

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE OCTOBER 2022



Healing hands

Disaster Assistance Response Team

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ON THE COVER

Firefighters recently completed a four-week Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) course. At the end, they participated in a 36-hour exercise to test their skills in concrete cutting, shoring, breaching and cutting metal to access casualties in a post-earthquake scenario. Photo by Sarah Ebsworth.

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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Address: Response magazine, Media, Communications and Online Branch, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, GPO Box 1425, Brisbane, QLD, 4001
Editor: Jarryd Luke
Phone: 07 3635 3314
Email: Magazine.Editor@qfes.qld.gov.au
Advertising: Martyn Hewett
Email: mkhewett@bigpond.com
Graphic Design: Dexart Graphic Design
Email: dexartgraphicdesign@gmail.com

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

The Inspector-General of Emergency Management's (IGEM) review into the South-East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding Event during February and March 2022 was tabled in State Parliament on 12 October.

QFES worked closely with IGEM to complete this review, which makes 19 recommendations at the state and local government level. A strong collaborative approach means recommended changes to existing systems are purposeful, achievable, and able to be well-executed.

Over four days in August, the Deputy Commissioners and I attended the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) conference, the largest and most comprehensive emergency management exhibition in Australasia.

QFES held two presentations: lithium battery fire safety and Operation Paia Trucks. The emerging issue of lithium battery fire safety, and unintended consequences associated with the rapid adoption of alternative and distributed energy systems and storage, has implications for community safety and the emergency services. QFES is becoming a leader in this field, providing advice on a number of discussion papers over the past 12 months.

It was fantastic to be in the room when Senior Firefighter Clinton Pilon and Inspector Bruce Budge were recognised with prestigious AFAC Awards. Read more about their achievements on page 13.

It was terrific to see 92 recruits – a record number – at the recent firefighter recruit grand parade. Six recruit courses took part and displayed teamwork and camaraderie – two values all firefighters need to keep Queensland communities safe. You can read more about a couple of our newest recruits on page 17.

On 31 August I oversaw QFES' involvement in a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional tsunami exercise. Exercise Bombora simulated a catastrophic tsunami impacting south-east Queensland. Read more about Exercise Bombora on page 6.

In recognition of the 412 emergency services personnel who lost their lives during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, QFES participates in the annual Queensland emergency services sports day. We competed with Queensland Police Service in league, union, Aussie rules, cricket, football and basketball and had some triumphant wins. The QFES basketball team captain talks about the experience on page 8.

During SES Week, QFES paid tribute to SES volunteer Merryl Dray with a plaque and memorial garden at Lowood SES Group headquarters. Sadly, Merryl lost her life during the February floods while responding to a call for help. This was a stark reminder of the dangers emergency services personnel face every time they put on their uniform.



ADAM STEVENSON

Acting Deputy Commissioner

STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

In the coming months, QFES has many capital works projects scheduled for completion. The replacement Loganlea Fire and Rescue Station, a \$4 million project that will support the fast-growing Logan community, was officially opened this month.

The \$14.5 million replacement QFES Maryborough headquarters and Fire and Rescue Station will officially open in late November. In addition to this site, a new Rural Fire Service Maryborough Area brigade headquarters will be built.

Our capital works programs have been delayed due to COVID-19 supply chain issues and the persistent wet weather, so it's wonderful to see these major projects come to fruition.

This year's AFAC Conference – which explored the theme 'Connecting Communities. Creating Resilience' – provided a professional development and networking opportunity for QFES staff from operational and corporate divisions.

The program included seven streams, covering the impact of disaster events on mental health, culture and inclusion, risk reduction, forecasting and modelling, and land management. Workshops and forums explored issues such as lithium-ion battery fires and spatial technologies.

Staff who attended said the conference helped them build connections at the agency, sector and community level, as well as spotlighting innovation and shared experience. I ask all attendees to share their new knowledge from the conference with their colleagues.

Conference proceedings are now available at www.afac.com.au/events/proceedings, with most presentations available to download. I encourage you to check it out.

The theme for AFAC23 is 'Creating a sustainable future: the challenges and opportunities'. Queensland will host the event and we look forward to bringing together fire and emergency management agencies, academia, government, the not-for-profit sector and technical experts to share their knowledge and lived experience.

The 2022 Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee Budget Estimates Hearing for Police, Corrective Services and Fire and Emergency Services was held on 3 August. The QFES Estimates process was coordinated by a standalone Estimates team.

In total, 141 briefing materials were prepared in support of the hearing. The hearing went incredibly well, with the Commissioner and Minister being able to answer all questions raised by the panel. The Estimates process is a substantial amount of work for all involved and this year was once again a testament to your hard work and preparation.

A key suggestion from QFES' Gender Equity Advisory Group has now been implemented, with the new 'one-stop-shop' page on the Gateway for information about pregnancy, birth and babies in the workplace. It's a handy resource for pregnant people and supervisors to find out their entitlements and obligations.



The only road into town was flooded in the lead-up to the Birdsville Races.

The show must go on

Facing our third La Niña in a row, Queenslanders are bracing for more rain and storms in the coming months. Some areas have experienced flooding, and QFES was there to help recently when Birdsville was washed out and the Birdsville Races were delayed.

A triple La Niña is a rare event – there have only been two or three in Australia in modern recorded history. After two wet summers, the ground is already soaked and catchments saturated. While this may not necessarily lead to more flooding, it's important for communities to be prepared.

Birdsville, the small town at the edge of the Simpson Desert, received three times their expected rainfall for September in one day, just before their main event of the year: the Birdsville Races.

Mount Isa State Emergency Service (SES) Area Controller Gordon Graham was there to lend a hand.

QFES sends a contingent of SES and Rural Fire Service volunteers from Mount Isa to support the Birdsville Races each year as well as having a contingent of auxiliary firefighters from Longreach on standby at Windorah. The teams also support the Big Red Bash in August.

"When it rains in Birdsville the water doesn't run off straight away, it just sits there," Gordon said. "The soil is pebbly, flood-prone desert terrain, so it can take two weeks to dry out."

"There's only one partially sealed road into Birdsville and the bitumen was still being laid, so there was a detour in place and it was flooded out.

"On the other side of town, near Windorah, the same thing happened – bitumen was being laid on the road into town, and the detour was flooded by a creek."

Up to 5000 people travel into Birdsville for the races, but there are no major stores in town, which means no excess food.

"Everyone has to be self-reliant out there," Gordon said.

"Because of the wet, some of the people couldn't sleep out in the camping areas beside the river, so the council let them camp in town on the bitumen."

The organisers pushed back the Birdsville Races by one day. The racetrack was so wet the organisers brought in graders to dry up the soil. The graders were still working right up to the first race.

"Everyone was calm and waited for the track to be ready," Gordon said. "There were no complaints – everyone adapted to the wet conditions."

Gordon said QFES members also assisted each year with any road crash rescues in the lead-up to the event.

"It's 200 or 300 kilometres to the nearest town, so we have a large area to cover," he said.

"A lot of planning goes into the event from all emergency services: QFES, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) and Queensland Police Service (QPS). We consider the hazards to predetermine what could happen.

"A lot of charter flights and light aircraft came into town each day.

"The Royal Flying Doctor Service monitor the area and if anyone's injured they fly them out to hospital in Charleville or Mount Isa. They normally have an aircraft on standby in Birdsville with a 24/7 rotation of emergency care.

"QAS look after a lot of medical incidents and minor issues, but we've been lucky to have no major incidents in the last couple of years.

"The community spirit was very strong. Everybody pitched in to make it happen and have a good time."



Saving the koalas of Minjerribah

To mark Save the Koala Month this September, *Response* spoke to Shaune Toohey, Brisbane Region's Manager of Bushfire Mitigation, about how crews protected the koalas on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) during a massive prescribed burn.

A population of 52 koalas live in Flinders Swamp, one of the island's many coastal heath swamps.

This was top of mind for the Bushfire Mitigation Unit when they undertook a 600-hectare prescribed burn, working with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and Quandamooka Yoolooburabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) through the Locality Specific Fire Management Group (LSFMG).

"The koalas were a major complexity for the burn, on top of the swamp's peat soil structure—a highly reactive vegetation type," Shaune said.

To look out for the koalas, Remotely Piloted Aircraft System pilot Dean West supported a joint research project between the University of Sunshine Coast and QYAC.

"The project monitored the location of the koala population weeks before the burn, during the burn and after. Dean tracked the koalas at night using a drone equipped with an infrared camera," Shaune said.

"Our crews learnt how to use burn patterns to protect local wildlife at all phases of the prescribed burn, using a combination of traditional and modern burning techniques.

"The koalas on Minjerribah are culturally significant to the Quandamooka people. The koalas are also disease-free because they're disconnected from mainland populations.

"If a koala had been injured, we would have had to remove it from the island for treatment. That would mean it couldn't return to the island for the safety of the others."

