

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE DECEMBER 2022



Cultural burning in California

First Nations women's exchange

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ON THE COVER

First Nations Bushfire Safety Officer Chloe Swiney practised cultural burning at the Women in Fire Training Exchange in California.

Photo by Marlené Dusek (Payómkawichum, Iipay-Kumeyaay, Kupa)

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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's an exciting time for QFES as we start to implement the outcomes of the Independent Review.

We're currently mapping out how we'll move the State Emergency Service, Marine Rescue Queensland and Queensland's disaster management functions across to the Queensland Police Service and build our new Queensland Fire Department.

The Reform Implementation Taskforce is considering the timing for the changes and finalising the terms of reference for the review of disaster management arrangements.

It's still early days but we'll keep you up-to-date throughout the process. I want to assure you nothing will change during this disaster season.

I'm looking forward to seeing our new Queensland Fire Department take shape and in the meantime I know we will continue to serve the people of Queensland to our usual high standard.

I would be happy to discuss the reform with you when I'm out and about in the regions and department, and I encourage you to ask questions or discuss any concerns with your Assistant Commissioner or Executive Director.

We've published a page on the Gateway with information about the reform, including an FAQ section. You can also use this page to submit your own questions about the reform.

We're keen to hear your thoughts about the changes and how we can make QFES' service delivery even stronger. Just search for 'QFES Reform' on the Gateway or email your questions to reform.questions@qfes.qld.gov.au

We will now include Executive Leadership Team (ELT) communiqués in the monthly Commissioner's Update so you can hear directly from the ELT about their strategic priorities and the work they're progressing. Please keep an eye on your inbox for the latest news.

I would like to thank all QFES members who have travelled down south to support communities in New South Wales and Victoria. La Niña has brought flood emergencies to many parts of the southern states, threatening lives and properties. Our swiftwater teams deployed to Gunnedah, Narrabri and Parkes, and an Interstate Liaison Officer was deployed to the State Control Centre in Melbourne.

The festive season is nearly upon us and I'd like to wish everyone a happy holidays. I know many of you will be working or volunteering over the break and I want to thank you for being there when your community needs you.

For those who have some time off, I hope the holidays bring you joy, quality time with family and friends, good food and good cheer.



JOANNE GREENFIELD

Acting Deputy Commissioner

CAPABILITY AND STATE SERVICES

I recently started in the Acting Deputy Commissioner role and I'm very excited to work with you and take on the challenges that lie ahead.

The Independent Review of QFES will bring an increase in resourcing to strengthen our frontline service delivery and disaster management arrangements. This is a time of positive change and we will manage it together to enhance the delivery of all our services.

In the face of climate change, it's more important than ever for us to continue to evolve and equip ourselves so we can support our community through increasing emergencies and disasters.

In October, the Inspector-General of Emergency Management's (IGEM) Review into the South-East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding Event made 19 recommendations at the state and local government level.

QFES has already completed the implementation of a number of these recommendations that related to Emergency Alerts. Thanks to these efforts, QFES is well prepared for this year's severe weather season.

It will take time to implement the remaining IGEM recommendations, but I'm confident we will work together to improve our systems and processes so we can continue to deliver the highest standard of service to our community.

The Fire and Rescue Service will soon introduce new helmets with handsfree communication and noise cancelling technology, even when combined with breathing apparatus. After an operational trial by 79 users over multiple locations, the new helmets will start to be rolled out from mid-2023 through to 2024. I look forward to seeing how this new equipment improves communications.

The SES, RFS and the Queensland Emergency Operations Centre received increased funding from the State Budget. In addition, FRS has increased swiftwater capability and training has been ongoing in readiness for this severe weather season.

The Commissioner's Intent for Operation Nimbusus was released last month in the lead-up to severe weather season. Several areas have already been affected by thunderstorms and flooding and many parts of the state are still soaked from the rain at the start of the year.

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, we face an increased risk of widespread flooding and an increased risk of an above-average number of tropical cyclones and tropical lows.

We will continue monitoring weather systems and I have every confidence that all the training and preparedness our members have committed to will stand us in good stead.

In closing, I wish you all a safe and merry Christmas and a special thanks goes out to all volunteers and paid staff who will continue to work over the festive season to ensure appropriate emergency service coverage for our community.



The women camped together and burned in diverse ecosystems in and around Karuk ancestral territory.

Cultural burning in California

A group of First Nations female firefighters from several countries gathered in the remote Klamath Mountains of California, where women have traditionally performed cultural burning, to share knowledge and perform the first cultural burn for 200 years.

The Women in Fire Training Exchange (WTREX) was an intensive 12-day event hosted by the Karuk Tribe.

Among the participants were First Nations Bushfire Safety Officer Chloe Swiney from Far Northern Region and Rural Fire Service (RFS) Crew Leader Kylee Clubb of Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade. They were joined by two First Nations Rangers from Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation.

The training included field trips, workshops and discussions, as well as presentations from cultural fire practitioners and basket weavers.

This event was part of WTREX's larger goal of changing the culture of fire management and providing opportunities for under-represented fire practitioners to learn from and support each other.

Thousands of years of fire knowledge

Chloe Swiney said it was empowering to learn from other traditional owners.

"Meeting women from all over the world was the most special part," Chloe said.

"We worked in a little town called Orleans between the Klamath and Salmon Rivers. The Salmon River was dirty because the recent wildfires had pushed sediment into the water, creating a toxic sludge. Luckily the Karuk people were still able to catch salmon this year."

The region was home to redwoods until thick pine forests were planted for logging.

"Indigenous women have been there for thousands of years and have passed fire knowledge down through the generations, but they haven't been allowed to put fire on their ancestral lands for 200 years," Chloe said.

"When the land was colonised, the colonisers would see the smoke from the burns and kidnap the women, and so the men had to take over the burning. Then the colonisers took the land away.

"It was awesome to be there this year when the women put down fire again. The whole time they had the biggest smiles on their faces.

"We protected some of the native plants and added fire to others so the women could use them for weaving materials to make headwear, baby baskets, fishing baskets and acorn-gathering baskets.

"All the women from the tribe were excited for the next spring when they could gather the materials."

Chloe said the Karuk women had some different practices, but a lot of things were the same.



“One difference was the women walked everywhere. They carried their packs all through the bush. Kylee and I were falling behind a bit because we’re used to driving.

“The women don’t push breaks through the forest with a bulldozer, they just cut a handline half-a-metre wide and stand on the fire line to make sure it doesn’t jump.

“With cultural fire, it’s about putting fire on the ground to strengthen the ecosystem and bring back all the native growth. That’s what we have in common with them.

“It will be interesting to keep going out to Indigenous communities here and keep learning.”

On the last day, Chloe and Kylee went to the local school and talked to the kids about cultural burning in Australia.

“We also gave a presentation to the women about the RFS, how mitigation works and how we help stakeholders with burning. They said they couldn’t wait to come to Australia.”

A strong and resilient people

Kylee Clubb said that despite some initial fears of falling trees, bears and rattlesnakes, they had an incredible experience.

“We camped in tents for a fortnight along the Klamath Mountain where the salmon rivers run beautiful and crystal clear – a bear-loving environment,” Kylee said.

“It was cold nights and warm days. The sky was clear and you could see all the stars. It was in the centre of the universe for the Karuk people, in their landscape.

“We were working on hilly and rugged areas, in forests prone to drought, infestation and catastrophic wildfire.

“It was breathtaking. But take a closer look and you could see heaps of decades of logging, fire suppression and overcrowding in the forest.”

Kylee said the Karuk people were very welcoming.

“Karuk people are very beautiful people, quiet, strong and resilient. We spoke to their elders and learnt about the importance of their cultural practices and what had changed from when they were younger.

“The basket weavers have been advocating for traditional ecological land management for many years.”



Women from California, Canada and Australia took part in the exchange.



Chloe and Kylee will use their insights as part of local land management practices.

Some of the native grasses the weavers use include Bear Grasses (Pany’urar), an overlay material used in twined basketry; Willow Sticks (Paarak), straight white sticks used in basket weaving; and Woodwardia Fern (Tiipitiip), used in burden baskets, baby cradles, ceremonial caps, ornamental mats, storage baskets and trinket baskets.

