertainment areas and the medical area.

“All the buildings are generally a different colour. For example, yellow is science; blue is no-go areas such as the Bureau of Meteorology balloon building, powerhouse,

incinerator, switchboards and so on; orange is trade workshops and comms; silver is hydroponics; and green is the pump house and transceiver.”

Wintering

Wintering expeditioners arrive on the first transport – usually a supply ship or aircraft – into the station and leave on the first transport out at the end of winter.

“We have minimum numbers on station during winter – Mawson has about 15 people, Davis 20 and Casey 27,” Doug said.

“Once you’re left there for the winter, it will be a long time before the next transports arrives. Everyone undergoes a stringent medical and physiological screening, and a compatibility assessment to ensure minimal conflict.

“We have phones and internet, so there’s always a way to contact friends and family, but if something happens back home, you





can't just leave and be back there with them. Unfortunately, you may miss special occasions."

Summer days

More people come to the station in summer because that's when they can do science work and external construction. The team does a lot of work outside, like maintaining masts and aerial systems.

"Casey and Davis may have up to 120 people during summer," Doug said.

"The temperatures on sunny days are around 5°C. The steel structures are very cold at the best of times and if fine work is required, you can take your gloves off."

Doug also installed new fibre-optic cables in summer.

"It once took me 14 days to expose the cable tray, which was buried under three metres of ice. We ran a hot air blower for 24 hours a day to melt the ice, along with putting heat blankets on top to protect the completed area and allow water to escape. We had snowstorms at that time, so we had to redo a lot of our work."

Wildlife

In summer there is an abundance of wildlife at the stations. Adelie Penguins come in to nest, lay eggs and bring up their young.

"There are Adelie colonies close to every station and there are literally thousands on thousands of birds during their breeding season," Doug said.

"We also see skuas, giant petrels, snow petrels, Wilston storm petrels and some of the other petrel family.

"The Weddell seal breeds in early summer and have their pups on the sea ice. We also see leopard seals, which are on the lookout for an easy meal with all the penguins about. Occasionally we spot an orca.

"It's a pristine environment and beauty surrounds you everywhere, with amazing cloud formations, sunsets and sunrises, auroras and icebergs."

Routine

There's no such thing as a typical day in Antarctica.

"We work five and a half days a week, and most people are on call 24/7 due to the nature of the station and its environment," Doug said.

The whole station also participates in regular fire and SAR training.

"The exercises can be on station, in the field or at a field hut. We don't use water during the fire exercises, because it's a precious commodity, and it would instantly freeze in the hoses if it wasn't flowing. Water can also freeze our boots to the ground.

"However, we access water hydrants and run out hoses if needed. We wear BA for building exercises.

"From this training, I gained an understanding of what fire and SAR teams do and how they operate. We did lots of rope, stretcher and rescue activities on ice cliffs, rock cliffs and gentle slopes.

"The stretcher handling activities were interesting, and the rope and pulley work was a lot different to what is used in the SES because we had more specialised equipment for setting up raise and lower systems, plus the pulley arrangements."

Lessons

Doug's time in Antarctica informs his work with QFES in many ways.

"I think I've become more tolerant of the different peculiarities of other people, compared to my own," Doug said.

"On station, every person is a cog in the wheel that keeps things running. If one cog fails, it affects the whole station.

"The equipment I use for working on towers and masts at the stations is different from what I use in the SES, but the basic principles are the same. I learnt a lot about working at heights and what my limits are.

"I've learnt to work with people from all walks of life, acknowledging the skill set they possess. Everyone, no matter who they are and what they do, has valuable skills that are useful under different circumstances."

Applications for jobs at research stations generally open in December each year. For more information visit jobs.antarctica.gov.au/jobs-in-antarctica/





Shining a light on RFS

Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week gives us the chance to celebrate the hard work of our 28,000 volunteers, including the recently crowned RFS State Volunteer of the Year and State Young Volunteer of the Year.

Savannah Terrar of Kuranda Myola Rural Fire Brigade in Far Northern Region is the 2022 RFS State Volunteer of the Year. Her roles have included brigade secretary, second officer, volunteer community educator, crew leader and incident team member. She attends up to 30 fires each year and is active in community events.

“When I was a little girl I lived at the base of Mt Whitfield near Cairns, and every year the fires rushed down that mountain and came within about a metre of our house,” Savannah said.

“I became well and truly infatuated with the amazing work the firefighters did. They saved our home half a dozen times.

“The way they dealt with the intense emotions of my parents and the community while still finding time to have a joke with us kids was incredible.

“I’m a single parent, and one day to keep my kids and their friends busy, I took them to my local brigade’s open day barbecue.

“Within five minutes I realised I’d put off my lifelong dream long enough and these people were my people. Within a week I sent in my application, and not long after I had boots on the ground.”

Savannah is a member of both the Kuranda Myola and Speewah brigades, within the Clohesy River Group.

“I wanted to engage with the area where I lived, as well as the area that encompasses my children’s school,” she said.

“One of the beautiful things about volunteers is we have jobs, families and everything else, so sometimes if I’m not busy with the Kuranda Myola brigade, Speewah can call me directly and I can act as a crew leader or help with training. It allows me to use my spare time, when I have it, for whoever needs it most.

Savannah has been on nine deployments in the past three years, often taking leave without pay to donate her time.