Shaune said natural disasters were a huge threat to our native wildlife, especially koalas.

"This has been documented in research by universities and parks and wildlife agencies across the country," he said.

"The research assessed the impacts of natural disasters off the back of the 2019-20 fire season in localities like Kangaroo Island, Mallacoota, Central Coast and South Coast.

"That was only for one season, compared to our koalas in Queensland who are exposed to floods, cyclones and bushfires all year round.

"No koalas were injured during our burn, which was great to see. It all comes back

to the crews' level of commitment and awareness.

"The cultural inductions QYAC provided crews gave them a sense of purpose in supporting the burn's cultural and ecological outcomes.

"We used three aircraft for the burn, which allowed us to control the intensity of the fire before it moved through koala habitats.

"Given the size of the area being burnt and its inaccessibility, this was best done by aircraft in a joint arrangement between QFES and QPWS."

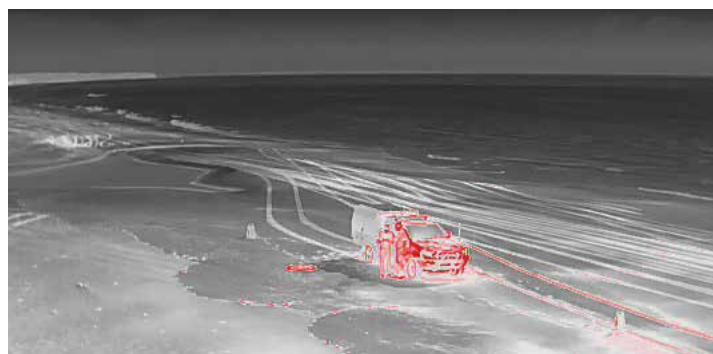
These types of prescribed burns take months to plan and require a large support team to consider every aspect.

"This annual burn has been the number one priority for the Greater Brisbane Area Fire Management Group for the past four years," Shaune said.

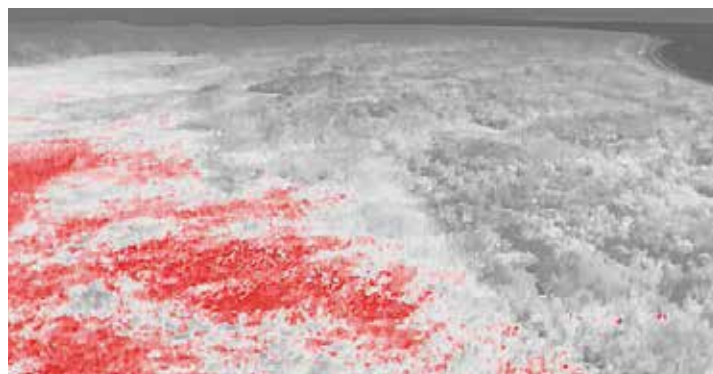
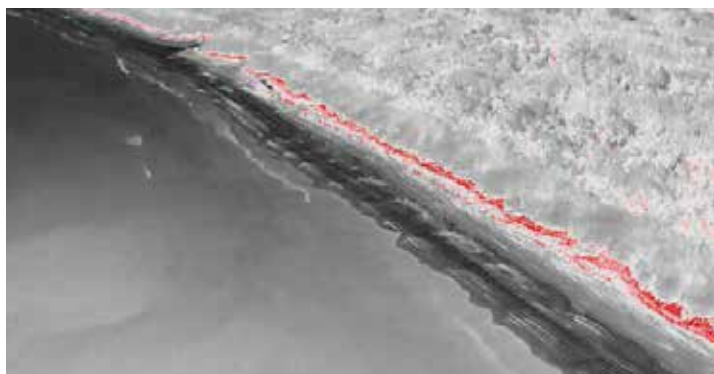
"It's been great working with QPWS and QYAC to achieve their environmental outcomes."



The prescribed burn covered 600 hectares of Minjerribah.



QFES monitored the burn's progress overnight using a drone with an infrared camera.





The tide is high

On 31 August QFES led Exercise Bombora — a joint desktop exercise with NSW and EMA, simulating a catastrophic east coast tsunami — triggering requests for state, national and international support. While the chances of this happening are low, the consequences are sobering.

Bombora (pronounced bom'bawruh) is a First Nations term for large sea waves breaking over a shallow area such as a submerged rock shelf, reef or sand bank some distance from the shoreline.

Australia is fortunate to have not been significantly affected by an earthquake-tsunami in recent history, despite being surrounded by major subduction zones to our north and east.

Previous modelling shows the Great Barrier Reef will reduce the tsunami height, partially protecting north and central Queensland, but the hazard is greater for south-east Queensland.

The scenario

At 11pm on 28 December, a large undersea earthquake ruptures at the Kermadec Trench, 2600 kilometres east of the Australian mainland, with an estimated magnitude of 9.4.

By 2am, Norfolk Island reports the impacts of an ongoing tsunami – no casualties but some damage to vessels has occurred. News and tide gauge data show Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, New Caledonia and Vanuatu have experienced the tsunami at varying severity.

The scenario paints a picture of a bleak situation in New Zealand and a confused and erratic evacuation in Australia.

Peter Readman, Director of Community Resilience and Risk Mitigation said this scenario was provided by Geoscience Australia and was considered credible based on international collaboration with tsunami experts.

“This scenario impacted sections of the New South Wales and Queensland coastlines and caused severe damage in New Zealand from the ground shaking from the earthquake itself, followed by large tsunami waves,” Peter said.

The history

On average, Australia experiences a tsunami once every four years. Tsunamis have been observed along the Queensland coast, resulting in strong rips, unusual currents and boat damage, but fortunately haven't come onshore.

“One of the earliest instances of tsunami occurred in 1960 after the Chile earthquake and tsunami,” Peter said.



The exercise was a collaborative effort made possible by funding from the National Emergency Management Agency through their National Exercising Capability.



“In 2007, when a tsunami was generated near the Solomon Islands, many people in Cairns took action and retreated to higher ground.

“The tsunami from the 2011 Japanese earthquake was recorded along the Queensland coast, and more recently, there was a Marine Threat Warning for parts of south-east Queensland following the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcanic eruption.

“Queensland is more fortunate than other places around the world because the earthquake sources are distant from our shoreline.

“The sources could be in the region – near the Solomon Islands or Tonga – or much further afield like South America. These distances may appear far away, but a tsunami could reach the Queensland coastline in just two hours.

“We can’t ignore an event generated near South America – there’s evidence that the 1960 Chile tsunami was observed near the Gold Coast.”

To inform the future, we must learn from the past.

The outcome

In the exercise, evacuation was largely successful for those within the evacuation zones, finding safety at least one kilometre from the shoreline and ten metres above sea level. Eighty to 90 per cent of residents were now outside the established evacuation zones and anxious for further information.

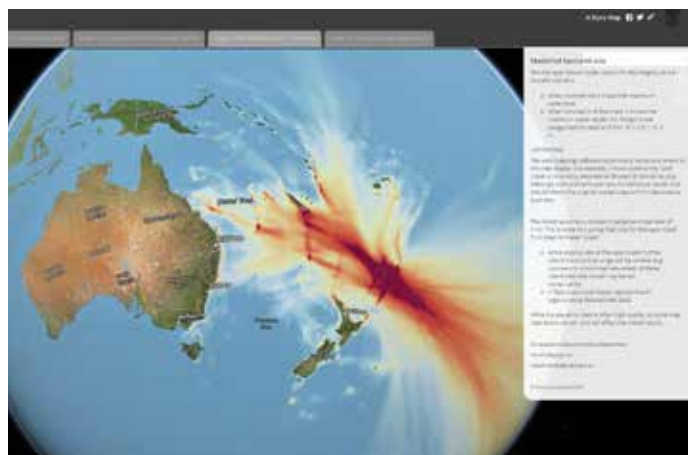
A major lesson from the exercise was how time-consuming it was to mobilise stakeholders and the challenges of warning and evacuating a large portion of the seaside population.

“As expected, the biggest challenges were the short time available to respond, the lack of detailed information to make decisions and communicating to the community given the date and time,” Peter explained.

“In a short period of time, operation centres need to stand up and decisions need to be made on whether the centres could be at risk and what messaging and actions need to be taken to enable evacuation.

“In the absence of detailed information, evacuation decisions are based on the current evacuation mapping. We need to coordinate messaging within and across jurisdictions and different time zones.”

Many of the challenges are known through lessons learned in surrounding countries or exercises and research conducted in Australia.



The tsunami in the exercise was triggered by a 9.4-magnitude earthquake.



Exercise Bombora was a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional desktop exercise.

The 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report found it’s critical to develop, implement and practise multi-jurisdictional response arrangements to catastrophic disasters.

“We all benefit from working together across borders and sharing knowledge and experience,” Peter said. “It means we’re challenged on our assumptions and learn from others.

“It also means we gain a shared understanding of the issues so we can work together towards a shared outcome.”

