

# RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE

APRIL 2023



## What lies ahead

Being prepared for whatever comes next

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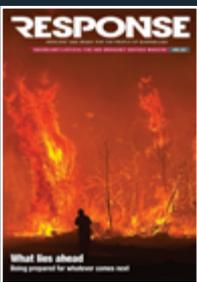
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Strike Team Bravo was deployed to South Western Region to battle multiple raging bushfires, which burnt tens of thousands of hectares in the Western Downs area. Photo by Rodger Howitt from Narangba Rural Fire Brigade.

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# FOREWORDS



**GREG LEACH AFSM**

**Commissioner**

## **QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Throughout March, the QFES Reform team, members of the Executive Leadership Team and I visited the regions for the first round of consultation and engagement about the QFES Reform. It's been great to hear your questions and thoughts on the Reform process. The consultation process will help identify opportunities in the organisation, and ensure we build an efficient fire department that meets the needs of Queenslanders.

If you have a question that wasn't answered during the sessions, visit the Reform Implementation page on the Gateway to send through feedback and ideas anonymously, or email [reform.questions@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:reform.questions@qfes.qld.gov.au). The next round of engagement is planned for June, and I will keep you updated on the reform's progress as new information is received through my regular communications.

On the operational front, QFES personnel have been busy dealing with widespread bushfires in the south of the state, and devastating flooding in the north.

The dry conditions extended the bushfire season into March, with South Western Region battling prolonged bushfire operations. Almost 200 Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue Service and SES personnel deployed from across the state to the Western Downs area.

It's disappointing to see our crews risk their lives to fight fires that were suspected of being deliberately lit. QFES personnel worked tirelessly to contain the bushfires, protect properties and the community, and I acknowledge their excellent work in difficult conditions.

While the La Niña was officially declared over, north Queensland's communities came to assist with evacuations from unprecedented floods. As the Government Champion of Coen, it was great to don my Trademutt shirt, designed to start conversations about mental health support, and work with State Emergency Service volunteers and community members to help resupply the isolated towns. You can read more about the floods on page 7.

The AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) returned home from New Zealand after two weeks of recovery assistance in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle. You can read more about the work of the AUS-1 team in New Zealand on page 9. QFES also deployed two DART personnel to Türkiye, to assist after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck the region.

In some good news, Surf Life Saving Queensland held their Junior and Senior State Championships, where a 12-year-old nipper, who was warming up for the event, saved the life of a woman in distress. This is a great example of how volunteers of all ages and abilities keep our communities safe.



**ADAM STEVENSON**

**Acting Deputy Commissioner**

## **STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

In March, we wrapped the first round of state-wide engagement about the QFES Reform. It's great to have the chance to meet with so many of you and hear your questions and concerns. Although change can be daunting, there is a solid change framework in place supporting all the work that will be done during the process. Whether, as for most of us, there will be minimal change to what we do day-to-day or whether you may be among those who will be transitioning to Queensland Police Service, there will be support for you every step of the way.

QFES has three upcoming Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Indigenous Projects that support the Queensland Government Building and Construction Training Policy: Moreton Bay Central, Caloundra South and Mount Cotton Road Fire and Rescue stations.

The policy forms part of the state government's commitment to closing the gap by improving the quality of life and providing equal opportunities to First Nations people through skill development and employment opportunities in the construction sector.

On the projects, First Nations workers will be engaged as apprentices, trainees or through other workforce training.

Everyone has a role in achieving positive long-term social and economic outcomes for Queensland's First Nations people. You can read more about the work of QFES and closing the gap on page 18.

In January, QFES established its in-house internal audit function – an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity that will value and improve our operations.

The function will also work closely with business units to promote efficiency, operational quality, internal control enhancement and regulatory compliance, and help understand and manage current and emerging risks.

Internal audit will assist the Board of Management to accomplish our goals and objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to improve risk management, controls and governance processes.

The School of Fire and Emergency Services Training (SFEST) is running on all cylinders to train our latest FRS recruits. By May, SFEST will have six recruit courses, including one course in Townsville, running concurrently, and by August, SFEST will host six recruit courses at Whyte Island. This course load is expected to continue for about two years, and is supported by the new Curriculum Writing Unit at SFEST. The unit develops, validates and reviews the current training curriculum to ensure the education we provide supports operational capability and future needs.