“I was once deployed to Torrington in NSW. It was mid-afternoon, but it was completely black and the sound of the fire coming toward us was like a freight train.

“It was the most intense fire I’ve been to and we needed so much water to fight it that we had to fix up all the old appliances from the ‘boneyard’ and use them.

“For three-and-a-half hours straight, we walked up and down a sandy track in a national park, putting out spot fires hundreds of metres from the fire wall. It was a 90-minute round trip to get water, so we used a lot of dry firefighting tactics.



Savannah Terrar (right) was named the State Volunteer of the Year.



“It was hard going on our bodies, but it’s one of my proudest days.”

Savannah also did two deployments for the Queensland floods.

“When you walk into a community that’s been underwater and people thank you for cleaning their house and salvaging some of their belongings, it’s one of the biggest honours you can have as a firefighter.

“We do it out of sheer love and drive for the community. I’ve seen firefighters turn away because they have tears in their eyes when a small child has written a note with a packet of homemade biscuits.

“When you meet up with people post-deployment, it’s like seeing your cousin or your best mate from high school. There’s a bond between us. Outside the emergency services, I don’t think a lot of people would truly understand that bond. It’s just beautiful.”

Savannah hopes she and her family can stay and grow with the RFS for life. Her 18-year-old daughter Ava is also a volunteer.

“It’s an amazing feeling to see your kids follow in your footsteps. We’ll often be at a fire together, but with different brigades, and I’ll look across the highway and see her working as part of a team.

“She’s the youngest in her brigade and she works shoulder to shoulder with the others, achieving the mission with a sense of joy and pride.”

Always learning

Caitlyn Simpkins-Field of Branyan Rural Fire Brigade, near Bundaberg, is the State Young Volunteer of the Year. She was recognised for her dedication to upholding the QFES values.

Caitlyn responds to regular fire calls and is always one of the first to put her hand up to help around the station.

“I was overwhelmed, excited and very happy to hear about the award,” Caitlyn said.

“I joined the RFS for the opportunity to help our community in times of need, whether it’s on the fire ground or in an Incident Control Centre.

“My brigade is wonderful and we work very closely together. We are a very organised and well-structured brigade, which I like. Our brigade covers a wide area and it can be quite fire prone in the dry months.

“My wife and I transferred to the brigade about six months ago. We were called to do a chainsaw job recently where a tree had come down across a road.

“The scene is vivid in my mind because it was a cold stormy night. We were pulling tree branches to the side of the road for the council to take away when we came across an injured magpie.

“I wrapped it up in my jacket and sat it in the truck while we waited for a wildlife carer to come and pick it up. We continued removing the tree bit by bit until the road was clear, just in time for the next storm cell to roll through.

“The advice I would give to someone who has just joined the RFS is to listen to the stories and the experiences of other members – it really teaches you a lot.

“For someone thinking of joining, attend a local open day – it’s fun and informative. Go along to your brigade’s training day or night, where you’ll learn a lot and find out if you’ll enjoy it.”



At the launch of RFS Week.



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QFES geared up for Road Crash Rescue competition

The Australasian Rescue Challenge took place in Tamworth from 21 to 24 July. Two teams from QFES – Cairns and Wishart – participated in the Challenge.

Back after a two-year postponement due to COVID-19, the Challenge, organised by the Australasian Road Rescue Organisation, showcased participants' skills, their willingness to learn and QFES' capability.

Response caught up with Cairns Team Leader Ian Fulton, a Station Officer with 37 years' experience and a Senior Road Crash Rescue (RCR) Instructor.

The Cairns team consisted of Ian, Advanced Care Paramedic and Auxiliary Firefighter Kate Heuer, Senior Firefighter Renee Price, State RCR Instructor Shane Given, Rural Fire Service Area Training and Support Officer and Auxiliary Firefighter Nick Bloomfield, and State RCR Instructor Michael Balmer. Together, they have more than 100 years of experience.

Teams from Australia and New Zealand, representing all emergency response agencies, competed in scenarios replicating road rescue situations.

"It's great to catch up with all involved," said Ian, who has received a Commissioner's Award for Excellence in RCR development.

"We're there to compete but at the end of the day we're also there to learn, and if we learn one thing that saves a life it's all worth it.

"This event gives us the ability to talk and exchange good practice learnt on the job."

The three 30-minute challenges involved side removal, roof removal, internal space making, vehicle lifting and vehicle relocation. Teams used these techniques to extricate live and mannequin casualties.

"The QFES teams used command and control of the scenarios to show planning and leadership," Ian said.

"We used our technical abilities with tools to carry out the disentanglement plan and medical skills to assess the injuries of the casualties and extricate them. If you do all three components well as a team, you score well in the competition."

Realistic preparation was the biggest roadblock the team faced in the lead-up to the Challenge.

"New Zealand and other states have already had state competitions, so they had the opportunity to practise under the conditions that are assessed by the judges," Ian explained.

"We do a lot of training in our own time, but it's hard to simulate scenarios under competition conditions."

A history of success

QFES teams have had many successes since the event began in the late 1990s. The Cairns team, which at the time featured Ian, Shane, Michael and Nick along with Ian Lawless, Darcy Magee and Gareth Colman, qualified for and attended World Challenges in Florida, Portugal and Romania.

The highlight of those Challenges was placing third in Technical and ninth Overall in Florida against emergency responders from all around the world.

"The competition enhances teamwork and camaraderie and is an excellent learning platform to share with our fellow QFES personnel when we return to our shifts," Ian said.