The future

Tsunamis are rare, unpredictable events and with a warming climate and rising sea levels, the risk of tsunami will be exacerbated.

As climate change is already increasing the pressure on emergency management arrangements, QFES is supporting local governments to develop evacuation plans and identify suitable evacuation sites.

“The exercise reinforced the need to exercise more, raise awareness, prepare messaging ahead of an event and support national initiatives to fill information gaps,” Peter said.

“QFES has published the tsunami evacuation mapping for Queensland, which maps those areas based on the current advice of a tsunami 10 metres high and traveling up to one kilometre inland.

“We’re also working at a national level through the Australian Tsunami Advisory Group and advocating for further funding to fill the information gaps for high-risk locations in Queensland.”



Shooting hoops

QFES faced off against the Queensland Police Service (QPS) for a sports day in honour of those who died on 9/11. A new addition this year was QFES' first ever basketball team.

The sports day at South Pine Sports Complex was immensely popular, with personnel from QFES, QPS and Queensland Ambulance Service coming together to play league, union, Aussie rules, cricket, football and basketball.

Station Officer Daniel Ogilvie coordinated the new basketball team.

"Basketball is a game played rain, hail or shine, and I really wanted to give people a chance to take part in the 9/11 memorial sports day in a sport they love and appreciate," Daniel said.

"I've been asking for a basketball game for a couple of years and I was told if I can organise something there'll be a time allocated.

"It all started in February and got serious in March when QPS confirmed they had a team and would be there on the day."

Daniel said the lead-up to the day was just as important as coming together for the big game.

"When we can mix it up and build relationships through teamwork and a common interest, that's when we can help develop tools to fight mental illness and help lighten the load when life gets tough.

"I wanted to give people the opportunity to explore their journey in life through the experience of this basketball team."

Daniel said the sports day was phenomenal and the events management team did a great job.

"Everyone remembered those events that took place on 9/11 and paid tribute to those who put their lives on the line for others they'd never met.

"Standing across the court from the QPS team at the start of the game, sharing a

minute's silence as the pipes player played his tune, gave me clarity of purpose and made me proud to be a firefighter.

"Sadly, we lost by six, but the event was excellent. All in all I was really happy with the way things went. First game of many more to come!"

Daniel said events like this brought people together.

"The sports day happens once a year and the longer it runs the bigger it will be in the future," he said.

"The best part was the inclusive and adaptable approach we had as a team, with players from various regions, all from different walks of life.

"What an amazing opportunity to meet new people and build a social connection through professional networks."

Upskilling for greater community care

Central Region are leading the way to build more inclusive training around working with those living with a disability.

Julianne Webster-Scott, Central Region's Community Engagement Officer, built a relationship with Carers Queensland and as a result they approached QFES to participate in a disability workshop's pilot program.

The workshop was designed for firefighters and volunteers to build their skillsets in working with people living with a disability to better assist them in emergencies and large-scale disasters.

This type of training is particularly pertinent for Central Region, as nearly one in four people living in Rockhampton and surrounding areas have a disability.

Central Region's Business Development Officer Simon Yarrow, who was born legally blind, understands first-hand the importance of empowering those with a disability.

"The statistics are rising, with one in three people living with a disability having profound or severe disability," Simon said. "We need to look at our community as a whole and understand there are people with different needs and backgrounds.

"As a community service provider, QFES needs to think about day-to-day interactions and how we manage our community members in a different way – there's no one-size-fits-all approach.

"There's a variety of disabilities in the community so we change our procedures to accommodate this and develop our skills to meet the needs of community members."

The program helps break down misconceptions of those who live with a disability. During the workshops, participants were put into the shoes of a person living with a disability.

"In pairs, participants shared information between each other. One participant had the point of view of a person living with a disability and the other participant was an able-bodied person," Simon said.

"It really opens your mind to how difficult it can be to communicate with a person living with a disability."

Central Region's Acting Assistant Commissioner Steve Smith, who participated in the consultation sessions, said disasters don't discriminate.

"Queensland is the most disaster-prone state in Australia, so QFES must understand the diverse demographic profile and the needs of the community to effectively support all people – including those living with disabilities – in the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery phases of emergency incidents and disasters," Mr Smith said.

"The staff who participated in the consultation sessions were highly engaged and gave positive feedback. This shows that our people are keen to upskill themselves to understand how they can better support and work alongside people living with disabilities during disasters and emergencies.

"The disability awareness workshops are a springboard for QFES to further develop our inclusion strategies to build greater community capability.

"The consultation sessions have significantly bolstered our partnerships within the disability sector and Central Region are looking forward to strengthening this partnership."



Consultation between Carers Queensland and QFES began in May this year.



The coming storm

With yet more rain and floods on the horizon, this year's R U OK? Day was an opportunity to reflect on how we prepare for challenging times ahead.

Tania Raghavan is Fire and Emergency Services Support Network's (FESSN) new Manager of Critical Incident Services, having previously worked as a psychologist with the Queensland Police Service.

Tania's work covers incidents across the state – from fires to floods – where QFES staff or volunteers are exposed to trauma.

"People work in this field to help others," Tania said. "It can be greatly satisfying to help in times of need, but we can't ignore the fact our people are regularly exposed to human suffering and that can have an impact on mental health.

"Emergency services workers may experience a gradual build-up of distress and symptoms over a prolonged period, or they may have an acute onset of symptoms after a single event.

"There are a range of mental health problems that may occur in the aftermath of a traumatic event, including depression, anxiety, acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, increased physical complaints and substance misuse.

"People often say mental health is really important to them, but if you ask them what they do about it – the way they might go to the gym to look after their physical wellbeing – often they don't know."

Tania said the floods earlier this year were close to home for many QFES members.

"Not only were our people responding to others in need, but they were also often in need themselves – their own homes were flooding. They don't just see the suffering of other people; they know personally what that feels like."

How to prepare for challenging times

1. **Acknowledge things are tough. When times are unpredictable and we don't have a lot of control over the environment, it can cause stress.**
2. **Actively engage in activities that build resilience. Often in times of stress, when we need them the most, these strategies are put to the side. Routine and commitment are even more important.**
3. **Know yourself and your early warning signs and act.**
4. **Create a workplace where everyone feels safe. This means having the courage to be open. It's ok to be not ok!**

The importance of networks

Tania said social support, be it friends, family, colleagues or leaders, was vital for mitigating feelings of distress during hard times.

"It also provides comfort and safety to help us bounce back afterwards," she said. "We spend so much time at work that often it's a colleague who'll first realise we're not the same or there's something not quite right. They play a really important role."

How can we recognise the signs that things aren't ok with someone?

"It can be the way someone interacts, or talks about having difficulty switching off," Tania said. "Their energy levels, motivation or mood might be lower or they may lack enjoyment doing the things they previously loved.

"If you have that connection with someone, you know when they're not themselves, so building those relationships first is really important.

"I see R U OK? Day as a conversation starter, but it doesn't end there. It needs to be an everyday thing.

"If a team goes to an R U OK? Day event and afterwards they decide to check in more often or include it in their weekly routine – that's what's really going to make a difference moving forward."

Building resilience

Another thing to be mindful of is when you sense someone is not ok, but they say they're fine.

"You may need to circle back a couple of times," Tania said. "Let them know you're there if they want to talk. You can't force people to talk if they're not ready, but you can circle back, and sometimes it takes a few laps for them to feel safe."

One of Tania's goals in terms of critical incidents is to not only consider what happens after the incident, but to focus more on the preventative measures QFES can put in place to support people beforehand to protect their mental health.

"One of those things is their ability to be self aware and proactive about looking after their mental health.

"It's about resilience building and feeling safe in the workplace, so when people are exposed to an event, they have a sense of connection to the workplace and feel they're cared about, which helps them recover.

"Having those healthy conversations, and equipping leaders to be aware of the early warning signs in their staff, addressing concerns early, helps to create a supportive environment."



ARE THEY TRIPLE OK?

Today and every day

Acting Assistant Commissioner Kevin Reading said in the past 12 months, about 2500 QFES members accessed counselling services through FESSN – an 11 per cent increase on the year before.

“I see this increase as a good thing because more people are using the services we have on offer,” he said.

“Mental health affects one in five people in the general population, but at QFES it’s twice as much.

“We need to be vigilant and supportive of mental health initiatives, not just today but every day.

“I think every single person in Queensland can say they’ve had some sort of mental health struggle where they’ve had to rely on someone, be it a formalised service or a friend.”

How to ask R U OK?

- *Don’t avoid asking the question*
- *Pick a time and place*
- *Have time to listen*
- *Reassure them you care how they’re going*
- *Ask what would be helpful right now.*

R U OK?™

A conversation could change a life.



The riders stopped at Karlu Karlu (Devils Marbles) on the way to Alice Springs.