There were more than 660 swiftwater rescues during the event.

# The billion-dollar disaster

The flood events from 22 February to 7 March 2022 left an enduring impact on Queenslanders and QFES.

It's estimated more than 500,000 Queenslanders – or one-tenth – were directly affected by the severe weather event, with many still recovering from the economic, social and environmental impacts.

Staff and volunteers from all services worked shoulder-to-shoulder to help the community recover.



Some SES units did more than a year's worth of jobs during the floods.

## The SES steps up

The State Emergency Service (SES) responded to more than 13,500 requests for assistance, including storm damage operations, chainsawing, sandbagging, temporary repairs and evacuations.

SES Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short described the positive sentiment of the

service during the event.

“It was a roll-up-your-sleeves attitude, which was evident by the initial local SES response,” AC Short said.

“Volunteers and staff are proud of what they achieved. Our volunteers always stand up to serve their communities without question – they are part of the community and look after friends and neighbours.

“Everyone was solution-focused, and this ensured operational needs and continuity plans were addressed early.

“This was the first time we redirected stranded volunteer deployment teams. They didn't sit idle on the sidelines simply because they were unable to reach their initial planned location.”

In some parts of Queensland, there were four floods in succession – meaning volunteers juggled their personal lives, work and service to the community.

“Early on, fatigue planning was implemented, and then monitored and managed during operations,” AC Short said.

“However, with continuous operations, fatigue was always going to be an issue. Where possible, we brought in assistance, but our members always rose to the occasion.”

AC Short said it was paramount that agencies work together when responding to disaster situations, to ensure no one was missed or left behind.

“One service or agency can't do it all, so cooperation is essential.

“The Queensland disaster system is built around all agencies working together to respond and recover from disasters. We achieved this during the floods, and we will continue to come together to support Queenslanders.”



QFES members and the community paid their respects to SES volunteer Merryl Dray.

## Merryl Dray

As part of remembering the 2022 flood event, we must also remember those 13 lives that were tragically lost, including our own Merryl Dray.



An RFS strike team helped clean up in Gympie.

On Saturday 25 February 2022 her life was lost while responding to people in need during the floods. This year her life was commemorated by close family and friends, SES colleagues, Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Mark Ryan, Commissioner Greg Leach, Acting Deputy Commissioner Joanne Greenfield, Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short and SES Director Brian Cox.

The impact she made as a mother, grandmother, friend, nurse and SES volunteer will live on.

### Support is here

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. The Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) provides a free 24-hour confidential phone counselling service to all staff and volunteers. If you feel you could benefit from this support, please call 1800 805 980. All calls are returned within two hours.

### Pride in their work

Neil Francis, Acting Assistant Commissioner for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), said firefighters performed many different roles to support the community, ranging from incident management to swiftwater rescue.

“We had FRS members in incident control centres, regional operations centres, the State

Operations Centre (SOC) and even the State Disaster Coordination Centre,” AC Francis said.

“Our firefighters put the community first, and themselves and their families second. Their commitment to the role is significant, and at times that comes at a personal cost. They continually go above and beyond in order to serve the community in whichever way they can.

“They take their responsibility to the community very seriously, and that showed in their actions during the floods.”

Many firefighters were recently acknowledged in the Brisbane Region awards ceremony, including several Australian Bravery Decorations and Commissioner’s Commendations for Bravery.

“I think firefighters would be proud of their actions and what they did to serve the community,” AC Francis said.

“Some firefighters may think they could have done more to serve the community. I believe the community is immensely proud of what FRS firefighters did to assist them during their time of need.”

There were more than 660 swiftwater rescues in February and March 2022.

“The large numbers of rescues put pressure on responding crews and FireCom. Sometimes reaching the incident sites was challenging on its own due to flooded roads, traffic and so on. The rescues were a huge challenge but firefighters absolutely met it face on and achieved so many good things and saved so many lives.

“I want to acknowledge FireCom’s efforts in saving lives and providing that entry point for the community. They worked under immensely stressful conditions with a significant volume of calls.”

AC Francis said it was important to learn from the 2022 floods.

“We need to understand how we can continue to do things better. With climate change, disasters like this may happen more, so through the review process we need to take key learnings out of the incident.