"In the twilight of my career, I'd love to see new firefighters and emergency response personnel enter teams in future challenges.

"The experiences I've had and friendships I've made will be forever, but more importantly it's an incredible way to gain and maintain skills in an ever-challenging environment."

Annually, QFES crews respond to more than 22,000 road traffic crashes across Queensland.



The Cairns team has competed at challenges in Australia and internationally for more than 18 years.



This year, the Wishart team won the Trauma Challenge.



Scaling the Story Bridge

It's one of the iconic sites of Brisbane, but there was no time to take in the scenery as 16 firefighters scaled new heights to earn their qualifications in Level II industrial vertical rescue.

Conducted as part of a series of exercises testing the ability of firefighters to problem solve, the exercise was carried out at the southern end of the Story Bridge.

Split into two teams, the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) vertical rescue technicians in training lifted a stretcher containing an 80-kilogram dummy and various equipment about 40 metres up to a platform just beneath road level.

From there, two FRS instructors posed as casualties suspended from the underside of the bridge.

Course instructor Nathan Roper said crews not only had to devise the safest way to access the casualty, but also secure and accompany them for the 40-metre drop down to ground level.

"The scenarios are developed with some real-world applications imitating previous jobs and also include elements that are

outside the norm, which require specific problem-solving solutions to test skills learnt on the course," Nathan said.

Brisbane Region firefighter Ashleigh Doble said the step up on skills required from Level I to Level II was significant.

"There are more skills to learn and more equipment to learn about," Ashleigh said.

"Some of those skills involve locating the casualty, working out different ways of access, stabilising the casualty and then transporting them to the ground or hauling them to a safe point.

"It's not a physically demanding course, it's more mentally demanding. There are lots of things to consider when setting up systems – there are a lot of different angles and different loads."

The Story Bridge exercise was just one of several undertaken as part of the Level II course, with other scenarios taking place

at the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy (QCESA) and nearby industrial facilities at the Port of Brisbane.

The training exercise is part of the initial course for advanced industrial rescue, which involves helping people stuck while cleaning or working on high-rise buildings, bridges or any activity involving heights in an urban or industrial environment.

"Initially it's quite daunting, but once you learn the capabilities of your equipment and you learn to trust it, and once that system is in place, height isn't the issue and it's more about your focus on the casualty," Ashleigh said.

"I've always been involved in physical and more practical parts of the job so being able to apply those skills is an excellent challenge and something I'm grateful to be able to do."



Cadets create pathways for young people

This month we celebrated National Student Volunteer Week, acknowledging the contribution student volunteers make to our community. *Response* talked with three cadets who started volunteering in the Emergency Services Cadets (ESC) program and went on to join the Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Claire Case

I've been a cadet for about 18 months and I'm currently the Unit Leader of the Highfields ESC Unit.

The cadets program teaches us so much more than first aid – it teaches us respect, efficiency, responsibility and commitment, and gives us opportunities to expand our leadership skills. All of these traits gave me an extra boost when applying for a job.

Cadets learn to look after our uniforms and take pride in what they represent. Applying for leadership positions and cadet camps are good practice for future job applications.

The ESC program introduces cadets to organisations like the RFS and State Emergency Service. This makes the transition into the emergency services easier, especially when we know the basic equipment and procedures.

The main highlights from my time so far in the RFS include attending controlled burns, learning new skills and helping my community. It's empowering to know you have the power to make such a big impact on people's lives.

My future goals include completing my Firefighter Advanced Skills course and moving up in rank. I've seen a huge amount of personal growth in myself since joining the RFS, and I have become a better person because of it.



Morgan Dundas

I was a cadet for 12 months and when I turned 16 I joined my local RFS brigade in Withcott. With another colleague, I was invited to the ESCape Week program, where we visited different emergency services across South Eastern Region.

Through my time with the cadets, I was taught incredibly valuable skills such as first aid, radio communications and teamwork, while gaining an appreciation for Queensland's emergency services.

Since joining the RFS, I have responded to emergency fire calls, completed national certificates and joined the Remote Area Firefighting Team.

My experiences and learning from both the cadets and the RFS led me to apply to join the Queensland Police Service.

Toby Turpin

Being in the cadets has shown me what it is to be a part of something special. It gave me a lot of skills and knowledge to get ready for adulthood and life as a volunteer in the emergency services. The program showed me discipline and mateship, which will stick with me forever.

I learnt so many things, including what each emergency service agency does and how important they are to our communities.

My personal favourite was learning how to bowl and coil all types of hoses. In my short time I obtained the rank of cadet leader and showed the younger cadets the knowledge I had learnt, which gave me a great sense of belonging.

Since joining Murphy's Creek Rural Fire Brigade near the end of 2021, I've learnt what it means to be part of a big family and how to carry out the role of a rural firefighter. The crew are amazing both on and off the fire ground. I've responded to multiple calls and been on one deployment to help other communities with flood recovery.

If you're interested in joining the ESC program as a volunteer adult leader or cadet, please email emergencyservicescadets@pcyc.org.au



"I learnt so many things, including what each emergency service agency does and how important they are to our communities."

– Toby Turpin



SOUTH EASTERN REGION

A surprise visit from the Broncos

Gold Coast State Emergency Service (SES) Unit Deputy Local Controller Leanne Woolard received a surprise visit in June from former Brisbane Broncos Captain Alex Glenn at group training.