Black Dog Ride

QFES members jumped on their motorbikes and rode to Alice Springs as part of the Black Dog Ride, a national event raising awareness of depression and suicide prevention.

Michael Young, State Emergency Service (SES) Area Controller for Mackay, has coordinated Black Dog Rides in Queensland for a decade.

“Black Dog Ride was founded in 2009 by Steve Andrews after his best mate’s wife suicided,” Michael said.

“Steve went on a trip around Australia to promote awareness, and the ride evolved from there.

“I wanted to help raise funds for mental health, and I’d been riding motorbikes for nearly 30 years.”

Since its inception, Black Dog Ride has raised more than \$2.5 million for mental health services.

Michael said 96 riders from Queensland participated in the ride to Alice Springs this year.

“It was third time lucky, because we had to cancel the last two rides due to Covid,” he said.

“The only bad weather was when we hit Biloela and it rained through to Emerald. Everyone enjoyed themselves and there were no accidents. We had a few flat tyres and oil pressure issues, but that’s standard on long rides.

“We had a support vehicle with us just in case, but we didn’t have to use them too much.

“The landscape along the ride changes every year. In the past it was dry, but this year it was greener — the water transformed it. The contrasting colours of the mountains were beautiful.

“We stopped at little country towns like Winton, Longreach and Richmond and had a look around.”

Dealing with crosswinds, rain and heat was a challenge for the riders, who covered almost 7000 kilometres.

“You do need to be bike fit,” Michael said.

“We recommend people do some riding beforehand. Sitting on a bike for long distances gets tiring.

“We stop every two hours so people can get off the bike and have a stretch. The longest leg was from Mount Isa to Tennant Creek – about 780 kilometres with nothing in between.

“We looked out for the new riders in the group and they got through it all. By the time we got to Alice Springs there were 440 bikes from around Australia.”

Michael said it took at least six months to plan the ride.

“I have a small team who help me find accommodation, fuel stops and restaurants. There’s a lot of ringing around to let people know we’re coming. If 90 bikes pull up at a servo and they didn’t expect us, they might run out of fuel.

“It can get tiring, but it’s satisfying when you jump on your bike and see 96 bikes following you to support a worthy cause.

“A big shout to Queensland Ambulance Service for their support over the last seven years.”

Michael and his team also coordinated one-day rides in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, the Whitsundays, Hervey Bay, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast this year.

In 2023, the ride will be around Queensland and in 2024 it will head over to Perth, where the organisation first started.

If you’re interested in joining the ride, contact Michael at michael.young@qfes.qld.gov.au.



Champions of innovation

At Australasia's largest emergency management conference, two QFES personnel received prestigious Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) awards.

Inspector Bruce Budge received the Knowledge Innovation Award for managing QFES' Continuous Learning program and using Extended Reality (ER) technology for staff and volunteer training.

"I was not alone in this acknowledgement," Bruce said. "The award reflects the effort over the past two years by the team in the Digital Learning Deployment Unit at the School of Fire and Emergency Services Training (SFEST)."

The Continuous Learning Program uses a combination of virtual reality, eLearning sessions, immersive group learning and 360-degree video to provide experiential training.

Bruce joined QFES in 1987 as one of the first state-trained recruits. After rising through the ranks to Inspector and a long period of writing and managing doctrine he wanted a new challenge, and looked to staff and volunteer training.

"In 2018, I moved to SFEST to manage the growing use of virtual reality training for all QFES services."

Currently, QFES uses face-to-face and instructor-led training for staff and volunteers, both regionally and at SFEST. With the pandemic shaking things up, and the rising costs associated with training, a new approach was needed.

"ER technology means the student can learn in their local environment, despite restrictions to personal interactions, access to real-world facilities and weather conditions," Bruce said.

"It allows the student to learn in a reduced risk environment where it's safe to learn from mistakes. The technology lets the student repeat an experience until it becomes second nature or experience a once in a hundred-year event to challenge their abilities."

Software for practising tactical incident management is being deployed into the regions to support auxiliary firefighter training. The same training software can be used by members of the Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service.

"The future of ER is shifting quickly and what was once science fiction is becoming science fact."

Youth fire safety

Clinton Pilon, a Station Officer at Kemp Place, received the Laurie Lavelle Award for founding the Australasian Youth Fire Safety Awareness Group. This group unites AFAC-member fire services from Australia and New Zealand to share knowledge about youth fire-lighting behaviours.

Clinton founded the group during his tenure as State Community Engagement Officer coordinating the Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) and Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) programs.

Since returning to shift life as an operational firefighter, Clinton volunteers his time to chair this panel and passionately involves himself in every aspect of youth fire safety across Australasia.

"When I first started coordinating FFF and RAAP, I reached out to all my counterparts across the country and New Zealand to touch base and talk about our programs," Clinton said.

The group has shared a wealth of information and resources and has

developed a national best practice guideline endorsed by AFAC.

"In our programs we show a lot of videos and visual resources, so we've set up a collection to share them," Clinton said.

"We're fortunate to have funding for education programs at QFES. Some states have no funding. We've shared our recruitment process and training resources to try and bring everyone to the same level and set a standard."

The group is also coordinating a national database for youth fire.

"The database will help confirm the need for the program by recording how many fires around Australia and New Zealand are started by youths. It will also gather evaluations of young people who have gone through programs across Australasia to demonstrate the programs' effectiveness," Clinton explained.

"We're currently running a FFF intake course, and three Northern Territory firefighters are sitting in on it to improve their program's training. In the future, hopefully some of our facilitators will go to other states to train them and vice versa."

Congratulations to Bruce and Clinton.



The AFAC Awards ceremony (from left to right): Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing, Bruce Budge, Clinton Pilon and Commissioner Greg Leach.



Fergus Adrian contains a fire during strong winds. Photo supplied by Samford RFB.

Rising from the ashes

On Yellow Ribbon Day in September, we celebrated Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers. To mark the occasion, *Response* took a step back in time to 1994, in what many volunteers regarded as the worst fire season in memory.

During the last week in September, first week in October and first week in November, more than 600 fires raged across the Sunshine Coast, Caboolture, Pine Rivers and Brisbane local government areas. The fires destroyed 23 houses, 93 other buildings and scorched 330,000 hectares.

About 3000 people were evacuated, and nine RFS personnel were injured – four when a fireball engulfed them at Bells Creek Road.

Fergus Adrian, First Officer for the Samford Rural Fire Brigade (RFB), has vivid memories from the Mount Beerwah November fires.

“It was night time and through the smoke haze I could see the fire running up Mount Beerwah. It reminded me of prehistoric times, with old extinct volcanoes,” Fergus said.

“We re-deployed along the railway tracks to put in a containment line along the back of the National Park. We used every skillset we had to conserve water and put in a back burn.

“We managed to do it, all by hand, but almost ran our 2000 litres of water dry. There were stiff lessons learned for many people at that large operation.”

Crews had to be wary of not only roadside trees on fire but fallen powerlines.

Hot and windy conditions were fanning bushfires along the coast line. A late change of wind saved the incident command centre, which was being shared by police, fire, ambulance and State Emergency Service personnel, who lost power and water as the fire approached.

Beerburum State Forest sustained huge losses of plantation timber, estimated at more than 5000 hectares. The financial loss was in the vicinity of \$35 million.

Fergus distinctly remembers getting the call for help.



“In the morning, the forestry workers were having problems with fires out there at Beerburrum, and in the afternoon we were called out to the fire.

“The Gold Coast hinterland had fires just as dangerous as Beerburrum at that time. We couldn’t get resources from there because they were fighting their own fires – they did a marvellous job though.”

On the day the Mount Beerburrum fire was contained, Fergus was involved in an almost burn-over incident at Bunya Forestry. A sudden wind change caused the fire to burn towards Fergus and another volunteer. The flames came under and over the truck, but only damaged the tyres and paintwork.

“1994 was one of the worst fire seasons we’d seen – probably since the 1968 fires, which burnt from Esk down to Brookfield.”

Changing with the times

The RFS has evolved from the times when local farmers worked together putting out fires with hessian sacks and fire beaters.

“In the early days, we had some equipment subsidised by the Rural Fires Board such as knapsacks but pumps and trucks were acquired by necessity such as repurposing old farming trucks,” Fergus said.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was introduced in the early 1990s and the introduction of a two-piece set has been particularly helpful for women. Previously, volunteers had to purchase their own protective clothing.

Currently, Samford RFB is harnessing QFES’ drone technology, interrogating the drone images taken from nearby areas, to assess the mitigation needs.

“It’s going to get hotter, and the types of fires are going to be more intense. We’re going to need the right equipment to respond.”

A sense of community

For many towns, the RFB is the nucleus of the community.

“We’ve always got people knocking on the door to join,” Fergus said.

“Volunteers bring unique skills from their job as they come from all walks of life. We’ve had doctors, nurses, farmers, pilots, ex-army – a range of people.”