“Legislation and fire exclusion policies have prevented the Karuk people from practising cultural burning, but their fire stewardship remains strongly connected to generational systems of knowledge that are deeply grounded in spiritual practice.

“For many thousands of years before, during and after European colonisation, Indigenous tribes have lived in these forests, lighting fires to manage landscapes and ecosystem mosaics, enhance habitat, produce food and basketry materials, clear walking trails, reduce pests and support ceremonial practices.

“I came to appreciate what the Karuk people have to do to get in and out of their forest and lay water lines, due to the vast landscape. They carry a 20-kilogram

backpack, fire blanket and tools with them at all times.

“In return we shared with them how we work in our crews, why we have smaller vehicles to manoeuvre in and out along the fire lines, how we use water and so on.

“In Australia we’ve started to see change within cultural burning practices, but we still have a long way to go,” Kylee said.

“Based on the amount of research into the benefits of cultural burning, including preventing larger fires from getting away, cultural burning has an important place.

“I want to thank Commissioner Leach, Acting Deputy Commissioner Stephen Smith, RFS Superintendent Neil Kelso and retired Assistant Commissioner John Bolger for giving us the opportunity to go on this exchange.

“I also want to thank the Nature Conservancy for supporting the exchange, my burn boss Kelly Martin for her guidance and knowledge when running our fire crews, and First Officer Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade Les Green for his support and dedication to our brigade.”



QFES' own everyday heroes

Several QFES personnel were recognised for outstanding dedication and commitment to their local communities at the recent QBank Everyday Heroes Awards.

Tom Mangan – Finalist: Achievement Award

For Tom Mangan, an Auxiliary Firefighter from Nanango, the floodwater rescue that saw him nominated for an Everyday Heroes Award was just him doing his job.

Tom was nominated in the Achievement category that recognises passionate individuals who have delivered outstanding performance and high achievement.

During a flood event that hit their local area in November 2021, Tom and his colleagues, Matt Lucas and Fiona Schatkowski, were called to rescue a man caught in the middle of a torrent of floodwater.

“A couple had driven into floodwater and their 4x4 ute was fully submerged,” Tom said.

“The man’s partner had managed to swim to shore and raise the alarm with a nearby neighbour, but he was clinging to a tree 20 metres downstream from their vehicle.

“We had a 15-minute drive out to the incident and knew it was unlikely that any other crews would make it there in time. So, we made a plan during the drive that we could put into action as soon as we got there.

“The man had swallowed water and was battling exhaustion. He told us he wasn’t sure how long he could hold on for.

“This rescue was in the middle of the day, which helped with visibility of course, but it was a big crossing and the water was running pretty fast. It was fairly scrubby with lots of trees around.

“Many people underestimate the power of the water during a flood event. The water is rushing all around you and it’s very loud.

“We had to stay calm and put our training into practice. We got there just in time and thankfully it was a good outcome at the end of the day.

“The couple were lucky to walk away from this.

“Matt and I did the swiftwater rescue while Fiona acted as our spotter upstream. It was a team effort and the positive result came about because we stuck to the basics and worked together.

“They are as much a part of this accolade as I am.”



Maxwell Pearce – Finalist: Ownership Award

Hailing from Dallarnil in the Wide Bay area, Max thought someone was ‘having a go’ when he was called about his Everyday Heroes Award nomination for his significant contribution to his community.

“You don’t think about awards when you’re out there. You just think about getting the job done and keeping the community safe,” Max said.

Max was thrown into the proverbial fire when he fronted up to the local Rural Fire Brigade more than 40 years ago. He left that meeting as President and First Officer of the brigade and has dedicated his time since then to developing the brigade and providing a service the community has come to rely on.

“We’ve had some pretty big fires here since I’ve been around, I remember one that had us out for about 10 days back in the 90s.

“We have some unique terrain here as well and have had to fight fires on the side of a mountain at altitude.

“We’ve been in some challenging situations, but I’ve always said that can’t isn’t in the dictionary. You can do anything if you put your mind to it.”

Max talks about the importance of community and working well with other small brigades in regions like this.

“Everyone looks out for one another, it’s like a big family,” he said.

“And it’s important to work well with other small brigades, especially when you’re trying to contain a bigger fire.”

The firefighting arsenal has changed somewhat since Max started out.

“We used to fight fires with bushes and wet bags. If we were lucky there’d be a bloke with a tractor to plough fire breaks,” Max said.

“Then we moved to slip-on units and then to trucks. With equipment, knowledge and training improving over time, it makes our job easier.”

Max says there’s no substitute for practical experience though.

“We look for training opportunities where we can because it’s especially helpful for the newer members.





“It might be something like trying a few different things at a smaller fire to test how it works. This helps put the theory into practice before they’re faced with a bigger event.”

Max and the brigade also run an annual essay competition for the local school to raise the profile of volunteering. Entries are judged by the brigade and there’s an award for each class.

“We’ve done this for a few years and we’re proud we’ve managed to keep it going.

“Finding young volunteers in towns like ours can be challenging. This competition helps to plant a seed about the importance of volunteering in your local community.”

David Lyons – Finalist: Dedication Award

Country born and bred, David started volunteering for his local rural fire brigade when he was just a teenager. Now he’s clocked up more than 30 years helping his local community.



From providing dinner on brigade training nights to mentoring those around him, David epitomises dedication, the category for which he was nominated for an Everyday Heroes Award.

As First Officer at Gilston/Advancetown Rural Fire Brigade, he has led the brigade through many major emergencies including the 2019-20 fires and the 2022 floods.

“The 2019-20 fires were challenging. We had trucks going out at all times of the day and night. Our brigade was quite small at the time, so we often had to double up on crews,” David said.

“That was the year we made the news with our light-hearted take on the total fire ban. Pictures of our notice board and the ‘don’t even fart out there’ message gained a bit of traction.”

Under his leadership, the brigade has grown from 10 active members in 2019 to more than 25 in 2022.

David has done this by creating a warm and accepting brigade with a strong training regime to keep members feeling included, interested in improvement and ready to take on opportunities.

“We are much more than a brigade that gets together for training and operational activities, we’re a family,” David said.

“In a rural fire brigade, you’re bringing together a group of people who come from a range of backgrounds with varied work experiences and different lifestyles.

“We encourage the social aspect of volunteering because it provides that sense of community that many people are looking for. It also helps build respect and cohesiveness, which is necessary when you’re out responding to an incident.”

David believes everyone should have the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

“I especially love seeing the young ones or those who have gone through adversity grow and develop more than they ever thought they could,” he said.

“We also involve everyone in training. We encourage the older members to add their firsthand knowledge and experience to help consolidate the training we provide to younger members. It adds important perspective.

“By building the capacity of each individual, we strengthen the brigade. It benefits all of us.”

David’s nomination took him by surprise but made him feel like he must be doing something right.

“Although we don’t do this work for recognition, it was nice to be nominated and named as a finalist. It reinforces that you’re on the right track and you’re making a difference.”



QFES’ Everyday Heroes finalists Tom Mangan, Max Pearce and David Lyons with Acting Assistant Commissioner Neil Francis.

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When the town of Collarenebri was cut off by floodwaters, FRS and SES members helped with supply drops and transport.

On deployment

In Queensland, several areas have been affected by storms and flooding, but New South Wales has been hit hardest by La Niña. Crews from the State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS) and Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) deployed south to lend a hand.

Queensland teams deployed to flood-hit towns such as Gunnedah, Narrabri, Brewarrina, Collarenebri, Nyngan, Mungindi and Parkes. The floods took a heavy toll on communities and they were grateful to see help arrive from as far north as Townsville and Cairns.

A town cut off

Senior Firefighter Tomas Neville from Cairns Fire and Rescue Station was part of a crew of four FRS firefighters deployed to Collarenebri over five days.

“Collarenebri is a tiny town with only three streets,” Tomas said. “It’s north-west of Narrabri, just south of Lightning Ridge.

“The town was dry but it was cut off in all directions when we arrived on scene. No supplies were getting in and out of town, apart from helicopters dropping food.

“An Aboriginal community out of town was also cut off, so we did welfare checks with them twice a day to make sure they were all right and had plenty to eat.”

While Tomas’ crew were on standby for rescues, they played a liaison role with the NSW SES, Queensland SES and Marine Rescue NSW teams in town.

“We assisted where we could,” Tomas said. “We transported a council worker into work every day to keep the town going, because he knew how the water pumps worked.