In 2018, Leanne was awarded the NRMA Brisbane Broncos Queensland Hero Award for her incredible 26 years as an SES volunteer, while also being a supportive wife of her Local Controller husband, the mother of three children and a full-time high school teacher.

In late 2021, Leanne's house was destroyed in a fire and she lost all her possessions and 30 years of SES awards.

When the Brisbane Broncos were advised of Leanne's circumstances, they offered to remint Leanne's 2018 Broncos medallion and present her with an up-to-date Broncos jersey signed by all the 2022 players.

Congratulations Leanne and thank you Alex Glenn and the Brisbane Broncos Management for supporting SES members.



Mount Barney RPAS exercise

South Eastern Region has been testing our Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) capability to assist with missing person searches.

Part one of the exercise took place on Mount Barney after discussions between QFES, Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service around the potential use of RPAS in the area.

The team discovered the smaller RPAS would only be useful for the lower parts of the mountain due to flight restrictions.

In part two of the exercise, the team used a larger RPAS to locate lost hikers and guide rescue teams. The larger RPAS could deliver messages to people working on the ground, as well as carrying out supply drops. The exercise was developed and led by Jason Daniels and Danni Bull from the State Emergency Service (SES).

Other attendees were from the Disaster Assistance Response Team, State Air Operations Unit, Technical Rescue and QPS.

The exercise consisted of Fire and Rescue Service and SES teams walking parts of the mountain with RPAS providing situational awareness and oversight. Footage from the RPAS was streamed live to the field headquarters and participants' devices.

The pilots gained valuable understanding of the capability and limitations of the RPAS fleet. Several SES members gained experience in the role of RPAS observer for the first time.

New Loganlea Fire and Rescue Station

In June, crews at Loganlea Fire and Rescue Station celebrated their last week operating out of the original station before transitioning to the new \$4 million state-of-the-art facility designed to future-proof population growth in Logan.

The original station was built in 1985 to serve Logan City District's then-population of 114,000 people and has seen countless firefighter responses and many fond memories over the last 37 years.

The original station has now been demolished to make way for stage 2 of construction, which will include a two-storey training tower and road crash rescue training pad.





SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Superheroes Day

QFES members from all three services joined in the fun at Superheroes Day at the Warwick RSL on the last day of June.

'Little Diggers' enjoyed looking through the emergency services vehicles, trying on some of the clothing and operating some of the equipment under supervision.

Alongside QFES, the event was attended by Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, Australian Defence Force and Southern Downs Regional Council.

As the picture montage below shows, everyone got into the spirit of the day and had a great time.



Tactical training

Professional Development Command recently hosted the region's first Tactical Incident Management course at the Tactical Training Facility.

The Auxiliary Firefighter Development Unit delivered the course over four days. Participants learnt to develop greater understanding of command and control at level 1 incidents.

Firefighters were mentored in the role of Officer in Charge and practised applying tactical decision making and prioritising objectives to meet tactical benchmarks.

Based on positive feedback from the participants, South Western Region will conduct further courses in the future.





FAR NORTHERN REGION

Murray Upper mural unveiling

The Murray Upper Rural Fire Brigade recently unveiled their new mural, an initiative to foster local talent and community involvement.

The idea was to use the large empty space to engage with other parts of the community.

The artwork encompasses community spirit and volunteering, featuring the role fire and firefighters play in the landscape. The crew hope it will become a talking point among the community.

The artwork is tentatively titled 'Fire in our landscape' and was painted by Lavinia Letherby from Art by Lavinia. The project was largely funded by a Cassowary Coast Regional Council community grant.



Kowanyama recruitment at community employment expo

Kowanyama State Emergency Service (SES) Local Controller Maxine Adams and Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council (KASC) Mayor Robbie Sands supported Area Controller James Gegg to undertake recruitment conversations with community members.

The Community Employment Expo was held over two days in June and was supported by many government agencies.

Long-term local volunteer Monica Josiah dropped in to say hello and helped engage with community members and encourage them to apply for membership. Several membership applications were completed for Kowanyama and one for Weipa.

QFES members had many conversations explaining what the SES does and doesn't respond to and how to request assistance.

Kowanyama means 'place of many waters' in the local Yir Yoront language. They community is located on the banks of Magnificent Creek and surrounded by numerous creeks and billabongs.

The Kokoberra, Yir Yoront (or Kokomnjen) and Kunjen clans are recognised as the traditional owners for this area. Each group has its own distinct language and culture.



Exercise HMAS Cairns

It's not every day you get to save a multimillion-dollar naval vessel, but the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and State Emergency Service (SES) did exactly that.

They undertook mock rescues and firefighting activities aboard the Paluma-class HMAS Shepparton as part of an inter-agency exercise led by HMAS Cairns Naval Base.

FRS provided internal fire suppression and rescue activities while an SES flood boat conducted an in-water recovery supported by SES drones. This exercise is one of many regional examples of the excellent relationships between QFES and external stakeholders in providing emergency response capabilities.



NORTHERN REGION

Townsville's first fire station opened 135 years ago

Built in 1887 in Flinders Street, the fire station was between the post office and the municipal offices, and was staffed by a volunteer brigade of ten officers. The station opened on 21 July 1887 to much fanfare, including a torchlight procession and fireworks.

The two-storey building, designed by Brisbane architect Victor Carandini, included a 15-metre lookout tower, which was also used for drying out hoses.