“The type of work we do has increased. Since 1999, Samford has responded to 2357 incidents. The majority of incidents are vegetation fires, controlled burns, motor vehicle accidents and structural fires.

“We’re averaging about 4000 hours a year for the community. A local challenge is that many people have not witnessed major fires, so they become complacent with bushfire safety.”

A similar sentiment was held before the 1994 fires.



Samford RFB controlling a fire at Cherside West during the 1994 fires. Photo supplied by Samford RFB.



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Instructor Fiona Rose (far right) with Recruit Course 127 at their graduation.

Forging a career with QFES

The recruit course is an arduous but transformational experience. *Response* spoke with an instructor and two of her recruits to find out what it takes to graduate.

Recruit instructor Fiona Rose said recruits needed to have a positive and professional attitude and a good work ethic.

“The course is designed to be layered,” Fiona said. “We teach them a skill, then when they master that, we add another and that continues for the entire 16 weeks.

“My favourite part of teaching is watching recruits walk in day one with minimal firefighting skills and walk out qualified and confident to do the job.

“It’s inspiring to mentor a recruit, to understand why they feel fear and provide guidance on ways to manage and become comfortable with it, then watch them excel in their training.”

Fiona said the most important thing she tried to impart to recruits was professionalism.

“We can train people to put out a fire, but if we teach them things like compassion for the community, proactive training at stations and always striving to be better, they can maintain those throughout their career.”

A sense of achievement

After graduating from Recruit Course 127 in July, Andrew North is working as a firefighter in Ingham.

“I wanted to cement myself in a town I could call home and become a valued member,” Andrew said.

“I’ve always felt drawn to becoming a firefighter. There’s something about helping the community and a profound sense of mateship that doesn’t compare to anything else.

“I served six years in the Air Force as an Aviation Rescue Firefighter, so I understood most of the challenges ahead.”

Andrew said completing the recruit course was enjoyable but challenging.

“We came from various different trades – panel beaters, fitter and turners, teachers, plumbers, electricians, mechanics and military officers – but all wanted to be there for the same reason, which allowed us to bond as a group and come together in times of hardship.

“Our instructors were extremely knowledgeable and professional.

“Graduation day was exciting. To stand there with my 13 course mates in front of our families and friends is a feeling I will never forget.”

Up for the challenge

Firefighter Robin Richardson is now serving at Logan Command.

“I was looking for a career where I could help people,” Robin said. “The recruit course was both challenging and rewarding. I had a great crew and group of instructors who were supportive and provided a wealth of knowledge and experience.

“As a recruit course, we all worked together and supported one another. Everyone’s bound to have a bad day at some stage, but by looking after one another we pushed through it.

“I found the live fire aspect rewarding as it gave me an opportunity to put the theory and training into actual scenarios with fire and heat.

“My graduation day was an amazing experience. Marching out and standing in front of family and friends and thinking back on what we’d gone through to make it there was a proud feeling.

“I was excited for what was to come, but also a little sad leaving our recruit group and the bond we’d formed over the 16 weeks together.

“As a firefighter, I’m looking forward to getting out and helping the community.”



Over the years, mountain rescue methods and equipment have changed immensely, from ropes and harnesses to abseiling techniques.

Mountain rescue pioneers

Retired State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer Neil Halpin has published a book, *Glass House Mountains Rescue 1965-2015*, recounting 50 years of daring rescues on the mountains, including his own 25 years of service.

Rescues were first carried out in the area by the Glasshouse Mountains Rover Scouts in the 1960s. The only rope they had was a 100-foot hemp rope borrowed from the railway yards, where it was used for tying pineapple crates onto carriages.

For insurance reasons, the Rover Scouts formalised their rescue work by forming the Glasshouse Country SES, now known as Glass House Mountains SES Group, in 1980.

Neil joined in 1987, having gained climbing experience while working for the Queensland Forestry Department, where he climbed plantation pine trees for research reasons. In his book he writes about the bravery and teamwork of his fellow SES volunteers.

Trial by fire

Neil's first rescue was in December 1989, when he got a call to help rescue someone from Mount Coonowrin in periodic heavy rain.

"A person was stranded just below the top on a narrow south-east facing ledge with a badly broken left leg...and with nothing but sheer rockface below him," Neil wrote in his book.

The rescue team reached the southern base of the mountain and made their way up via a precarious ledge called Salmon's Leap. Descending with the young man was even more perilous, because there were loose rocks everywhere and the rope anchor points weren't firmly bedded.

"Two of us went over the side with the young man on a stretcher, and then it turned out the ropes weren't long enough, so we had to reset them," Neil said. "We had little room to move and the whole rescue took five hours.

"Fifteen years later, my wife was flying up to Mackay and there was a young man sitting beside her as they passed over the mountains. My wife commented on how magnificent they looked, but he said he didn't necessarily agree because many years ago he got stuck on Coonowrin. It was the same man we'd rescued.

"That first rescue underscored the importance of concentration. Not for one moment can one's concentration wane.

“The adrenaline was racing on that day. There are a lot of unknowns on the mountains, especially Coonowrin. But once we got into it, that all went by the wayside. Working with a team you trust and are good friends with makes all the difference.”

Help from above

The first helicopter rescue in the Glass House Mountains was in 1990. Neil was part of the team who rescued someone from above the caves on the east face of Mount Tibrogargan.

The rescuers got a ride in a doorless Bell helicopter that lifted off from a nearby sportsground. When they reached the mountain the pilot couldn't land on the rocks, so he hovered as close as possible and told them to jump out.

The team later learnt how to lower themselves slowly from a helicopter to avoid putting it off balance.

Neil recounts the scene of the incident in his book:

“The casualty... had fallen 15 metres and skidded, ending up on his back bent over a large surface rock and with his legs either side of an eight-centimetre-diameter tree. Both of his legs were badly broken.

“A doctor joined the rescue team and they helped him administer a femoral nerve block. This is a targeted injection of a local anaesthetic that deadens the feelings in a patient's injured legs.

“This then enabled us to move his legs so that we could use a commando saw, also known as angel wire, to remove the tree so that the casualty could be moved on a stretcher and then into clear space for aerial extraction.”

Helicopters became a standard part of mountain rescues from then on.

In one rescue on Mount Tibrogargan, a helicopter was lowering a stretcher to the rescue team through a narrow gap in the foliage when the stretcher snagged in a tree seven metres from the ground.

It was a dangerous situation because the helicopter couldn't move up or down until one of the rescuers climbed the tree and released it. They transferred the casualty to the stretcher and lifted him free.

“Helicopters certainly made life easier in transporting medical practitioners to the scene and retrieving casualties,” Neil said.

Thunder and lightning

One of the SES group's memorable

achievements was a rescue in May 1998. A team of eight climbers and six ground crew rescued four people stranded on a ledge 120 metres above a sheer cliff on Mount Tibrogargan.

It was night and there were severe electrical storms and heavy rain. The two lead climbers reached a cave adjacent to a ledge where the people were trapped, then climbed a further 30 metres in darkness to a position above the ledge, which enabled the rescuers to abseil down to the stranded group. They led the people across 15 metres of sheer cliff face, buffeted by wind and rain, to a cave.

Water tumbled down the rock face, and flash flooding made it hard for the ground crew to operate.



The rescue dragged on for nine hours – the batteries in the team's radios and headlamps went flat and hypothermia started setting in.

The two lead climbers received a National Bravery Medal and Neil and the other five climbers received the National Group Bravery Award.

“That rescue highlighted the elements of team bonding – dedication, cohesiveness and empathy,” Neil said.

“After a rescue, when you're done and dusted and you go have a beer, there's such a feeling of compassion and empathy within the group – it's a good feeling.”

To find out more or order a copy of the book, contact Neil at the_halpins@bigpond.com



Mount Coonowrin from a helicopter. The 1989 rescue took place at the yellow dot.



BRISBANE REGION

Happy faces at the Ekka

QFES had a big day at the Ekka, with crews heading along every day from 8.30 in the morning to 10.30 at night.

The crews were a happy welcome at the Gregory Terrace entrance, spending their time engaging with the kids and letting them sit in an ATV and ring the bell.

They also educated people about the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, handed out Safe Home checklists and postcards and spoke to people about smoke alarms.



Engaging with the Ukrainian community

The Ukrainian Community of Queensland hosted a community information and education session for Ukrainian displaced persons and their families in September.

QFES engaged with people on the day, alongside Queensland Health, Refugee Health Network Queensland, Queensland Police Service, Services Australia and others.

The displaced Ukrainian community responded well to QFES, especially the children, who enjoyed some care-free fun after some particularly harrowing times for them.

The firefighters benefited from the visit as well, gaining a greater understanding of one of the many cultural groups they serve in the community.



QFES at the Pride March

QFES members were delighted to spend the morning at the Brisbane Pride Festival Rally and March at South Brisbane on Saturday 24 September.

We shared a stand with the Australian Federal Police, Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service.