“The pumps were in the flooded creek, 100 metres out in the flow, and when they stopped working we had to take him out in a boat so he could reset them and restore the water supply.

“Logistically the deployment was challenging because we were cut off, so any little thing we needed, like oil or

sparkplugs for a boat, had to be flown in. It was a logistical nightmare to get anything outside of bread and milk.

“My team really stepped up to the mark, doing things outside our normal tasks. We adapted and made do with what we had.

“The community was stoked we’d come so far to help them out. They figured they’d be fending for themselves down there, so they were really grateful for our support.

“They had a vehicle ready for us and we borrowed a trailer from the local hospital to take our equipment around. The community really got behind us.

“We managed to scrounge up some meat and sausages by raiding freezers to hold a barbecue one night. We got all the local people together and thanked everyone for having us and helping us out.”



Ferry service

Senior Field Operations Officer Cody Elliott from Livingstone Shire SES Group was on deployment to Brewarrina for five days.

“The Air Force picked us up, showed us around and took us to the base camp,” Cody said. “Then we went straight to the flood boat and had a briefing on the water.

“The peak flood level was 10.4 metres. Some sections of the river rose to 70 or 80 metres from where the river normally was.

“No houses were flooded in the area, but the water came close. It was right at the front door of one man’s house and he could hop in his boat from his front yard and go into town.

“Brewarrina had planned well in terms of flood levies and the residents created banks for themselves. The SES helped them with sandbagging.

“We provided a ferry service, taking people up and down the river. We took nurses to work and kids to school and helped people pick up medical supplies.”

Cody said the residents were thankful and it was rewarding to lend them a hand.

“I drew on a lot of my flood boat training, which was great for controlling the boat and really getting back to basics,” he said.

“We used a flat-bottom barge with a drop-down front. I trained in V-bottom boats, so it took me some time to get used to it.

“I really wish I’d done a deployment sooner. I’ve only been with the SES for three years and it’s an experience I never would have had otherwise.

“I’ve definitely found my calling with SES flood boats, so I’m going to dive into that and see if I can further my qualification.

“Thank you to everyone who works behind the scenes. The amount of organisational skills to get that amount of people out to the middle of NSW in that amount of time is just mind-blowing.”

Many weeks underwater

Graeme Hall worked in the SES headquarters at Wollongong as a QFES Jurisdictional Liaison Officer (JLO).

“I’ve been to many flood events in Queensland and in most cases we have a day’s notice beforehand, and then the floodwater starts to go down within a day or two,” Graeme said.

“In NSW, they tend to have a couple of days’ notice so they have more time to prepare, but the water stays around for longer.

“In Forbes they had several days’ warning, but the town was underwater for a few weeks. That is so different to what we’re used to. These poor people have to wait around to go back to their house and clean it out. The damage to infrastructure is massive.”

Graeme’s role was to look after QFES assets in NSW.

“I made sure SES members got in and out of NSW, and helped address any issues with their work,” he said.

“We transported SES personnel to Sydney and then to Dubbo with commercial aircraft. We also transported some of them with chartered aircraft from the Gold Coast to Moree.

“I made sure physical assets like vehicles got to where they needed to be. We drove SES vehicles down to Moree, then to Tamworth and on to several locations.

“Each SES team that was deployed left the vehicles in a secure place so the next team could pick them up.

“Since Collarenebri was completely isolated, we packaged a motorised swiftwater rescue craft and flew it into the town with a helicopter. They couldn’t drive big trucks in while the road was underwater because it would damage the road.”

Graeme said the biggest challenge was maintaining communication.

“Communicating with people in the field is hard because their phones drop out, they don’t have email access and so on,” he said.

“I also communicate the volunteers’ needs with the SES to make sure they stick to



QFES crews have been on several deployments to support our southern neighbours.



their 1-3-1 deployment – one day of travel, three days in the field, one day of travel.”

Graeme said it was rewarding to make a difference.

“We were able to go down there with fresh troops and give their SES members some days off. Some of their operators had been working for quite some time.

“Our swiftwater operators offer a wide range of skills when they go into a town. While standing by to help with rescues, they helped the community with sandbagging, unloading helicopters and so on.

“They just went in and did whatever was needed to be done. We all felt part of a bigger team.”

At the time of writing, the NSW flood response was ongoing, with a Queensland JLO, SES floodboat operators and damage assessment teams still hard at work.

“NSW are asking for assistance for another couple of weeks because their volunteers are tired – they have to clean up their own houses, and they have jobs to go back to.

“We have an impending storm season here in Queensland, so eventually we’ll have to stop giving NSW assistance and possibly ask for assistance ourselves.”

Gearing up for Queensland storms

In preparation for the severe weather to come, FRS crews have honed their skills in Motorised Swiftwater Rescue Craft (MSRC) operations.

There are more than 100 trained MSRC operators across Queensland. The capability was implemented in 2017 and is the only one of its type in Australia, with operators chosen from FRS Technical Rescue teams across the state.

The MSRC operators complete a nine-day training program in calm water and swiftwater environments to prepare them for challenging rescues.

This year’s training workshops included rescuing people from cars in flood water and swiftwater incidents. The purpose-built car prop was built by the Technical Rescue Unit to replicate real-world scenarios.



FRS crews completed their Motorised Swiftwater Rescue Craft training ahead of storm season.



Queensland crews on deployment said they felt like part of one big team.



SES and RFS volunteers prepared several hundred sandbags in Gunnedah.



Armed with 500 sandbags, SES volunteers helped out a farmer in Mungindi.



RFS volunteers from South Eastern Region were part of the flood clean-up in Moree.



A year of challenges and changes

It's been another busy and challenging year for QFES, with much to be proud of, much to reflect on and many exciting changes ahead. A message from the Hon Mark Ryan MP, Minister for Fire and Emergency Services.

The results of the Independent Review into QFES, published in October, ushered in a new era for Queensland's fire and emergency services.

The Queensland Government accepted all but one of the recommendations, delivering a \$400 million commitment to provide more resources, more personnel, improved equipment for crews and better aligned services across the state.

This boost will see frontline officers, volunteers and support staff even better positioned to respond to emergency situations and keep Queenslanders safe, particularly in the face of the increasing challenges of climate change.

One of the most satisfying aspects of my job is going to events and meeting staff and volunteers from the Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service (RFS), State Emergency Service (SES), Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association and Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland.

Among the many stand-out events in 2022, I attended the official opening of three replacement fire and rescue stations, including at Loganlea, Maryborough (via Teams) and Mossman, with a total value of more than \$21 million.

This year, I was fortunate to announce \$15 million worth in new appliances, vehicles and equipment to many dedicated QFES crews.

The Government delivered boats, water tankers and trucks to rural fire brigades, SES units, and fire and rescue stations throughout all parts of our diverse state.

In May, I announced a \$470,000 grant program to directly support frontline marine rescue units. More than 3000 volunteers across 47 marine rescue units along Queensland's coastline will come together as the newly announced Marine Rescue Queensland.

The first marine rescue vessel contract was also awarded. This draws from the \$17.38 million the Queensland Government is investing to replace ageing search and rescue vessels across the state.

Mid-year, we celebrated RFS week, while in September, it was the SES's turn.

I was delighted to be in the audience when, in late August, a record 92 new firefighters marched in the largest recruit parade in QFES' history.

Witnessing this show of professionalism and unity inspires great confidence in the future of fire and emergency services in Queensland.

The first five months of 2022 were dominated by flood emergencies during a difficult severe weather season.

Highlighting the severity of the extreme rainfall event that engulfed south-east Queensland, on 25 February, QFES and the SES received nearly 1000 calls for help in just 24 hours.

That figure included more than 40 rescue responses to people caught in floodwaters. Once again, staff and volunteers across all services rose to the challenge.

Many lessons were learned by all emergency services involved in working through this disaster, with key takeaways fed into the Inspector-General of Emergency Management's (IGEM) review into the South

East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding Event during February and March 2022.

Released in October, the independent review thoroughly examined the preparedness and response to the devastating events of earlier this year. Tragically, 13 lives were lost due to the severe weather and flood event, including that of SES volunteer Merryl Dray.

Nineteen recommendations were made, with work on many of these already underway – testament to the proactive work QFES undertakes.