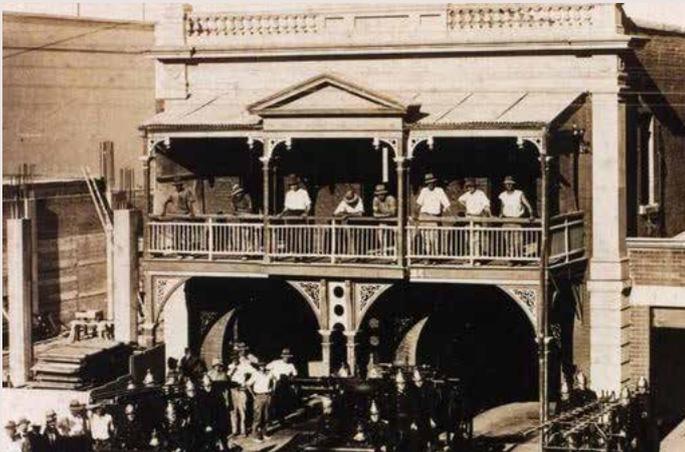
One disastrous fire the brigade fought was the Townsville Bulletin office in October 1912.

When fire broke out in a reel of paper in the basement, the brigade were swiftly on the scene. However, there was no water to fight the fire because the city council had switched it off overnight to conserve the city's precious water reserves.

The engineer at the waterworks was notified, but it was 15 minutes before the water was turned on and then it took another five minutes to reach full pressure.

By the mid-1920s, the Townsville Fire Brigade had outgrown its home. The Townsville Central Fire Station, at the intersection of Stokes and Walker Streets, officially opened on 24 July 1926, and at the time it was considered one of the most modern fire stations in the state.

The present fire station was opened in 1972 in Morey Steet and celebrates its 50th anniversary in October.



Meet Bob and Kath Freeman from Oak Valley

"We're both foundation members of the Oak Valley Rural Fire Brigade, joining in July 1982. Bob was the treasurer for over 20 years and a firefighter until recent years.

"Kath occasionally got on the end of a hose, but her main role was supporting the crew and organising the annual brigade Christmas party.

"She spent weeks getting donations and finding prizes, organising everything from jumping castles and catering to Santa. It was a great way to get the whole community together.

"In our time with the brigade, it has been a great pleasure to work with and assist our community. Over the years we have attended many fires and our success in controlling them along with our members and neighbours is a great feeling.

"We were both very proud to receive the QFES Diligent and Ethical Services Medals in 2010 and Bob was honoured to be nominated and receive a Local Legends Award earlier this year.

"We've had a lot of fun over the years. You've got to have pride in where you live and what you do."

Retirement of Assistant Commissioner Steve Barber

QFES Northern Region Assistant Commissioner, Steve Barber AFSM, will be leaving QFES soon to embark on a new chapter in retirement.

AC Barber has served the communities of Tasmania and Queensland for more than 39 years and has been a catalyst for positive cultural and behavioural change. He joined QFES in August 2005.

AC Barber is an avid outdoor enthusiast who enjoys fishing and being on the water, building projects, and has been known to whip up a great batch of caramel tarts. He will officially retire on 18 August 2023.



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CENTRAL REGION

Farewell Darryl King and Ian Cox – 63 years of combined service

Darryl King

Central Region would like to thank retiring Assistant Commissioner Darryl King for his guidance and friendship. We wish Darryl and his wife Sharon all the best in the years to come and we will miss the dad jokes around the office.



Darryl joined the fire service as a firefighter on 21 August 1989 and throughout his career held numerous positions including Executive Manager TEM, Director of Operations Brisbane Region and Director of the 2018 Commonwealth Games Program for QFES.

During his career with QFES, Darryl has been presented with many awards including:

- Australia Day Achievement Award (2006)
- Premier's Award for Excellence (2018)
- Commissioner's Outstanding Award (2018)
- Commissioner's Award for Excellence (Commonwealth Games 2018)
- Commissioner's Meritorious Unit Citation Award (2018),
- The National Medal with 25-year clasp
- Commissioner's Ethical and Diligent Medal 1st and 2nd clasp
- Australian Fire Service Medal (2019)

Ian Cox

Another stalwart retirement in Central Region is Ian Cox, fondly known to the region as 'Coxy', who leaves us after more than 30 years of service.

Ian started with the Queensland Government as a public servant on 23 March 1992 and joined QFES as the Regional Finance Officer in 2003.



Ian is a true gentleman and has consistently demonstrated his commitment to our staff and organisation in his role. He is the true essence of our shared values and will be extremely missed.

The region celebrated not only his and Darryl's retirements, but also Ian's 68th birthday.

Acknowledging traditional owners at Walkerston

The rain didn't dampen spirits in Central Region during NAIDOC Week. While some events were postponed, others went ahead in perfect sunshine.

We profiled local personnel at the events within the region and on state social media.

A highlight for the week was Walkerston Fire and Rescue Station becoming the first auxiliary fire station in the state to use the new station signage template that includes an acknowledgement of traditional owners.

We are proud to say "Walkerston Fire and Rescue Station is located in the Traditional Country of the Yuwibara People".





NORTH COAST REGION

Exercise K'gari

Nineteen State Emergency Service (SES) flood boat operators, eight vessels, nine mentors and 11 Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) volunteers recently headed to the Great Sandy Straits between K'gari and the mainland to test operational abilities.