“The interoperability between the services was undertaken at a very high standard. At the end of the day the community doesn’t prefer one service over the other, just as long as the service can help them in their time of need.

“I’d like to acknowledge the RFS and SES for their support and professionalism and acknowledge the tragic death of Merryl Dray in the line of duty.”

### Helping the community

Chief Superintendent Matt Inwood from the RFS was the Deputy State Coordinator in the SOC during the floods.

“People put their hands up from all regions of the state to assist in affected areas. We had really good support from all staff and volunteers,” Matt said.

“Looking back, I’m sure RFS members are proud of their efforts supporting their communities.



A temporary flood levee was erected in Maryborough to protect the city centre.

“A lot of rural fire brigades in remote or isolated communities don’t have any other support available during floods, so they’re always prepared, and not just for fire.

“Some of these communities, such as Gympie, Maryborough and the Sunshine Coast, aren’t that remote but by virtue of the land and river systems, they quickly become isolated and sometimes the only service in town is the RFS.”

Matt said the RFS made a huge difference in their communities and continued to do so.

“Our communities were supported by a bunch of wonderful volunteers who turn up to give their time.

“There’s a whole host of lessons for us organisationally from that event. A takeout from this along with any significant event is making sure we continue to be prepared and all our resources – whether it be human resources or equipment - are ready at any time to assist the community.

“The cooperation between all the services holistically is essential. We had all three services working together with a common goal of just making sure the community was safe and we could get them back to normality.”

RFS Acting Assistant Commissioner Peter Hollier oversaw the floods response in North Coast Region.

“From a regional perspective, our volunteers swung into action in areas with major flooding,” AC Hollier said.

“Maryborough in particular flooded numerous times over the last 10 years, so the volunteers know exactly where to go and what to do, and at what level of receding floodwaters they should start washing out.”

AC Hollier said brigades helped with removal of debris, clean up, as well as resupply of food and medicine.

“They also provided areas of refuge for communities. In remote isolated communities, the brigade is often the point of only contact between their community and the outside world.

“Looking ahead, there are always opportunities for improvement and making sure our workforce is well and truly engaged early and have plenty of warning upfront so they can make plans with their employers. They do it because they can see the benefit to their community.”

### Learning from disasters

Lessons management is the collection, analysis and application of experiences from events, exercises, projects and reviews. The practice facilitates organisational growth and continuous improvement through more efficient and effective practice and improved safety.

Anita Ransome, Principal Advisor, said in the months following the floods QFES’ Lessons Management Unit embarked on a wide-ranging review to learn from the disaster and continue to improve our service to the community.

“We applied a lessons management lens to QFES’ operational response activities,” Anita said.

“Overwhelmingly, the insights captured during the review demonstrated QFES staff and volunteers strive to achieve the best outcomes for Queensland communities, despite adversity and challenging circumstances.

“Our people and how they work together to overcome challenging situations to make things work emerged as a strong theme.

“Some examples are the work of Emergency Management Coordinators with Local and District Management Groups supported by the many liaison officers; Air Operations officers and the work with the Regional Operational Centres; SES floodboat teams and how their work was coordinated with the Emergency Operational Centres’ and the completing of damage assessments as quickly as it was safe to do so in the recovery phase.”

In any disaster event or major incident, there is no such thing as a perfect response.

“Every incident or disaster is different and comes with a differing level of complexity that challenges emergency service capabilities, and this event was no different,” she said.

“Planning for surge capacity to support operations during sustained events is an area to address for future events, particularly if it is expected that future events will be more frequent and intense in nature. To support that, the challenge is also to ensure that the surge capacity required is trained and exercised.

“The event duration also placed a challenge on floodboat and swiftwater teams who operated for long days and hours.

“Another challenge was supporting ongoing effective communication across organisations as the duration and intensity of the event stretched the regional emergency management capability.”

The full event report is available on the QFES Gateway on the Lessons Management page.



Glendon Connolly from Planet Downs Rural Fire Brigade and the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

## Gulf communities pull together

Major rainfall right across the Gulf of Carpentaria has isolated communities for several weeks, as well as inundating farms and disrupting food supplies.

Michael O’Neil, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Northern Region said the rains began in mid-December and several communities had been isolated since the start of the year.