I thank all our people who consistently go above and beyond to put their communities first. I also would like to acknowledge our partners at PCYC Emergency Services Cadets, Surf Life Saving Queensland and Royal Life Saving Society Queensland for their tireless efforts and consistent work within the community.

The work of everyone in and involved with QFES is recognised and greatly appreciated – by myself and more broadly by all those in the community.

I wish each of you a happy and safe holiday season. I look forward to working with you all again in 2023.





Commemorating our SES volunteers

The SES Week State Award ceremony in October recognised the service's top volunteers for the crucial role they play in keeping Queenslanders safe.

Mitchell Brushe from Cleveland SES Group received the Minister's Cup for Queensland SES Member of the Year for his leadership, dedication to the community, and developing the knowledge and skill levels of other members.

Mitch joined the SES when he was 22 and has been on an upwards trajectory ever since. He first heard about the SES while preparing for Cyclone Marcia in Gladstone.

"As soon as I came back from the mines, I signed up and joined because I really wanted to help," Mitch said.

Mitch juggles many responsibilities as Group Leader for Cleveland as well as owning his own electrician business.

"I give 100 per cent credit to having a fantastic SES team. The Deputy Group Leader and senior leaders are phenomenal and always have my back," Mitch, who was nominated by his best friends in the SES, said.

"I also have a fantastic team at work who understand my passion. And a very understanding wife – the most important thing.

"It was surreal for a few weeks after receiving the award. I just do what is

expected as a member and I hope to continue to live up to that award.

"I've always been under the belief that you help those who are less fortunate. When you get out of the truck at a job, you see straight away that a weight has lifted off their shoulders because someone is there out of the kindness of their heart to give them a hand."

Mitch has been on many local, regional and state deployments, always putting up his hand to help out. At the time of interviewing, Mitch was on deployment in Collarenebri to assist with flood efforts.

"My favourite memory is from earlier this year when we were transferring motorhomes to flood victims in Lismore. There was destruction on the side of the road, but people were waving and cheering us on.

"When I first joined, I received the new member encouragement award. I knew I'd found something I was passionate about and that really pushed me further to continue to help people, it was genuinely appreciated.

"I want to inspire people to join the SES, it's a fantastic organisation. Volunteering is

something people can do no matter their skills – you can always jump in and be a part and help out.

"I'm not planning on quitting anytime soon.

"I would like to thank all fellow members of Queensland's SES for being alongside one another and helping their respective communities and doing what they do."

Mitch was also Highly Commended in the inaugural Suncorp Spirit of SES Award. Highly Commended award nominees were presented after SES Week.



Mitchell Brushe was named SES Member of the Year for his dedication to the service.

**Commissioner's Cup for Unit of the Year – Townsville/
Thuringowa SES Group**

**Assistant Commissioner's Shield for Operational Response of
the Year – Brisbane City SES Unit, Moreton Bay Regional SES
Unit and Redland City SES Unit (joint winners)**

**Joyce Scorey Shield for Trainer of the Year – Julie Crocker,
Caboolture SES Group**

Suncorp Spirit of SES Award – Peter Rice, Townsville SES Group

Life Member Award – Alan Green, Innisfail SES Group

Life Member Award – Robert Sutcliffe, Home Hill SES Group



The course was run by the International Association of Arson Investigators in conjunction with the Queensland Association of Fire Investigators.

Investigating vehicle fires

Members of the State Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) organised a three-day vehicle fire investigation workshop at the School of Fire and Emergency Services Training.

Daren Mallouk, Manager of the State FIU, said this was only the second time the course had been conducted outside the US. The course was run by the International Association of Arson Investigators in conjunction with the Queensland Association of Fire Investigators.

“The course attracted 35 participants from most state fire services, Queensland Police Service, along with private and insurance fire investigators,” Daren said.

“The workshop taught participants the latest developments in vehicle fires, while showcasing QFES’ world-class training facility to fire investigators from across Australasia and internationally.”

The course consisted of 24 hours of tested instruction in determining origin and cause of vehicle fires. It culminated with a live burn, exposing the participants to the latest investigative techniques for modern vehicles.

“Participants investigated a vehicle specifically burnt for the course and presented their findings to the class. At the end they gained accreditation from an international fire investigation organisation.

“Overwhelmingly, participant feedback was about how invaluable it was to observe first-hand a live-burn scenario expertly facilitated by the staff at the Live Fire Campus.

“State FIU would like to acknowledge the professionalism, cooperation and

assistance of all involved in planning and running the course.”

Daren said modern vehicles are much more complex, both in design and construction.

“The construction methods, exotic steels and alloys, composite materials and advanced safety technologies all affect how a fire behaves and reacts.

“The course allowed participants to witness first-hand how fire develops, spreads, intensifies and interacts with variables such as ventilation openings and environmental influences such as wind speed and direction.

“While empirical research and literature are crucial for learning, there is no substitute for pragmatic testing and live burns. As the saying goes you have to ‘burn to learn’.”

Daren said the Queensland Police Service regularly asked Fire Investigation Officers (FIO) to assist with vehicle fires suspected of being deliberately lit.

“The first task of an FIO is to determine the origin of the fire, which can typically be broken down to three main areas: the engine compartment, cabin and cargo area.

“The FIO then determines the cause by examining the vehicle from the least area of damage and progressing to the most severe. They look for burn patterns that indicate the path of fire travel such as lines of demarcation or radial burn patterns.

“The windscreen usually provides significant information about origin and path of travel. For example, if the fire originated from the engine compartment, tell-tale signs are burn patterns on the bonnet with radial burns progressing toward the bulkhead where the fire usually vents.

“The windshield will commonly display fire damage at the base while the top section is intact. A cabin fire will typically cause the windshield to fail across the upper section and fall inwards.

“The location and failure mechanism for all window glass also plays a key role in establishing origin and cause, and can help the FIO determine if the vehicle has been broken into or was open at the time of the fire.”

After the workshop, the two-day Australasian Association of Fire Investigators (AAFI) Conference took place on the Gold Coast. The conference was keenly attended by members of the fire investigation profession from both the public and private sector.

The theme was ‘Fire Investigation: Multi Agency Cooperation, Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future’. Participants explored recent advancements in fire investigation and how COVID-19 has influenced the way we work. The broad range of topics provided a valuable opportunity to learn and enhance professional development.



Queensland takes out rescue challenge

After being delayed by fires and COVID, the first National Disaster Rescue Challenge since 2017 was held in Perth this October. Our Townsville and Thuringowa State Emergency Service (SES) Rescue Team made history by becoming the first Queensland team to win.

The team previously won the 2019 State Disaster Rescue Challenge and consists of eight SES volunteers including the team manager. Their backgrounds are a diesel fitter, accountant, RTO trainer, landscaper, marine technical officer, small business manager, environment and sustainability manager, and a teacher.

Daryl Camp, SES Regional Director for Northern Region, said the team dedicated years of training to compete at this level.

“The reason this team worked so well is the respect and trust they have in each other,” Daryl said.

“Real-world search and rescues and deployments assist with all these competitions. The team manager helped them work out a training schedule and they found people who are really good at what they do to help train them.

“A local firefighter ran through stabilisation, hydraulic tools, air bags and other tools. Other SES volunteers helped out as casualties, setting up scenarios and moulage.

“The team members put in hundreds of hours of training to represent their unit, region and state and that means sacrificing hundreds of hours with family, time you don’t get back. Without the SES’ number one supporters – our family, friends and partners – this wouldn’t have been possible.”

Due to other commitments, the first time the whole team were all together in one place was on the flight from Brisbane to Perth.

“The team went into this without any big expectations except to have a professional attitude and do their best for Queensland while having fun,” Daryl said.

“The team leader has so much trust in the team that she is confident to hand over control to a team member for a particular part of the scenario, knowing it will be done properly and control will be handed back when they are done.”

An earthquake challenge called Exercise Fault Line was held in Kings Park over two days.

“The team loved the vibe of the whole event and the interaction between the states and territories, and it really feels like we have new friends all over the country.”

The weekend culminated in an awards dinner, where the Queensland team was awarded Best First Aid and Best Team Leader. After dinner, they were announced as the winner of the National Disaster Rescue Challenge.

“The team was surprised and very happy to have a clean sweep of all the key trophies by Queensland.”