Activities included setting up of a field EOC, communications, using navigational instruments, testing fuel and developing inter-unit capability and camaraderie.

The exercise's objective was to conduct enhanced flood boat training to practise operational skills and develop the teamwork between the SES units. The participants also started flood boat mentoring for future operators and identified different vessels in the SES fleet and how they handle.

Participants faced freezing temperatures and 20-kilometre-an-hour winds, but they enjoyed the day and learnt a lot.



Community messages for North Coast Region

In May, staff and volunteers from North Coast Region met at the ABC Wide Bay Radio Office to record a series of community messages in preparation for regular airing across the Wide Bay and Burnett.

These community messages include information on Operation Sesbania, bushfire preparations, information on how to report a bushfire, how to obtain a permit to light a fire, information on heightened fire behaviour weather and what precautions landholders should be taking, community information about the types of warnings issued and what call to action is required.

While these community messages have been around for some time, it is critical they are kept current, relevant and contemporary.

Thanks to Inspector Clinton Newman, Acting Area and Training Officer Peter Carlson and Volunteer Rural Fire Service First Officer Tara Ellem for recording these community messages. The pre-recorded messages have since aired each working day of a morning when the peak listening audience are tuned in.

Congratulations to Scott Lamond and the Wide Bay ABC team on this community initiative.

Developing skills in fuel assessment

North Coast Region hosted four one-day overall fuel hazard assessment workshops in June, facilitated by Francis Hines from Healthy Land and Water Ltd, who is the key researcher and author of the overall fuel hazard assessment guide.

About 60 volunteers attended the workshops in Bundaberg, Maryborough, Burnett and Caloundra Rural Fire Service (RFS) areas.

The workshops provided a refresher for volunteers to make a rapid visual assessment of fuel arrangement and understand how this will affect the chances of managing a bushfire. This will in turn assist in identifying and validating bushfire risk within their communities.

Participants can take this knowledge back to their brigades and demonstrate the value of the guide.

Feedback was positive across the brigades, with Anthony from River Heads Rural Fire Brigade saying, "I was thoroughly intrigued and learnt a massive amount. It was well worth the time. My fellow members took what we had learnt back to the shed and did our best to spread the information while it was still fresh. This only served to consolidate our knowledge."

David from Bidwill Rural Fire Brigade said, "Thanks for the very informative day. As a newbie to the RFS I gained a lot from it."

Sharon from Dunmora said, "I thought the course was very effective, without it being complicated."





BRISBANE REGION

Flood recovery visit to Redcliffe

In June, members of the Redcliffe State Emergency Service (SES) Group met with Major General Jake Ellwood, who was appointed the State Recovery Co-ordinator following this year's disastrous flooding.

In February and March, the Redcliffe SES Group received 350 calls for assistance when 967 millimetres of rain lashed the area in a few days.

Maj Gen Ellwood, accompanied by local MP and the Minister for Health Yvette D'Ath, thanked the volunteers for their efforts.

After inspecting SES vehicles and viewing stores holding tarps, ropes, sandbags and equipment, Maj Gen Ellwood moved to Grant Street to talk with residents affected by the floods.

Photos by Graham Davis.



Southern Moreton Bay Islands vehicle fire training

Volunteers from Lamb, MacLeay, Karragarra and Russell Island rural fire brigades recently came together to participate in practical drills and skills around extinguishing vehicle fires.

Crews started with a small vehicle fire scenario with an emphasis on branch handling techniques and remaining away from smoke, and by the end of the day they completed more complex scenarios with ease.

The volunteers displayed exceptional skills in correct branch and hose selection, vehicle extinguishing techniques, incident command and control, correct radio wordback, primary and secondary searches, thermal imaging camera operations, pump relay, appliance approach and positioning, and unforeseen changes in incident dynamics.

The volunteers will now take their new skillsets back to their respective brigades, where they will pass on their new skills to others.

The Area Training Team were impressed with the level of participation and interaction shown by everyone on the day.





Attendees at the 2014 PSO Conference.

FESSN celebrates 30 years

2022 marks the 30th anniversary of QFES' support services. We look back on how they've expanded and developed over the years.

The service began in 1992 as the 'Occupational Support Service' (OSS) in response to clinical evidence provided by Dr Beverley Raphael, which highlighted the mental health risks related to emergency services. At the same time, the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) developed similar services under the name 'Priority One'.

In 2000, the OSS diverged to form independent services for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority (QFRA) and State Emergency Service (SES). The QFRA service was called 'FireCare' and the SES service became 'Your Emergency Support Service' (YESS), and later 'EmBrace'.

In 2014, following the integration into QFES, the separate programs were combined to form the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN).

Always evolving

Bernie Scully, Executive Manager of Psychological and Support Services, said FESSN had a lot to be proud of.

"The evolution of FESSN has been amazing," Bernie said. "First responder agencies are like no other – the work is high intensity and often takes place in challenging environments. Our staff and volunteers have high exposure to trauma, emotional turmoil and, at times, risk of personal danger.

"It requires a level of support over and above standard models of care used in other government departments.

"QFES is a very complex organisation made up of distinct streams with people in very different roles. We have to make support available to the entire QFES community, while still being sensitive to individuals' specific needs."

FESSN is involved with members at every step of their journey at QFES.