“It’s affected communities as far south as Urandangi, where we assisted the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to evacuate people,” AC O’Neil said.

“More recently, a low sat south of Burketown and dumped a lot of rain, so we’ve seen the highest recorded flooding in the area. Though I was just talking to a local and they said by their reckoning the 1974 flood was actually worse, because it went higher on the pub wall.”

AC O’Neil said people in the Gulf community were incredibly resilient.

“They are used to being isolated during the wet season, but this year it’s more protracted – usually they’d only be cut off for two or three weeks but this is the first time since 1974 we have seen water flood houses. The longer period of isolation has affected food supplies, particularly in Burketown, where we evacuated about 100 people.

“The impact on food supplies also affects employment and income into the town through the local shops.

“Food resupply is paramount, and we’ve been working on that since January along with the Disaster District Management Group (DDMG).”

AC O’Neil said the duration of the flooding meant they’d struggled to find pilots to deliver food drops.

“Recently we hit a stumbling block when our pilots reached their maximum flight hours. A significant amount of work goes into organising these, and we’re grateful for the work of the DDMG and Local Disaster Management Groups.

“The community up there will bounce back and we’ll see them thrive again once we support them through their recovery.”

QFES members had to be careful how they acted in and around the floodwater because there were several crocodile sightings in Burketown.

“Our State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers do a tremendous job looking after locals, and our Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers are doing washouts of major infrastructure and homes.

“We put out a call for several Fire and Rescue Service staff to travel up there to assist, and we were overwhelmed by how many hands went up.

“Our volunteers in these communities *are* the communities – they live and work in the communities – so they provide support not only with tasks but with general friendship through these times.

“I can’t stress enough the resilience of the communities and our volunteers. The Gulf community is remote and it takes a special person to live and work up there. A lot of our volunteers wear dual hats – quite often they’re both RFS and SES. Without their commitment we could not do what we do.

“Each day I sit in this role I’m amazed by the commitment of our volunteers in one of the most danger-prone areas of Queensland.”



Flooding at Burketown and Gregory in March. Photos by Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.



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# Gripped by disaster

**Aotearoa New Zealand's North Island was battered by Severe Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle, bringing gale force winds and huge ocean swells.**

It was the deadliest system to hit the country since Cyclone Giselle in 1968 and for only the third time in New Zealand's history, the country declared a national state of emergency.

The cyclone claimed 11 lives, including two New Zealand firefighters who died after being caught in a landslide in Muriwai.

Twenty-five QFES personnel from AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) were deployed to one of the hardest hit areas, Hawke's Bay, from 17 February to 25 February.

The team — along with PPE, drones, communications and field equipment — were brought over on three different flights and greeted at Auckland Airport with a Pōwhiri, a traditional Māori welcome.

Andrew Sbrizzi, Superintendent and Jurisdictional Liaison Officer for AUS-1 DART - Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle deployment, said the AUS-1 DART technicians worked closely with the New Zealand Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team, the police canine squad and excavators to conduct full coverage searches for missing victims and to clear priority buildings and key points of interest.

"We were brought together and tasked with work details, initially four teams of mostly Australians and some New Zealand mates. Then an integrated model, we were keen to make a difference," Andrew said.

"AUS-1 DART's swiftwater rescue technicians were recognised for their specialised knowledge. They were integrated into the New Zealand USAR team to advise them and the police on hydrology — water movement through and around structures and strainers (debris catching structures, i.e. fences) — together with related swiftwater rescue advice.

"The damage was overwhelming, it was bigger than what the team could have imagined."

The days were long, working from 8am to 7pm.

"Our team joined volunteers and Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) in a Marae (community centre) to assist with coordination of clean up and recovery efforts in their community," he said.

"We integrated well with our New Zealand mates, starting on the difficult tasks as soon as we arrived. The searches were clearly arduous, hot and heavy work in mud and silt."

The deployment team enjoyed kai (food) and kōrero (conversations) with local members of the community.

"The local community were very thankful for our assistance, showing their appreciation of our work, with many donations of food, including kids who brought us delicious home-made ANZAC biscuits."

This wasn't the first time the DART team have assisted New Zealand after a disaster.