The Townsville and Thuringowa SES Rescue Team are the first Queensland team to win the National Disaster Rescue Challenge.



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Queensland's disaster outlook

When it comes to understanding the hazards Queensland faces now and into the future, research is key. The Hazard and Risk Unit crunched the numbers on a wide array of disasters for their most recent publication, the State Disaster Risk Report.

The unit's Manager, Lochlan Morrisey, said he and the team analysed disaster risks to help communities get prepared.

"Our research provides new information on hazards and disaster risks, how they affect communities across Queensland and how they will change in the future," Lochlan said.

"This can help us build our understanding of disaster impacts and how we can mitigate the risks.

"Research also provides the opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with other stakeholders in disaster management."

The team collaborates with other government agencies, industry and universities. Their recent research has explored topics such as tropical cyclones, critical infrastructure, heatwaves and the vulnerability of Queensland's pre-1940 masonry buildings.

Their State Disaster Risk Report, which is an update to the State Natural Hazard Risk Assessment from 2017, describes the risks associated with ten hazards.

For the first time, the report also provides forward projections of disaster risk based on climate projections.

"Decision-makers at all levels can use this to consider the changing nature of risk due to climate change and adjust their long-term disaster planning," Lochlan said.

"Eight of the ten hazards in the report are directly or indirectly influenced by climate change, so understanding how the risks from these hazards will change is vital."

One of the ten hazards is earthquakes, which despite their low probability could be catastrophic.

"The probability of a significant earthquake occurring in Australia is low by global standards, and Queensland has the lowest probability in Australia. However, that doesn't mean we should ignore it.

"Earthquakes are rare but they do happen – without warning and with major consequences.

"There are hundreds of earthquakes recorded every year in Australia, but we don't feel most of them. Queensland has

experienced some large events in recent years, and while most of these have occurred offshore (such as K'gari), we still need to be mindful of low-probability events and understand the risks they pose.

"In researching the State Disaster Risk Report, we found south-east Queensland has a higher risk of earthquake than the rest of the state."

Other less-common hazards include critical infrastructure failure and mass casualty incidents.

"Critical infrastructure failure is a key risk to consider," Lochlan said. "All of our systems and everyday lives rely on the functioning of critical infrastructure such as power, water, telecommunications and transport.

"This infrastructure can be interdependent on each other, so they can have compound and cascading impacts on society. For example, most systems rely on electricity, so when there's a power outage and no backup supply, most other critical infrastructure will also fail.

"The Hazard and Risk Unit is working on a Critical Infrastructure Disaster Risk Assessment, to understand the risks to Queensland's critical infrastructure and what mitigations are or should be in place."

Mass casualty incidents are events in which the location, number, severity or type of casualties require more than the local capability.

"These incidents can be the result of human-made disasters or emergencies, natural disasters, or epidemics and pandemics.

"Fortunately, these incidents are uncommon in Queensland. However, they were included in the report to ensure Local and District Disaster Management Groups are aware of the potential broader impacts and the plans and resources available."

You can read the State Disaster Risk Report on the Queensland Government Disaster Management website.





The delegates were from a broad range of portfolios within the Laos government.

Laos delegates visit QFES

A delegation of 26 senior leaders from Laos visited QFES to discuss emergency response, leadership and social policy.

The visit was part of a Leadership in Responsive Public Administration course at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), led by Dr Danica Hooper and Nelson Salangsang. Delegates also went on a tour of the State Disaster Coordination Centre.

In a panel session for the delegates, QFES leaders highlighted our capability and collaborative approach to response.

The delegates were interested in current policy initiatives, Deputy Commissioner Stephen Smith's leadership journey, QFES' contribution to nationwide networks, and our current areas of strategic focus.

Nelson Salangsang, Director of the International Projects Unit at QUT, said the visit came about because QUT is implementing a Leadership Development

Program on behalf of the Laos Australia Institute. This program was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Mekong-Australia Partnership program.

"The QUT program focused on key leadership areas including modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process (change management), enabling others to act (empowering people) and encouraging the heart (mentoring)."

Of special interest to the delegates was the QFES Volunteerism Strategy and how QFES attracts and retains our vast number of diverse volunteers across the state. They discussed the value volunteers bring not only to QFES, but to the community.

"The participants were very impressed with the QFES Volunteerism Strategy as it gave them an idea of how to enable people through training, valuing and recognising, particularly in disaster and emergency management," Nelson said.

"They were very grateful to see such a state-of-the-art system.

"These visits are important as they enhance people-to-people links, and help participants see new possibilities and concrete strategies in action.

"It was wonderful to hear from the QFES leaders. The participants were really impressed by the way they articulated the vision, mission and values of the organisation.

"The main purpose of the program is to enhance leadership for responsive public service," Nelson said.

"QUT identified QFES as a responsive and effective government agency, with inspiring leadership and a mature human resources framework.

"These delegations are part of Australia's global education program. The Laos delegation also met with the Australian Public Service Commission, National Indigenous Australian Agency, Regional Development Australia and the Australian Centre for Agricultural Research. They also visited Parliament House in Canberra."



The delegates discussed QFES' policies, leadership and strategic focus.



The path to Station Officer

The new *Preparing to Become a Station Officer* guide helps Senior Firefighters develop their skills and knowledge for the next stage of their career. *Response* spoke to the guide's author, Station Officer Sheree Merryfull, about the journey to becoming a Station Officer (SO).

To develop the guide, which is supported by the Assistant Commissioner in South Eastern Region, Sheree drew on her experience working her way up to SO since joining QFES in 2010.

“Going through the application stages to become an SO was just as stressful as the Officer Development Program (ODP),” Sheree said.

“I was successful making merit for Logan Command and offered a position not long after, but I became hesitant with my decision and questioned if I was suitable for the role.

“With my confidence levels depleting, I made the decision to decline the SO position.

“It wasn't until November 2021 that I felt ready to take the step again after developing the confidence and identifying the areas I wanted to work on. This is where I gained a lot of material for the guide.

“I want to thank the other SOs and firefighters I worked with on shift for the support they showed me on my return, and my Senior Management Team for helping me navigate through the stressful times. I also want to thank my partner Emma

for putting up with me and being there always.”

Sheree said SOs are accountable for a lot of things.

“If you're not ready for that, it can be quite daunting,” she said. “Not only do you have to be on your game at operational incidents, you have to make sure you have a good team culture and staff are happy and supported.

“There are opportunities to go into other portfolios like training and community safety. I like how I can experience other roles and get to know people from other regions and departments.”

Sheree decided to write the guide after identifying small gaps in the pathway to become an SO.

“I had a great support network but still found areas I was lacking. After speaking to other Senior Firefighters and SOs, I realised I wasn't alone.

“I hit a few speed bumps and roadblocks but my friend and colleague Caine Warburton helped me push through.”

Sheree, who was named Outstanding Female Leader Fire and Rescue Service in the 2022 Women in Fire and Emergency

Services Awards, said it took a lot of time, effort and support to become an SO. She set herself a goal to write the guide to support other Senior Firefighters.

“The guide will hopefully provide some early direction and make the long process a little easier to manage,” she said.

“Everyone is at different stages in their life and career but having the support from family and friends is very important.

“I love to see the hard work rewarded for our Senior Firefighters in whatever path they decide to take.”

Sheree said there were many qualities that make a good SO.

“I used to try and fit into those categories and try to be like the other SOs on shift, but I think you need to work out what you personally can bring and not try to be like someone else.

“For me, I really like being there for people and supporting them, getting to know what they need and how I can deliver.”

Preparing to Become a Station Officer is currently being distributed in South Eastern Region and will soon be available to all regions on the Gateway.



Sheree's guide provides information on topics such as leadership, management, mentoring, engagement, networking and interview prep.



NORTH COAST REGION

Welcome to paradise aka K'gari

Not so long ago, news reports and screens across the world were filled with images of fire ravaging K'gari (Fraser Island), causing widespread devastation.

But in September three Rural Fire Service firefighters travelled around the island for four days, educating residents and tourists about Australia's new Fire Danger Rating System.

Area Training and Support Officer Dan Sandeman, Mungar Yerra's Second Officer and Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) Robert Haigh and VCE and Secretary Rebecca Kruger armed themselves with brochures, paperwork and promotional materials for young and old.