It was a great day of engaging with the community and celebrating diversity, equality and inclusiveness. QFES was proud to show our support for the LGBTIQ+ community.



Murri AFL day

In September, QFES attended the Murri AFL 9s day on Friday 2 September, together with representatives of the Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, Deadly Choices and the Brisbane Lions.

QFES is proud to work with Deadly Choices and Brisbane Lions at sporting events like this to help promote healthy lifestyle choices.



SOUTH EASTERN REGION



Emergency Management exercise in Ipswich

Enhancing the skills of council employees to help them better support the community in times of disaster was the focus when Ipswich City Council joined with QFES, Australian Red Cross, Queensland Police Service, West Moreton Health, State Emergency Service and local community centres, for a disaster training event.

Participants put their newly learned evacuation centre management skills into a 'real-time' field exercise, which included

Ripley Fire and Rescue Service crews responding to a mock fire at the Ipswich Showgrounds pavilion. A post-exercise debrief was held to identify lessons learned.

This model of training is invaluable for participants to consolidate their new skills and build confidence in the disaster management space.



One airport, two states, three fire services

Crews from QFES' Fire and Rescue Service, Fire and Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW) and Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting Service (ARFF) have been familiarising themselves with the new Gold Coast Airport (GCA) terminal extension.

The new terminal is positioned across the Queensland and New South Wales border, making for a collaborative approach to emergency response.

In August, emergency services from state and federal jurisdictions, along with other key partners, took part in Exercise Torana to test the functionality of the GCA Aerodrome Emergency Plan. The exercise involved an aircraft impacting one of the new aerobridges.

Fire crews from QFES, FRNSW and ARFF worked together to combat a simulated fire and rescue injured passengers.

'Ruff' Canine USAR exercise at Ripley Tactical Training Facility

QFES' Volunteer Canine Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team recently used the Ripley Tactical Training Facility (TTF) to train their qualified and upcoming canine teams. The Canine USAR team first heard about this amazing training facility after they noticed a post on QFES social media.

The Ripley TTF provided a challenging scent picture for the dogs; the construction is mainly steel, the sun was strong on one side of the building and the scent tended to pool in certain areas.

These factors play a part in how scent moves and how handlers read this to support their dog in searching.

There was also a risk of falling from height for the dogs, meaning the handler had to maintain their situational awareness and control of the dog.

The multiple levels and rooms meant the handler had to keep records of what had been searched, where victims had been located and where the dog showed interest.

The key learnings were to trust your gut instinct when reading your dog and to give your dog space to work so you don't push a false alert.

If you would like to volunteer as a handler with your dog or as a helper without a dog, please email KgUSAR@qfes.qld.gov.au





SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Celebrating SES Week

In early September, the South Western Region SES Week Awards ceremony was held in Miles with 60 guests, including Assistant Commissioner Hermann, Suncorp representative Barbara Spence, volunteers and their families.

It has been a very busy twelve months for South Western Region SES volunteers with flooding across the region on numerous occasions, land searches, road crash rescues, resupply, storm damage, forensic searches and Royal Flying Doctor Service and Queensland Ambulance Service assists.

Congratulations to:

- Regional Trainer of the Year – Matthew Sondergeld
- Regional Operational Response of the Year – Western Downs SES Unit
- Regional SES Member of the Year – Taufa Halaufia
- 40 year service plaques – Janis Green and Leslie Res
- SES Week Award Winners – Christopher Stephens, Rosemarie Basiuk, Henry Schrader, John Wallace, Alycia Williams and Gabrielle Groves.



Life rescue simulation

In August, firefighting crews from Toowoomba Command participated in a major multi-agency exercise, organised by Lifeflight and attended by Queensland Ambulance Service, Toowoomba Regional Council, Department of Environment and Science, and fuel transport representatives.

The exercise involved the rescue of a fuel transport driver and large volumes of aviation fuel leaking from the bulk storage facility on site. Life rescues and managing large flammable liquid spills are complex, so it was an excellent opportunity to test the Fire and Rescue Service response.

At the completion of the exercise, a debrief was held and all agencies shared their learning points. It was a great opportunity to share ideas and work collaboratively for better service delivery outcomes.



Hospital decontamination exercise

At Roma Hospital, Roma Fire and Rescue Service crews operated the decontamination and recovery trailer to simulate a request for the trailer to decontaminate persons prior to hospital entry.

This involved transporting to site, set up, operating and returning the trailer to service after the exercise. The exercise was well attended by the Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, south-western emergency service department and health management personnel. Some great learning points were identified from observed operating actions and in-depth discussions by attending agencies.



FAR NORTHERN REGION

The Yellow Wiggle comes to town

Far Northern Region emergency services will remember the day they wiggled fingers and rubbed shoulders with original Yellow Wiggle Greg Page.

Greg made a special journey to the rural community of Goldsborough after hearing the Cairns Dog Squad and Giri Dojo Karate raised \$3000 through door knocking and community barbecues to buy an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) for the community.

“We had the pleasure of helping the Goldsborough and Gordonvale community celebrate the purchase of a community AED, through Greg’s initiative Heart of the Nation,” said Gordonvale State Emergency Service (SES) member Lotus James.

“It was a great turnout with the Cairns Dog Squad, Gordonvale SES, Queensland Ambulance Service, Gordonvale Auxiliaries and the Disaster Management Coordination Centre.”

Goldsborough’s new AED is positioned in Goldsborough Valley and is accessible 24/7. The AED is linked to an app that notifies registered community responders when it’s activated.

The audience was treated to displays from the emergency services and a sing-along with Greg Page to some old favourites from the Wiggles.



New Australian Warning System campaign resources

The Australian Warning System (AWS) is a new national approach to warnings during emergencies like bushfire, flood, storm, extreme heat and severe weather.

To engage with the community and promote the new AWS, Far Northern Region have invested in five AWS bushfire packages to be disseminated across the region.

Each package consists of a custom-made gazebo with two padded folding chairs, a collapsible table, an esky to hold cold drinks for ground crews, and a display wall promoting specific bushfire warning information.

The packages can be used in a PIO capacity during large-scale bushfire incidents, community engagement static displays or station exercises.



Rossville search and rescue

A team of five State Emergency Service (SES) Land Search Operators from Trinity Beach, Cairns and Gordonvale travelled to Home Rule Rainforest Lodge near Rossville in September to help search for a missing person.

The person was last seen on Saturday morning walking from Cedar Bay to Home Rule along the designated track. On Monday and Tuesday, a Queensland Police Service (QPS) helicopter searched the area but was hampered by foliage.

The SES team started searching from Home Rule trailhead. The walking trail was difficult and had substantial elevation changes.

Earlier in the morning, three QPS officers and a member of the public were transported by helicopter to Cedar Bay and started a walking search, ascending the large range inland.

As the day progressed, the SES team provided regular SITREPs (SMS via satellite) to regional headquarters.

By lunchtime, plans were well underway with QPS for a larger SES search team and SES Search Commander to travel to the site on Thursday, with plans to stay at least one night.

Shortly after that, regional headquarters received the message, “Missing person found!”.

Instead of traipsing through the bush risking injury or getting even further off track, the missing person had pitched her tent by a running creek and stayed there until located by two members of the public. The three then met up with the SES team who provided food and helped with the return journey.

Featured front and centre in the photo below, the missing person was reunited with her family at the trailhead.





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NORTHERN REGION

Charters Towers history

Northern Region continues digging into its rich history and has unearthed rare photos from Charters Towers.

The Charters Towers Fire Brigade dates back to 1874 and was the nucleus of the fire service in the township area.

Until 1916, all fire units were horse-drawn or manually powered. The first motorised vehicle, a Studebaker, was purchased in 1916 and stationed at Bow Street, which was the main town centre at the time.



Celebrating SES Week

Congratulations to Regional State Emergency Service (SES) Member of the Year Tristan Lever (pictured right).

Tristan was honoured for his distinguished service to the SES through his commitment and dedication to improving the recruitment experience for Townsville and Thuringowa members, as well as his SES Group's operational response.

Awards also went to:

- Regional SES Group/Unit of the Year – Townsville/Thuringowa
- Regional SES Operational Response of the Year – Burdekin SES Group
- Regional SES Trainer of the Year – Markham Tyrrell, Thuringowa SES.



Eyes in the sky

Two of our Northern Region Air Observers, Jeff Hurlle and Josh Woolfe, put their new qualifications into practice during the recent wildfire at Nome.

Jeff and Josh observed the fire behaviour to notify the Incident Control Centre (ICC).

They also mapped the fire for the Regional Operations Centre and Predictive Services, and for the ICC to see in TOM/MSO.



Talking road safety with Project Booyah

Fire and Rescue Service firefighters Stephen Johnson and Liam Drake delivered the Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) program to Project Booyah students recently.

The RAAP program is designed to help young people make the right choices when they're behind the wheel.

Project Booyah is a Youth Mentoring Program delivered by the Queensland Police Service.