## Quotes from QFES personnel:

*"Such respect between us and the New Zealanders showing off our skills and knowledge of the team."*

*"The incredible spiritual, cultural and awareness of others has been mind-blowing, such community spirit."*

*"First time up Esk Valley - I have not seen so much devastation, the volume of this from water from silt and timber, houses swept off their foundations... the pure volume of silt has made the place like a moon scape or Grantham times ten."*

*"Such a beautiful place that now has scars."*

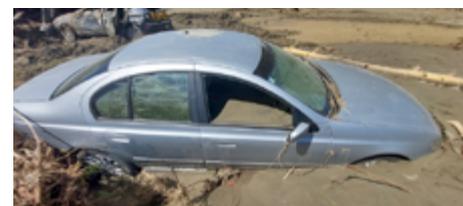
"This was hard for some of us, as four of us were here 12 years ago for the Christchurch earthquake. There's old friends and old memories.

"Two, one-minute memorials were held on 22 February; one at 12:51pm for remembrance of Christchurch and another at 2:55pm for a fallen firefighter."

In addition to the difficult recovery work in the valley, the DART team worked closely with the community. The residents of Bayview were isolated during the event and stood up a community-led response in their village which continued over eight days after the flooding stopped. Residents were exhausted, but absolutely committed to their work. Superintendent Craig Stolte, along with a representative from FENZ, helped support them as they prepared to transition their operations to the local council for the long-term recovery efforts.

"The initial management of the event was outstanding. Craig bought a calming influence into a heightened situation — this is clearly above and beyond what DART does and this kind of intervention directly contributed to the positive welfare of the Bayview community," Andrew said.

"The community was extremely accepting of us. They embraced AUS-1 and FENZ's contribution, guidance and mentoring of their operations. There were offers of food, gifts and notes of thanks every hour, every day."



Many people lost their homes, jobs and livelihoods.



The specialist firefighters were confronted with devastating scenes in Hawke's Bay.

# An emerging threat

With the rise of rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (RLIBs) in everyday products, many consumers are unaware of the potential risks and hazards.



*A lawnmower battery exploded being on charge and unattended to for 35 hours.*

More than 450 fires in Australia have been linked to RLIBs over the past 18 months. In Queensland, firefighters are called to almost one fire each week caused by this type of battery.

The chemical make-up of RLIBs means they are more volatile than traditional batteries, as a large amount of power can be stored in a relatively small space.

While not every RLIB is dangerous, unintentional misuse can have severe consequences.

## On the case

Daren Mallouk, Manager of the Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) and an experienced fire investigation officer (FIO), is closely examining the rise of fires caused by RLIBs. He says his role represents an amalgamation of multiple professions, rolled into one.

“The role of the FIO can be best summed up as part amateur sleuth, part budding structural or electrical engineer, part aspiring forensic scientist and part-time regulator and enforcement officer,” Daren said.

“The FIO must analyse, determine and document the origin and the ignition sequence that ultimately caused the fire.

“Part of State FIU’s role is to capture and analyse data, identify common causes and trends, and provide recommendations, mitigation strategies and areas that need further research. This can be used to make informed decisions on how to protect the community from any potential fire risks.”

Daren said an exploding battery was similar to fireworks: shooting sparks, fire, debris and making a ‘pop-pop’ sound.

*The remains of an e-bike after a fire.*



Although there is no single root cause of the problem, the FIU have unearthed a common theme of incompatible chargers, mechanical damage and low-quality products.

“There are likely several issues at play and no obvious single solution,” Daren said.

While it may be convenient to charge an item overnight, buy a second-hand e-scooter or charger, or use a seemingly ‘compatible’ charger you already have at home, these everyday actions can cause an RLIB to fail – and when they fail, they fail with ferocity.

“When a battery cell self-heats due to uncontrolled chemical reactions between the positive and negative nodes due to mishandling, it is termed ‘thermal runaway’. Once thermal runaway starts, it can’t be stopped and almost always – depending on battery capacity, output, and state of charge – fails catastrophically.

“Therefore, thermal management and cooling is key to mitigate the hazard, which doesn’t stop until the batteries have been drained of energy. This cooling may require significant amounts of water over a long time if the battery is large, such as in an electric vehicle.”



Batteries inside an electric skateboard displayed extensive blowout.

Thermal runaway can typically occur in two forms: jet flame and explosive venting.