People responded well to the news that the Fire Danger Rating System is now national and they can access the data that might help them or a loved one in an emergency.

At the end of the adventure, the firefighters had shared information with more than 2000 people to help them to get prepared this bushfire season.



Heavy rescue training

North Coast Region Professional Command recently ran a Heavy Rescue course at the Maryborough Show Grounds with 57 firefighters from surrounding stations.

The participants familiarised themselves with specialised heavy rescue equipment typically found on Lima or Kilo appliances.

These specialised appliances will respond along with frontline appliances in the event of incidents involving heavy vehicles such as trucks, buses and heavy machinery.



Getting ready on the Fraser Coast

The Fraser Coast State Emergency Service (SES) participated in Get Ready events hosted by Fraser Coast Regional Council in conjunction with 'Food n Groove' events to help prepare Fraser Coast communities for the severe weather season. Events were held over two Fridays: one in Hervey Bay and the other in Maryborough.

The SES Unit helped our local communities understand what our risks are and how to prepare for them.

All our Volunteer Community Educators were on site to help educate our local communities with practical activities as well.



BRISBANE REGION



HER ROAR

QFES recently sponsored HER ROAR, a sporting event where women competed in several sports including powerlifting, cross fit and a fun run. Expert speakers on the day also spoke about fitness for women and related topics.

Our crews at the QFES trade stand talked about firefighting as a great career option and gave out information about how to apply to become a firefighter.

Family fun at Wynnum

The Wynnum Family Fun Day had to be rescheduled for October after it was cancelled due to bad weather in July.

It was a glorious day to provide a community marketplace with stalls, foods and entertainment.

A visit from the crew at Wynnum Fire and Rescue Station was a highlight, with smiles all round.



Get Ready Expo

The Get Ready Expo was held on 16 October at Victoria Park, Brisbane. This was the final event of Get Ready Week, with the launch held at Nundah State School on 10 October.

The expo was attended by more than 12,000 people, with stalls by the Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Volunteer Marine Rescue, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, RSPCA, Suncorp and Red Cross, to name a few.

This event was an opportunity for all emergency services to showcase their emergency response, engage with the public about what to do in an emergency, and demonstrate the type of crews and equipment that would attend.

At the Home Show

QFES recently attended the Home Show with Brisbane City Council over three days.

Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service members delivered the message of getting prepared for both bushfire and flood.

Attendees who were considering building or renovating their homes were keen to learn about flood-proof building materials and how to keep their homes as bushfire safe as possible.





SOUTH EASTERN REGION

Gold Coast 500

After a two-year hiatus, V8 motor racing returned to the Gold Coast from 28 to 30 October.

The Gold Coast 500 is an annual racing event for supercars, held at the Surfers Paradise Street Circuit.

During the race carnival, QFES ensures the Standards of Fire Cover are maintained for premises and the public within the race precinct.

Fire and Rescue Service personnel supported the event each day with a Station Officer and firefighter conducting foot patrols, an

operational appliance positioned before the pitlane, two Safety Assessment Officers at the track and a senior officer in race control.

Emergency response inside the race precinct was coordinated from the Queensland Police Service Joint Emergency Services Coordination Centre (JESCC), where two Senior Officers and a FireCom Officer were located.

A logistics firefighter and an appliance from Surfers Paradise Fire and Rescue Station provided additional support.



Swiftwater rescue refresher training

South Eastern Region personnel came together in October for a level 1 swiftwater rescue refresher. Technical Rescue crews from Bundamba Fire and Rescue Station ventured to the Scenic Rim to conduct the refresher training for auxiliary crews from Rathdowney and Kooralbyn.

The exercise was designed to be as realistic as possible, mirroring operational challenges in the water at night.

The aim was a refresher of level 1 capability and limitations using real-world scenarios to test firefighters' skills, such as throw bagging for people in the water and getting lifejackets to people stuck on a car roof.

Crews were able to see and understand water hydrology, rescue techniques and waterway hazards such as strainers and undercuts, as well as swimming techniques in the unlikely event they end up in the water.

Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems also attended to test their capabilities flying at night and using a spotlight to assist bank crews.

The training was beneficial to Rathdowney and Kooralbyn Fire and Rescue Stations, which often get cut off during severe flood events.





SOUTH WESTERN REGION



Warwick multi-agency exercise

A multi-agency exercise was held in Warwick in October with Warwick Queensland Ambulance Service, State Emergency Service and Fire and Rescue Service from Warwick and Killarney. The crews responded to a simulated fire at the Warwick town hall.

In the scenario, about 30 Girl Guides and Scout Cubs, along with their parents, were holding a function at the time of the fire. All required evacuation and some had to be rescued.



Chinchilla Family Fun Day

Western Downs Regional Council and QFES hosted the Chinchilla Family Fun Day in October.

This event was an opportunity to bring community members together to promote emergency and disaster preparedness.

QFES members also encouraged residents to meet and talk with emergency services and relevant support agencies, to prepare themselves and their families for disasters and emergency events.

RPAS training starts

South Western Region moved a step further into the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) world with the first official training for the region taking place at Charlton over the past month. Our region now has an RPAS capability at both Toowoomba and Roma.

RPAS are classified as aircraft according to CASA and are therefore highly regulated. All operators must be appropriately licensed to operate these aircraft within Australia.

RPAS can be used for multiple incident types, including search and rescue, fire investigation, swiftwater, high-angle rescue and wildfire mapping and intelligence gathering.





NAB Foundation Community Grants

Supporting Australian communities to prepare,
recover and build resilience against natural disasters.

NAB Foundation Community Grants fund local projects that help communities prepare for natural disasters, support long-term recovery and build resilience against future disasters.

Grants of up to \$10,000 are available for community-led projects that do one or more of the following:

Readiness: Help communities (people, environments, infrastructure) prepare for natural disasters

Recovery: Help communities, landscapes and fauna rebuild and rehabilitate after natural disasters

Future-proofing: Reduce the risk of future natural disasters by cutting a community's carbon emissions.

Applications for NAB Foundation Community Grants are open all year with up to \$1 million in funding available over two grant award rounds each year. An additional \$200,000 in impact grants will be available for projects with scalable, long-term social or environmental impact.

Learn more about the program and find out how to apply for the next round at www.nab.com/nabfoundation



FAR NORTHERN REGION

Greenie becomes a Life Member

Alan Green, affectionately known as Greenie, has become the fourth person in Far Northern Region to join the prestigious State Emergency Service (SES) Life Member club.

He was presented with the Assistant Commissioner's Certificate of Appreciation by Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short recently in Brisbane.

Alan joined the SES in November 1985 and is currently a member of Innisfail Group.

He has performed countless hours of operational duties across many functions including flood boat, storm damage, incident management and land search. He helped respond to tropical cyclones Winifred, Larry and Yasi.

He has dedicated many years to his SES group's management and capability, including 14 years as Local Controller, three years as Deputy Local Controller, 11 years as Group Leader and eight years as Leading Field Operations Member.

"He has an immense amount of knowledge and experience, which he was always keen to pass on to other members and groups especially those new to the SES," said Andrew Portelli, Local Disaster Coordinator, Cassowary Coast Regional Council.

"I believe Alan has exemplified the characteristics of community, involvement and commitment to the SES over his 36 years of service," said Daryl Camp, SES Regional Director, Northern Region.

Alan was also awarded his Meritorious Service Medal 3rd clasp for 35 years of service. This was presented at the SES Week Awards in Atherton by Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing.



Spring Festival

Local emergency services competed in the box car rally race at the annual Kuranda Spring Festival in early October.

Kuranda State Emergency Service (SES) won first place over the Kuranda Police and Kuranda Fire and Rescue Service. The event was held at the Kuranda Amphitheatre, and the race took place on the terraces.

The competitors from SES did well to manoeuvre their box car and SDO trailer around the course.

Kuranda SES is actively engaged in community events and always takes the opportunity to spread key messages to encourage the community to get prepared.



NORTHERN REGION

Get Ready Townsville

Get Ready Day is an annual event on the Townsville calendar. Emergency service agencies come together on the first Sunday in November, setting up stalls and displays at Jezzine Barracks.

This community event gives residents the opportunity to equip themselves with the knowledge and resources to deal with natural disasters.

It's an opportunity to educate new community members, and ensure long-term residents continue to take preparedness seriously.