CENTRAL REGION

Exercising for excellence

The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and Hamilton Island Fire and Rescue crews – who are volunteers separate to QFES – conducted a simulated multi-level building fire exercise in August.

Exercise Hamilton Island was conducted as a multi-agency interoperability deployment exercise, which exposed operational staff from all participating agencies to the principle of joint agency interoperability.

Through a mentoring program, the participants gained a better understanding of current QFES systems and processes.

Central Region FRS personnel from Airlie Beach, Glenden, Mackay and other areas worked closely with the Hamilton Island volunteers to demonstrate a range of knowledge and practical concepts in structural fire management.

In September, QFES participated in the ‘State Bushfire Regional Preparedness Audit Exercise 2022’. A large component of Central Region staff, comprising all services, activated and developed a structure and plan in support of a bushfire exercise.

The exercise incorporated local knowledge templates, regional plans and Incident Management Team capabilities.



Bushfire Reduction Grand Challenge

Bushfire Safety Officers Craig Gyemore and Scott Brook visited Rockhampton High School to participate in the Queensland Virtual STEM Academy (QVSA), a state-schooling initiative that delivers STEM challenges and courses to students in Years 5-9.

During the challenge, students analysed and developed tools to raise awareness of the impact of naturally occurring and purposefully lit bushfires.

Students studied concepts such as fuel load and moisture impact, ambient temperature and relative humidity and ignition sources linked to bushfires.

To help grow these skills, students will continue to develop a deep understanding of the complex issue that bushfires pose for native flora and fauna and the community at large.

To complement the information available to the students, QVSA engage a number of subject matter experts to participate in the program via a virtual chat room.

This opportunity was ideal for our Bushfire Safety Officers to share prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, *Prepare. Act. Survive* and Bushfire Survival Planning with the students.

The students loved the presentation and gave our people some engaging questions to address. A student said how “good it was that the pros visited”.

Two more sessions are planned including a Cultural Fire Management session by First Nations Bushfire Safety Officer Craig Gyemore.





NORTH COAST REGION

North Coast Region's family of firefighters

Brody Walters, who graduated from recruit course 129/22 in August, is the fourth generation of the Walters family to dedicate their time to protecting the Queensland community.

Brody's father, Station Officer Greg Walters, joined in 1988, and is currently a Building Assessment Officer in North Coast Region's Community Safety Operations Command.

Brody's grandfather, Brian Walters, retired as Fire Chief of Maryborough, after completing 47 years of service between 1950 and 1997.

Brody's great grandfather, Frank Walters, retired as Fire Chief of Gympie after 30 years of service. Both Brody's father and grandfather were able to attend Brody's graduation.

Following school, Brody completed a panel beating apprenticeship, and then went on to secure employment in mines rescue.

In 2014, Brody became an auxiliary firefighter in Maryborough, and will return to the newly refurbished Maryborough Fire and Rescue Station following his graduation.

This is the same station that Brody's grandfather was the Deputy and Chief Fire Officer at, which meant the family, including Brody's father Greg, resided above the fire station.



Stuck in the mud

Getting bogged is normally a 4WD connoisseur's worst nightmare, but our State Emergency Service crews recently got bogged on purpose.

The volunteers got down and dirty at the Glasshouse Mountains and Noosa North Shore during a training exercise to ensure they're equipped to handle any terrain in their pursuit of keeping Queenslanders safe in the great outdoors.

All-terrain training

Auxiliary firefighters from Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach were put through their paces to learn some valuable new skills perfect for their sandy, sunny part of the world.

They were trained to drive and operate an ATV safely in the tracks and sand within the Cooloola National Park, including K'gari (Fraser Island).

The vehicle carries battery-operated road crash rescue equipment, allowing them to lend a hand in hard-to-reach places.





Fire in the Mulga

The Rural Fire Service (RFS), in partnership with Southern Queensland Landscapes, ran the 'Fire in the Mulga' forum in Charleville to help reduce the impact of major bushfires in the area.

Acting Inspector Steele Davies said 88 people from a variety of industries attended the forum to share local knowledge about strategies for improving property planning and management.

"A lot of local landholders believe mulga thickets have increased significantly from their typical landscape," Steele said.

"Mulga is a native shrub found in south-west Queensland, predominantly in the Murweh, Paroo and Quilpie shires, and north-west New South Wales. This area is known as the mulga lands.

"Mulga has a unique relationship in this country – it provides nutritional value to livestock in times of drought and provides fuel that intensifies large bushfires."

The workshop raised interest in hosting further workshops to demonstrate First Nations' burning practices, which would allow landholders to witness this different approach to fire and land management.

"We'll continue to work co-operatively across the mulga lands to improve resilience against everything mother nature brings," Steele said.

"The key element is bringing First Nations' cultural understanding, traditions and lore, in conjunction with long-term farming and agricultural management practices. This should be the foundation that legislation, procedures and strategies are built from by the RFS and our partners.

"Because none of us own the land but we all belong to the land and it's critical that we work together to improve country for future generations."



Attendees at Fire in the Mulga included traditional owners, graziers, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff, carbon abatement businesses, tourism companies, local government personnel, RFS volunteers and other partner agencies.



Mulga can be considered an invasive native in parts of the mulga lands.

Healing upside-down country

To encourage the use of 'the right fire', the Rural Fire Service (RFS) have worked in partnership with Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Corporation to run workshops across the Wakka Wakka Nation (Toowoomba and Western Downs Regional Council areas).

More than 100 people attended from various industries, including landholders, farmers, First Nations peoples, land managers, RFS volunteers and fire wardens.

Acting Inspector Steele Davies said upside-down country was all too common across southern Queensland.

"The trees with their dead upper branches and canopies look like roots, and the thick scrub layer at the surface looks like their leaves," Steele said.

"First Nations peoples call this sick country, and it usually means the country hasn't had the right fire applied.

"The Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Corporation rangers use the term 'right fire' to describe the right type of fire at the right time of year that is most suitable for country.

"The right fire is low intensity, with white smoke and black ash, allowing the soil to remain cool seconds after the fire has passed."

The workshops promoted right fire practices and demonstrated how easily they can be adapted to a landscape.

"The workshops also provided the opportunity for rangers and traditional

owners to share their knowledge about smoking ceremonies and country sing outs, how to identify and protect scar trees and how native wildlife react to fire.

"We continue to plan workshops to empower people with knowledge and skills to look at their land with a new perspective.

"The end goal is to have enough landholders and practitioners around to spin the upside-down country right way up again."



Safety is up to everyone

Each year in October, during Safe Work Month, we shine a light on our efforts to build a safer and healthier workplace at QFES.

Safe Work Month raises community and industry awareness about the importance of work health and safety, best practice rehabilitation and returning to work.

This year, QFES is taking a 'back to basics' approach to Safe Work Month. Safety isn't just up to one person – your whole team, group or department needs to get involved to make the workplace safer.

Commissioner Greg Leach has maintained a strong focus on safety throughout his career.

"I've been involved in situations where emergency services personnel, both career and volunteer, were injured or paid the ultimate sacrifice in carrying out their duties and working to keep communities safe," Mr Leach said.

"Each of these experiences has reinforced the importance of having well-trained people with safe systems of work.

"We knowingly deploy to hazardous situations, but we do it based on our understanding of the risk and what we need to do to respond safely.

"Nothing is more important than each and every one of us going home safe at the end of a shift or deployment."

Mr Leach said safety was everyone's responsibility.

"One of the things I've learnt from these events is how easily they can occur, despite our best efforts with policies, procedures, training and equipment.

"That's why we all have to be vigilant each and every time we deploy to look out for our own safety and the safety of those around us. If it doesn't feel right, speak up.

"When people feel safe, well and are working in supportive environments they're able to provide the best possible service.

"We all have a role to play in ensuring health, safety and wellbeing is considered in all aspects of what we do.

"Through continual safety leadership on a daily basis, we can all contribute to a work environment where people will feel more connected, motivated and committed.

"Healthy, safe and well workplaces don't just happen – they're formed when people work together."

Acting Assistant Commissioner Kevin Reading said there were 1143 reported incidents at QFES in the last financial year.

"It's good to see a strong reporting culture, but there's still room to improve," Mr Reading said.

"I've observed in my role a strong, supportive and caring culture when QFES members are ill or injured. I want that to be the view of each person.

"Health and safety in the workplace is important because no one wants to be hurt, or made sick by the work they do.

"The sector we work in requires extra vigilance when it comes to physical and psychological safety. It's important to remain educated and up to date, so you don't become a statistic."