"FESSN provides training to all recruits as well as leaders, and we respond with operational crews during their most challenging jobs. We've deployed to almost every major disaster from the Christchurch earthquakes through to floods and bushfires.

"FESSN has listened, adapted and grown to meet changes to our organisation, the environment and the needs of our community.

"With limited budget and resources, FESSN has delivered a level of support in line with best practice anywhere in the world.

"At the heart of FESSN's success is the care and goodwill of the people who join FESSN to support their workmates.

"The work of our peer support officers, regional counsellors and FESSN managers requires effort and time away from their families. I am overwhelmed by positive feedback about the things our wonderful people have done.

How to reach out

FESSN's range of services now includes critical incident response management, peer support, confidential counselling, organisational training, leader coaching and consultation, and resources and information relating to mental health.

FESSN continues to improve the support services for all QFES members and their family. You can find out more on the QFES website under 'Supporting our people'.

To access the 24-hour telephone counsellor call-back service, free call 1800 805 980.



"I continue to be amazed and proud of the people I'm lucky enough to work with. I'm grateful for the opportunity they give me to be part of such a fantastic service. Hopefully I can contribute to the next 30 years."

Critical incidents

FESSN responds to 40 to 60 critical incidents per month and the culture around receiving support has changed a lot over 30 years.

Acting Deputy Commissioner Stephen Smith said, "Early on there was a real reluctance by anyone to talk to peer support or counsellors because it was new and not well understood.

"Now if crews don't get a check-in it's very common to be reminded, which is a really positive step forward."

Looking out for each other

Helen Madell from Central Region has worked with FESSN as a counsellor since 2015.

"Over the years I have noticed changes with QFES members – the way they value and appreciate mental health," Helen said.

"Members are looking out and reaching out, for each other and themselves.

"If more people in the world could operate with the same ethos as QFES members, that 'mental wellness is on exactly the same par as physical health', then the state of people's lives would improve drastically."

Sharon Davis, a PSO from Brisbane Region, said, "As a PSO, it's all about being tuned in to my colleagues and noticing the nuances that give clues to when someone may need a bit of extra support, and then creating that opportunity through a friendly chat.

"It's inspiring to see the relief as people open up and share their stories, and to help them feel less alone with whatever challenge they're facing."

Supporting our peers

Peer Support Officers are QFES people who put their hand up to support their peers. We have a strong network across the state and all streams.

Commissioner Greg Leach said, "Peer Support Officers are special people who have a wealth of knowledge and experience in the emergency services field, but they also have the compassion, empathy and leadership skills needed when times are tough.

"Thank you PSOs for the important role you play in the wellbeing of your colleagues at QFES. Keep up the amazing work – we appreciate you very much and know we're a better organisation because of you."

Your experiences with FESSN

"Because a PSO had a caring conversation with me, I knew where to turn to when I needed help, and I felt less ashamed asking because I knew they would understand."

- Sarah Astbury, Central Region firefighter

"When times are tough and you can't see beyond the dark, just remind yourself that nothing ever stays the same, and that in darkness light can always be created, you just have to find that glimmer."

- Josie Montano, SES Volunteer from Brisbane Region

"Being a leader doesn't need to be a lonely experience. Over the years I've had to learn to be brave enough to reach out for support and guidance where and when needed. No shame in that. It's what leaders should do."

- Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short



The FESSN team received a Commissioner's Award for Excellence in 2019. From left to right: Bernie Scully, Sharon Davis and Robyn Kirby.



A PSO deployment to Northern Region in February 2019

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New QFES Charter highlights our values

Based on your feedback, QFES has developed a new Charter that outlines the behaviours you identify with each of the QFES values.

In last year's Working for Queensland (WfQ) and Volunteering for Queensland (VfQ) surveys, a new question was included asking about your perceptions of how workplace behaviour demonstrated the QFES values of respect, integrity, courage, loyalty and trust.

After the results were released, teams across QFES had conversations about how each of the values should be demonstrated in their workplace.

Teams identified 'above-the-line' behaviours they wanted to see, and 'below-the-line' behaviours that were not acceptable. More than 100 teams identified almost 3000 above-the-line and below-the-line behaviours.

Values and calls to action

Respect

- Embrace diversity
- Communicate openly
- Be kind

Integrity

- Be accountable
- Be honest
- Be transparent

Courage

- Call it out
- Own mistakes
- Challenge ourselves

Loyalty

- Support each other
- Be committed
- Work as a team

Trust

- Empower others
- Be open
- Be dependable

These behaviours are being compiled and themed to build the new QFES Charter, which represents the behaviours our people expect to see in our workplace.

A surprising find was that different teams related similar behaviours to different values. For example, 'supporting each other' was related to every value.

'Calling out unacceptable behaviour' was identified by every team. Other commonly identified behaviours related to accountability, honesty, open communication and kindness.

Kevin Reading, Acting Assistant Commissioner of QFES People, said, "Our values are the foundation of everything we do at QFES – from how we interact with each other and our community, to how we make decisions at all levels of the organisation.

"The Charter clearly sets out the behaviours, aligned to our values, that our people expect of each other in our workplace."

The QFES Charter summarises these behaviours with three short, sharp calls to action for each value.

Changes to this year's survey

The surveys will look different this year. The Public Service Commission reviewed the WfQ survey to provide even better insights into your experiences.

There are new questions about health and wellbeing, fairness and equity, and diversity. The Workforce Experience Unit will update the VfQ survey questions to match, where appropriate.