An honour for Doug Ladner

On 4 November the Hinchinbrook Shire Mayor Ramon Jayo officially opened the Doug Ladner Bridge, named after the late Doug Ladner, a State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer with more than 40 years of active service.

This honour was in recognition of Doug's extensive involvement with disaster management, including community emergency flood response as a volunteer and local coordinator of the Ingham SES Unit.

An SES vehicle with Mrs Ladner inside was the first to drive across the newly constructed bridge.

Push for Plasma

Senior Firefighters Joe Nuth and Matt Letters from Townsville Fire and Rescue Station have encouraged QFES crews, family and friends across the region to donate plasma and be part of their Emergency Services Push for Plasma Team.

Their goal is to get 343 donations by 11 September 2023 in honour of the 343 firefighters who lost their lives during 9/11.

Just let the blood bank know you're part of the Emergency Services Push for Plasma Team when you donate and your contribution will be included in the challenge. Every plasma donation can save at least three lives.



A lifetime of service

Robert Sutcliffe of Home Hill State Emergency Service (SES) Group was one of two volunteers recently presented with an SES Life Member Award. Robert started with the SES more than 45 years ago, when it was still known as the Civil Defence Organisation.

Robert originally joined as a member of the Ayr Group and become a founding member of the Home Hill Group.

"It feels pretty good to be recognised as a Life Member of the SES. I didn't join to get all these awards, but it feels great to get them," Robert said.

Robert has participated in many fundraising, sports and community education events and operational responses such as Cyclone Larry and the Theodore and Grantham floods.

"If someone needs help, I'll go and help them. Thank you to Brad Hutchinson for my nomination."



CENTRAL REGION

Captain Robbie Price's retirement

Captain Robbie Price celebrated his retirement in October, having served as the Captain of Baralaba Fire and Rescue Station for more than 37 years.

Robbie recalled how he was recruited into what was then known as the Baralaba Fire Brigade – he was talking to the local fire officer, who received a fire call during their conversation and told Robbie to 'get on the back of the truck', a 1972 Ford F100.

Robbie continued in his role until the last day before he turned 65, and he immediately transitioned to Baralaba's Rural Fire Service to continue supporting his beloved community.

Acting Inspector Scott Castree said there was no sign of Robbie slowing down.

'Robbie has been a key figure in Baralaba for over 37 years and is so respected by his community that on Australia Day in 2022, he was awarded the Banana Shire Citizen of the Year, a shire of around 15,000 citizens', Scott said.

Robbie has balanced his QFES responsibilities with his work as Baralaba's only mechanic and fuel store. He received incredible support from his friend and workshop administration officer, Sharon Tucker, who received an Assistant Commissioner's Certificate of Appreciation for her ongoing support to Baralaba Fire and Rescue Station.

Sharon often took over Robbie's workshop responsibilities to ensure local residents could get fuel when he was called back to the station to assist with emergencies. She also ensured crews were given much-needed sustenance at protracted incidents.



Exercise Rocky Ready

Emergency services agencies from across Central Queensland joined with the Australian Army's 11th Brigade to undertake Exercise Rocky Ready 2022, one of the largest training exercises in Central Region.

The four-day exercise was an opportunity to test our capabilities and interoperability with the Australian Defence Force.

The exercise's goal was to ensure emergency personnel have the processes and support necessary to mobilise a coordinated response during an emergency.

The 11th Brigade consists of army reservists from across Queensland who support whole-of-government responses to fires, floods and other weather events.

The exercise brought together the State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland Police Service, District Disaster Management Group and multiple Local Disaster Management Groups.

A huge thank you to everyone who assisted in the planning and delivery of the exercise. The planning team was made up of staff and volunteers from across all the services and it was wonderful to see the results of their hard work come together.



Remembering together

Services for Firefighters Remembrance Day were restricted by Covid over the past two years, but in 2022 communities across Queensland came together to pay their respects.

One such event was the Northern Region service at South Townsville Fire Station. Executive Support Officer Mel Banks has coordinated the service for the past seven years.

“I was a little worried how we’d go this year after only being able to host a scaled-down service for the past two years,” Mel said.

The planning committee includes representatives from the Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service, Retired Firefighters, RAAF Association, 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment and Aviation Rescue Firefighters.

“We hold our service in the engine bay of South Townsville Station, so FireCom can have a role in the service.

“At the end of the minute’s silence, FireCom gradually increase the volume of the turnout bells. It gives everyone goosebumps.

“FireCom then make an announcement over the PA system: ‘Station 14 in honour of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and who are now eternally silent. We remember them.’”

The service acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, the Wulgurukaba people of Gurambilbarra and Yunbenun, and the Bindal people, as well as the surrounding areas of the Nywaigi and Gugubadhun peoples.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Michael O’Neil said, “Firefighters Remembrance Day is an opportunity for us to stop and reflect on the 59 souls that have fallen across the state and pray for their

families. We tragically have lost two from within our community: Sub Station Officer John Shimmin in 1964 and Volunteer Firefighter Miles Farrow in 2004.

“Incidents and disasters are never convenient, and we ask our staff and volunteers to work and often miss important family events such as birthdays, anniversaries and other milestones. So Remembrance Day is also an opportunity to acknowledge our families.”

Tim Grose, a firefighter from South Townsville Station, said he was surprised how many community members came out.

“People emerged from every shop and lined the streets,” Tim said. “It was good to see the appreciation for what we do.

“After riding in the truck, I was given the role of ringing the bell after each name in the honour roll was read out.

“I went through my recruit school at the end of 2019 and we went to the Firefighters Remembrance Day service in Brisbane as a group. Since then I haven’t been able to attend due to Covid.

“Firefighters Remembrance Day can mean a lot to a lot of different people. From my point of view, it’s good to remember the reality of our job and the fragility of it.

“It only takes one wrong move at a job and a life could be taken. This day is also about the importance of mateship and camaraderie within a team and having each other’s back.”

The story of Saint Florian

Saint Florian’s Prayer is recited at Firefighters Remembrance Day services each year.

Florian was born around 250 AD in an ancient Roman city that is now part of Austria.

After joining the Roman army, Florian advanced through the ranks, eventually becoming a commander in the province of Noricum.

He was responsible not only for military duties but for training a group of soldiers into an elite firefighting unit.

In 303 AD, during the Christian persecution, Florian was expected to enforce laws against Christians in his territory, but he refused to do so.

In punishment, it is said that Florian was sentenced to be burnt at the stake but he stood up on his funeral pyre and delivered such a daring challenge to the Romans that they were afraid to burn him, and instead drowned him in the River Enns.

Florian is the patron saint of firefighters (as well as chimney sweeps and soap makers) and is invoked not only against fire but floods and lightning. Saint Florian’s Cross is used as a symbol for firefighters.





Emergency services personnel made a splash for Movember.

A hairy moment

Moustaches of all shapes, sizes and furriness were grown during Movember to support suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer.

Movember at QFES is about having fun and supporting men's health. In 2021, QFES raised more than \$45,000 to support Movember initiatives.

Many QFES regions put their own local spin on Movember activities. The Fire and Rescue Mackay Movember team host the annual Emergency Services Swim Challenge in Mackay. Last year, the event was awarded QFES' Best Movember Fundraiser trophy.

Now in its third year, the challenge differs from previous years by upping the ante as 68 personnel from QFES, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service and the Mackay Airport Fire and Rescue team raced each other in a 60-kilometre swim, representing the 60 men we lose to suicide each hour across the globe.

The idea for a Movember swim was the brainchild of Senior Firefighter Catherine Duchock and Acting Inspector Tim Curtain, who created the fitness challenge to increase morale, teamwork and to start the conversation around men's health.

Business Support Officer Dee McMurtrie and firefighter Kyle McCormack helped organise this year's challenge and both have found the event creates a positive culture to have tough conversations about mental health.

"You need to be a good person and watch out for each other. The more trust and rapport you build with everyone on the individual level, the more people feel comfortable being themselves around you, which in turn creates trust and leads to those conversations," Kyle said.

"There is always a lot of banter going around but the event helps as an ice breaker to start the conversations on the more difficult topics," Dee said.

While bragging rights and winning a shiny trophy are a great motivator, the friendly competition promotes inter-agency bonding and the importance of physical health and mental wellbeing.