QFES health and safety at a glance

During the last financial year, QFES members reported:

- **156 hazards, mainly chemicals, ergonomics and biological factors. Of these, 39% were high risk. Brisbane Region reported the most hazards**
- **23 near misses (investigations took on average 34 days to complete)**
- **1143 incidents, 21% of which resulted in a lost time injury. South Eastern and Brisbane regions each reported 23% of all incidents**
- **17 serious incidents**
- **619 new illness/injury management cases**
- **457 new WorkCover claims (50% were due to trips or falls and 7.5% were for psychological injury)**



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QFES connects with First Nations peoples up north

QFES is running a trial of Volunteer Cultural Engagement Officers in Far Northern Region to help embed traditional fire management practices.

QFES recently released our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Action Plan (CCAP) 2022-2025.

The plan outlines QFES' five principles and corresponding outcomes that will advance our cultural capabilities.

All areas of QFES have a responsibility to improve practices and attitudes that provide better outcomes for First Nations peoples.

One of QFES' new projects in this area is a two-year trial of Volunteer Cultural Engagement Officers in Far Northern Region.

Chloe Swiney, First Nations Bushfire Safety Officer for Far Northern Region, said the Rural Fire Service (RFS) identified a gap in the embedding of traditional fire management practices.

"This gap translates to a lack of engagement with traditional landowners

during bushfire prevention, preparedness, response and recovery within our rural and remote communities," Chloe said.

"The trial's main goal is to help incorporate traditional fire management practices

"The officers will provide cultural advice on promoting and embedding traditional fire management practices within the region."

and develop stronger engagement with traditional landowners before, during and after bushfires."

The region has appointed two officers this year and plans to have five or six. The role includes a wide range of activities.

"The officers will provide cultural advice on promoting and embedding traditional fire management practices within the region, including managing fire in the landscape for mitigation and during bushfires," Chloe said.

"They'll provide advice on culturally significant activities and cultural sites within community and give cultural input into the regional bushfire annex. We'll rely on them to provide a local cultural perspective into the RFS' day-to-day business in community and represent QFES at ceremonies, corroboree and so on."

The officers will also help identify future volunteers and fire wardens and promote blue card management.

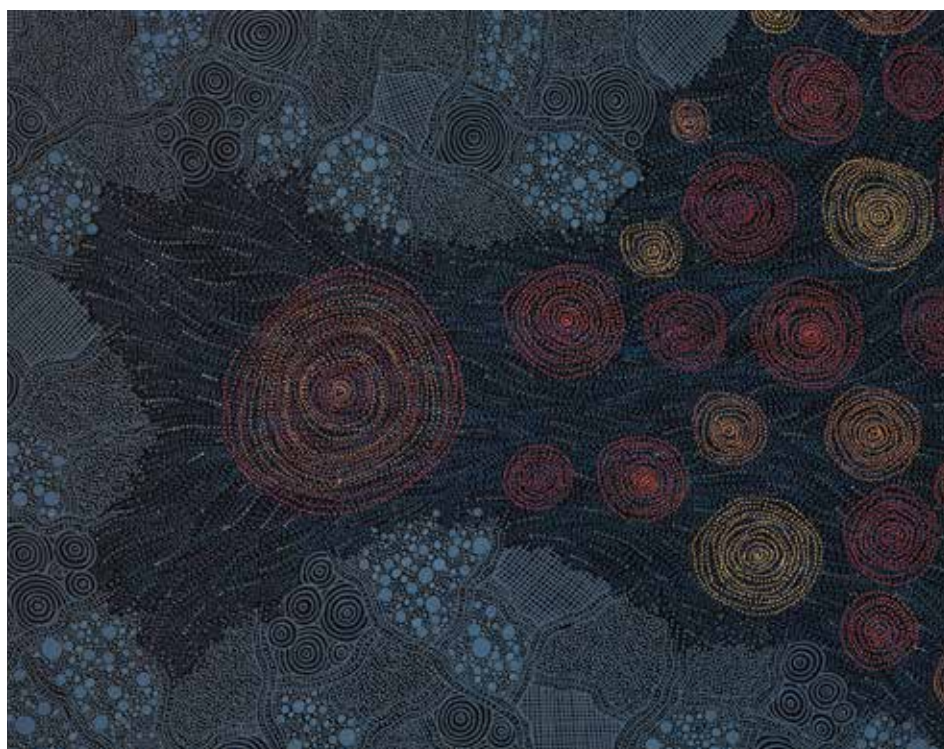
"They'll provide advice through the Bushfire Mitigation Unit to the Regional and Senior Leadership Teams to develop a deeper understanding of cultural practices and engagement strategies.

"Another important part of the role is assisting with local community engagement, including engaging and liaising with traditional landowners within our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"The officers will use their local connections to country and the traditional owners and be offered a seat within Area Fire Management Groups."

To find out more about the CCAP and how your team can contribute to QFES' cultural capability development, refer to the First Peoples and Culture site under Fairness, Equity and Inclusion on the Gateway. You can also find the CCAP on QFES' external website.

To learn more about cultural capability, you can complete the 'Starting the Journey' training course on the Learning Cache.



This artwork, titled *Together*, was created for QFES by Sarrita and Tarrise King.



QFES held a breakfast to show our appreciation for the partners who support the State Emergency Service: Suncorp, Powerlink Queensland, Ergon Energy, Energex, Girl Guides Queensland and Bunnings Warehouse.



Fire and Rescue Service crews brushed up on their mountain rescue skills in anticipation of more hikers and climbers over summer. Photo by Shane Bretz.



Fire and Rescue Service firefighters faced off against the Queensland Police Service at the South Pine Sports Complex for the annual sports day in honour of those who died in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Photo by Sally Jelbert.



Air Operations personnel from across the state completed a pre-bushfire-season workshop at QFES' Toowoomba airbase.



Specialist technicians from our Disaster Assistance Response Team inspected a CH-47 Chinook after it landed at Fort Lytton.



Airbase operators from Bundaberg and Maryborough completed their annual refresher training.



QFES members gathered on Firefighters Remembrance Day to remember the 59 firefighters who have made the ultimate sacrifice since 1877.



QFES members rode their bikes from Gladstone to Brisbane for the annual Bike4Burns, raising funds for the Children's Hospital Foundation Burns Research Group.



At the start of State Emergency Service (SES) Week, a plaque was placed in the memorial garden at the Lowood SES Group headquarters to honour SES volunteer Merryl Dray's memory.



Connected to culture

Program Support Officer Seema Echeenta Keezhil is proud to celebrate her culture by hosting a radio show and volunteering in the community.

Seema, who goes by Seema Sreekumar in her Indian community, has volunteered with many community organisations over the years, including 4EB Ethnic Radio Brisbane, Briswani AM1701, the Organisation of Hindu Malayalees, Australian Bollywood Club and South Indian Music Group.

She's also served as an interpreter and translator for Hindi and Malayalam, tutored in Hindi at community centres, and written poems and stories for Indian publications.

Her awards include the 2015 South Australian Governor's Multicultural Award for the Community Sector and the 2013 South Australian Women's Honour Roll.

"India is a multicultural country with many languages, food, festivals, costumes, music, dance, art, sports, religions, philosophy, books and the list goes on," Seema said.

"My father was an Indian Army Officer, so I was raised in a very disciplined and

strict household and taught to respect multiculturalism and Indian values.

"When I migrated to Australia with my husband, it wasn't that new to me because we moved from a multicultural country to another multicultural country."

At home, Seema's family speaks Malayalam, a South Indian language.

"In India, we're taught English from a very young age, so migrating and adjusting in an English-speaking country wasn't difficult for me and my family," she said.

"We were all very happy to see a big Indian community in Australia. I always felt language, music and culture kept our communities close together, hence I started volunteering.

"When people migrate to a new country, they fear losing their ethnic identity. To get rid of that fear, we organise ethnic festivals,

concerts, movies, performances, fashion shows, food shows and so on."

Seema said in her role at QFES she shares her culture in staff meetings, morning teas and multicultural events like Harmony Day and Multicultural Queensland Month.

"I'm so glad and proud to experience the same respect for multiculturalism in Australian workplaces," she said.

"During last year's Multicultural Queensland Month celebration, I brought Indian food to share and demonstrated the draping of sarees.

"I always send out emails to my colleagues regarding Indian festivals when they occur and share Indian snacks with them. I feel very proud to share my culture."

Seema is also passionate about Hindi radio broadcasting and has been a radio jockey for more than 20 years.

"I love Hindi, which is why I did my Postgraduation in Hindi Language and Literature," she said.

"I had this fear before migrating to Australia that I might lose my grip on Hindi. But by working in ethnic radio in Adelaide and Brisbane, I've maintained my attachment to my language and community.

"I'm exploring a great social side of me. In my radio program, I do interviews and select a topic like Indian festivals, Indi-pop singers or Indian arts awards, and play Hindi film songs from all eras.

"Thanks to ethnic radio stations, our community feels togetherness while we're living away from our country of origin and families and friends.

"Listening to our native language in our foster country gives that nostalgic feeling that keeps lots of sadness and loneliness away when we're struggling to make a living here.

"I am always thankful for the blessings of the Almighty and support of my family for all my achievements."



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