The updated surveys will align with our strategic imperatives and the upcoming *Public Sector Act 2022*.

"The changes to the surveys this year have changed focus to put the spotlight on the day-to-day experiences of employees," AC Reading said.

"There is a move away from 'you told us; we responded' to giving people the opportunity to tell us what working and volunteering for us is like for them as individuals.

"The new focus on employee needs also puts the spotlight on behaviours in our workplace. This really aligns to the work that's been done on the QFES Charter.

"We'll be encouraging people to look at survey results and consider how they relate to the expected behaviours in the Charter."

Keep an eye out for the surveys, which will be conducted from 5 to 30 September.



Fire and Rescue Service firefighters completed a series of exercises with the Combined Aerial Pumping Appliance (CAPA), positioning the truck and manoeuvring the ladder.



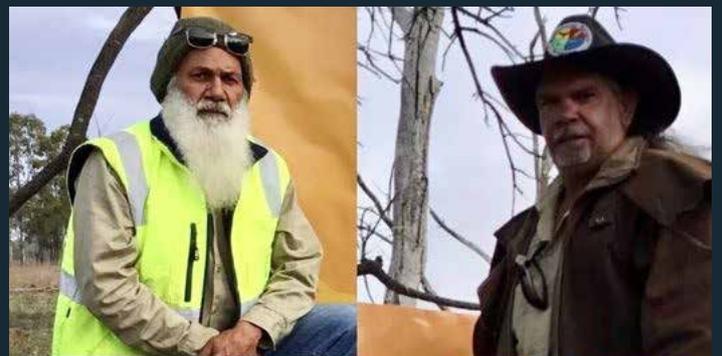
QFES has entered into a new bushfire resilience partnership with Noosa Shire Council and FireTech Connect. We recently ran pilot trials at the Sunshine Coast to enhance bushfire resilience in regional communities through prediction, detection, aerial operations and uncrewed firefighting solutions.



North Coast Region held a Mountain Rescue Workshop in the Glass House Mountains. Photo by Shane Bretz.



QFES, with help from Fire and Rescue New South Wales, delivered the first national Urban Search and Rescue Coordination Course at the State Deployment Centre in June. Participants learnt how to receive and manage international rescue teams into their state in the wake of a major disaster.



Twenty SES volunteers deployed to Maitland in July to help NSW communities in the wake of the floods.



Milton, Lynette, Maurice, Aaliyah and Roger are proud to be both QFES volunteers and rangers with the Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council's Ranger program, which empowers them to care for country.



More than 200 cadets competed in a range of events at the 2022 Brisbane Cadet Games.



QFES Commissioner Greg Leach met future firefighter Jack at the Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade during a recent visit to far north Queensland. Jack is the son of a volunteer and proudly showed off his homemade Indigenous Fire Service shirt.



A swiftwater rescue team was recognised in the annual Queensland Day Awards at Parliament House in June. The team saved the lives of a couple trapped inside a fully submerged car in Brisbane.



State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service volunteers worked with other emergency services at the Big Red Bash in Birdsville, the most remote music festival on Earth.



Ali Lane was presented with the Queensland Volunteer of the Year Award by the Governor of Queensland, Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM.

Our volunteer of the year

State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer Ali Lane, Group Leader of SES Eastern Group, Brisbane Unit, was recently named the Queensland Volunteer of the Year.

Ali joined the SES in 2018 and volunteers around 800 hours each year. She's passionate about the importance of female voices in formal leadership roles, and advocates for an equal culture for all within QFES through transparency in communication and better conditions for all volunteers.

Ali said she joined the SES after hearing an ad on local radio.

"I was only aware of the work the SES did on land searches, but I had some spare time and was keen to expand my horizons, gain some confidence and learn some new skills," Ali said. "I had no idea what was in store for me!"

"The award was really humbling and almost too much. There are so many members in my unit and across the state who deserve it as much as, if not more than I.

"It was important to me that I accepted the award on behalf of every volunteer in the SES. The best part of winning the award was drawing attention to the SES and the work we do."

Ali said her favourite part of volunteering was helping the community when they're vulnerable and need it most, but it's also about the time spent with her group.

"I absolutely love the connections, friendships and sense of purpose I've received. I wasn't expecting the incredible feeling of belonging and the lasting relationships.

"One of the biggest challenges we all face in our volunteer roles with the SES is finding that balance between paid work, home and SES.

"I'm one of those people who tends to throw everything into something I love and it's always challenging to manage that balance.

"Becoming a trainer has also been a journey, but it's super rewarding. Of course, moving into a leadership role in an organisation that can be quite resistant to change is daunting and not always easy, but I focus on making as much of a positive difference as I can every day."

The response to the Springfield hailstorms in 2020 stands out in Ali's memory.

"Seeing such devastation in such a short amount of time was so shocking, but the response was a real credit to our organisation," she said.

"After receiving requests for help, Brisbane Unit didn't hesitate to pack our vehicles and join the many teams in the initial response, and in the following weeks we replaced our planned training nights and weekend activities with attendances to Ipswich and surrounds.

"I was able to step into the Local Disaster Coordination Centre for two days in an SES liaison role, which was an opportunity to learn something new in an operational setting.

"It was so inspiring to see all the services, resources and people from across the board including SES, Rural Fire Service, QBuild, the local council and others coming together for the common goal to help a community through an incredibly difficult time."



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