"QFES' Fire and Rescue Service is predominantly male, and men seem to think they are tough and don't need to talk about how they are feeling, but this event is changing that ideology," Dee said.

"As a firefighter, we are in a job where we are exposed to trauma and it shouldn't be buried, it shouldn't feel wrong to talk about things, no matter how the incident affects you – you should be able to voice your feelings," Kyle added.

The day finished with Queensland Ambulance Service taking home the trophy. More importantly, the QFES crew raised more than \$500 on the day to fund ground-breaking men's health projects. At the time of printing, QFES raised more than \$40,000.

Four simple steps to help navigate a conversation with a mate who might be doing it tough.

Ask

- Ask how they are and what's been happening lately?

Listen

- Listen and give them your full attention.

Encourage action

- Encourage them to take action towards feeling better.

Check in

- Check in with them regularly after your chat.



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Listening to your feedback

The results from the 2022 workforce experience surveys help us understand what's working well and what needs to change so QFES can continue developing to support Queensland communities.

More than 3700 QFES members shared their thoughts in the Working for Queensland and Volunteering for Queensland surveys in September.

This year's surveys were updated to better capture your day-to-day experience, with new questions about health and wellbeing, fairness and equity, and diverse experiences.

The new questions also provided more information about the experiences of staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds. QFES will consider these results in future strategies related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Strengths

Some of the most positive results were related to social support within workgroups and teams, particularly in terms of respect and psychological safety.

More than 80 per cent of staff and volunteers reported contributing to positive workplace experiences over the past 12 months.

The majority of staff and volunteers also understand the importance of aligning behaviour to the QFES values.

More than 90 per cent of both staff and volunteers recognised the positive impact our work has on the lives of the people of Queensland. This result is significantly more positive than the Queensland public sector as a whole.

Areas for improvement

The surveys also highlighted some areas where QFES needs to develop, including leadership, change management, workload and demands, health and wellbeing, performance management and professional development.

While most respondents were aware of their health and safety obligations, they were less positive when asked if teams are proactively discussing workplace safety or promoting wellbeing and mental health.

Only 32 per cent of staff and 55 per cent of volunteers said they receive constructive feedback to help their performance, and 21 per cent of staff and 49 per cent of volunteers discuss professional development with their manager.

Less than a quarter of staff and volunteers said they're regularly consulted about change or have the opportunity to provide feedback on changes that directly affect them.

It's important for all leaders and teams to come together to discuss the survey results and develop actions within the team. This year, the Workforce Experience Unit will also provide a toolkit to support these important conversations.

Staff

- I understand the importance of behaving in a manner aligned to the QFES values

95%	4%	1%
-----	----	----
- My organisation has a positive impact on the lives of the people of Queensland

91%	7%	2%
-----	----	----
- I discuss my work challenges with the people in my workgroup

85%	9%	6%
-----	----	----
- In my workgroup, we share learning

84%	9%	7%
-----	----	----
- I have contributed to positive workplace experiences over the past 12 months

84%	13%	3%
-----	-----	----

Volunteers

- I understand the importance of behaving in a manner aligned to the QFES values

94%	5%	1%
-----	----	----
- My organisation has a positive impact on the lives of the people of Queensland

91%	8%	1%
-----	----	----
- My volunteer work has a positive impact on the lives of the people of Queensland

90%	9%	1%
-----	----	----
- In my team, I'm comfortable speaking up to share a different view with my colleagues

85%	7%	8%
-----	----	----
- In my team we treat each other respectfully

85%	8%	7%
-----	----	----

Staff

- In my workgroup, we proactively discuss workplace safety

46%	43%	11%
-----	-----	-----
- In my workgroup, we discuss ways to promote wellbeing

44%	43%	13%
-----	-----	-----
- In my workgroup, we discuss ways to promote mental health

40%	44%	17%
-----	-----	-----

Volunteers

- In my workgroup, we proactively discuss workplace safety

62%	31%	7%
-----	-----	----
- In my workgroup, we discuss ways to promote wellbeing

46%	40%	14%
-----	-----	-----
- In my workgroup, we discuss ways to promote mental health

39%	40%	21%
-----	-----	-----



Commissioner Greg Leach laid a wreath at Anzac Square, on behalf of QFES, for Remembrance Day.



In his role as Government Champion for Coen, Commissioner Greg Leach spent time in the Far North Queensland town, meeting with elders and other key stakeholders and touring vital infrastructure.



QFES representatives met with the Gyeonggi Fire and Disaster Department in South Korea to discuss topics such as bushfires, technology in the Fire and Rescue Service and training opportunities.



The Emerald PCYC Emergency Services Cadets Unit hosted their official launch at the Emerald Fire and Rescue Station.



Trick-or-treaters came out in droves for the Malanda Halloween Night at Malanda Fire and Rescue Station.



Hervey Bay firefighters attended an awards ceremony at St Stephens Hospital after they responded to a significant fire in the Medical Surgery Ward in September.



A generous donation of more than 120 books from the Mount Isa Fire and Rescue Station has filled the shelves of the new community book swap at the Mount Isa Hospital.



QFES was well represented in the taekwondo section of the Pan Pacific Masters Games with Firefighter Neal Davison and Acting Manager of Partnerships and Sponsorship Kate Eggar bringing home bronze medals.



Firefighters from Thursday Island ran five kilometres in their turnout gear for run4reef, raising awareness about the long-term sustainability of the Great Barrier Reef.



The Minjerribah Local Specific Fire Management Group, including representatives from the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue Service, came together to discuss bushfire mitigation practices.



Scott Beasley (front row, far right) was deployed to Christchurch after the 2011 earthquake.

20 years of technical rescue

Acting Superintendent Scott Beasley has been involved in technical rescue for more than 20 years and has travelled the world to instruct others and develop the capability.

After becoming a firefighter in Ipswich in 1987, Scott grew interested in the fledgling area of technical rescue.

“I met up with one of the instructors to discuss how I could get involved and how we could develop the capability in Ipswich to get more people involved, and it went from there,” Scott said.

“It looked like an exciting direction for the Fire and Rescue Service to go in. You could develop a lot of new skills, and you could be deployed overseas to use these skills.”

Scott was part of the response to every major cyclone in Queensland, participated in training exercises in Malaysia, and travelled to Russia, Singapore and the US to instruct other teams.

The technical rescue team’s (USAR) first overseas deployment was to Padang in 2009, where they helped in the aftermath of an earthquake.

“The earthquake was over a wide area,” Scott said. “It was eye-opening to experience a different culture and adapt on the run to work with the locals during the disaster.

“Search and rescue wasn’t well known back then. At the airport there was no one to meet us, and we had to establish communications with local government and show them how we could help.

“We didn’t have any forklifts, so we had to load and unload 15 tonnes of equipment by hand. We also took bulky tools like hydraulic jackhammers, whereas now we use battery-operated ones which are so much lighter and more efficient.

“We now understand better how to integrate with local governments while still being self-sufficient.”

Another formative experience for Scott was being deployed to New Zealand after the Christchurch earthquake.

“We worked on the CTV Building. It was a seven-storey building that had pancake-collapsed and we worked with other teams to delaminate it floor by floor, looking for survivors and retrieving the deceased.

“It was an overwhelming situation. Christchurch had been locked down by the military, so no one else was allowed into the city. It was eerie walking down streets with buildings half-collapsed and aftershocks coming through.

“We worked 24/7 and we’d search hotel rooms in the middle of the night where people’s lives had just stopped – cups of tea sat there half drunk, wallets and passports were left in place.

“We went to the casino and there was still money and chips on the tables where

people were playing cards. There was still money in the safe.”

Scott said technical rescue was continually evolving.

“We’re classified as a heavy rescue team and we can do a lot to assist people, but a heavy rescue team takes a lot of money to pick up and take to a disaster.

“We’re working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to see what other areas we can support, such as assisting with shelters, providing filtered water for drinking, or sending in light rescue teams who are more flexible.

“We can also perform reconnaissance in a disaster zone so DFAT can decide who else they should send in, like a medical team.

“We’ve recently been put on standby for Samoa and Indonesia after the recent earthquakes and we could send in a damage assessment or HazMat team, depending on what they need.

“I’m in a management role now, which has its own challenges in some ways, but I’m excited to keep evolving and moving forward within the area of technical rescue and exploring where it can go.”

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