“The jet flame is a sustained, high intensity flame of more than 500 degrees, which greatly increases the likelihood of igniting nearby objects,” he said.

“In the explosive venting scenario, the battery’s internal ‘jelly rolls’ – thin films of metal covered in special chemicals and rolled into a spiral – can be forcefully ejected and ignite nearby flammable items.”

Responding fire crews could encounter multiple fires originating from one source.

### Stay alert, not alarmed

Executive Manager Fire Safety, Mark Halverson said almost all rechargeable devices such as e-scooters, tools or toys are powered by RLIBs.

“RLIBs always have some form of marking on them that contains words or letters like ‘lithium-ion’, ‘li-po’, Li+ or ‘lithium-polymer’. However, the battery pack may not be readily visible so the markings may not be obvious,” Mark said.

“The single most important fire safety consideration is only using the charger that is specifically recommended by the device’s manufacturer.

“The warning signs of a damaged RLIB or device are swelling, blistering or changes in colour on the battery pack, an obvious odour during or immediately after charging and overheating during or after charging.

“These fires are very difficult to extinguish with any firefighting medium, including water. Even when a fire appears to have been extinguished, reignition remains a real risk.”

Unlike a conventional electrical power source, there is no off switch. A battery may appear flat and not capable of powering the device, but stranded energy may remain.

Overheated batteries emit dangerous gases that can cause severe irritation to eyes, skin and nasal passages.

“Interconnected, photo-electric smoke alarms are highly recommended as they give an early warning of all types of fires to the occupants, giving you the best chance to get out in the worst-case scenario.

“If a rechargeable device, tool or toy becomes significantly overheated or catches fire, evacuate the area immediately and call Triple Zero (000).”

Damaged RLIBs can readily produce sufficient heat to start a fire in the rubbish truck or recycling facility. Incorrect disposal of rechargeable lithium battery products has caused several fires at waste management facilities and inside rubbish trucks.

“Never dispose of damaged or undamaged RLIBs in household wheelie bins or industrial bins. Contact your local council to identify a local resource recovery centre where the battery can be taken.”

### Charging tips:

- *Unplug when fully charged*
- *Don’t charge in direct sunlight*
- *Let the item cool down after use before charging*
- *Don’t charge on combustible materials such as bedding, clothing or lounges*
- *Avoid charging large items in living areas*
- *Don’t mix-and-match chargers.*

### New training

Due to the rising number of fires caused by RLIBs, QFES is updating training to effectively fight these fires. This includes new road crash rescue techniques with alternative energy vehicles for QFES recruits, developing online learning sessions and training provided at the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy.

“Proactively training our people is important and the need for further community awareness and education on the risks of RLIB devices is essential,” Daren said.

# Ear to the ground

Each year, QFES surveys households across Queensland to measure the level of their preparedness for fire and emergency events.

The Community Insights Survey delves into understanding community risk perception and awareness, preparedness levels and actions taken, as well as community expectations of QFES.

The survey has been running for five years, and its predecessor, the Households Survey, dates back to 2004.

Principal Program Officer for research and innovation, Michael Carroll, said the survey was a sample of the Queensland population and gathered community insights on a range of emergency and disaster events, preparedness activities and QFES' services.

"The 2022 Community Insights surveyed 2099 people, with representative sample sizes for each QFES region," Michael said.

"We reach out to all our customers across the state, not just those who have interacted with QFES in the past year, to ask their views and actively seek their insights and perspectives.

"The final reports are made available to the public, which is important for transparency."

Michael said the annual survey was an important guiding document for QFES' planning.

"The survey results will be used to guide strategic planning measures, such as the percentage increase in the number of people who had a positive interaction with QFES and the percentage increase in the number of communities who recognise and understand their local risks.

"The insights gathered can also be used to inform our community education strategies and provide supporting evidence to business cases.

"Another positive aspect of the survey is its flexibility. It can accommodate current topics, such as a COVID-19-related question being included in the past few years – and climate change questions are likely to increase in number soon."

## What the community had to say

As seen in previous years, most Queenslanders consider themselves (85 per cent mostly or completely) responsible for preparing their household for emergency and disaster events.

For the first time, warnings and alerts were considered the most important service, overtaking fire and hazard response in the top spot compared to 2021.

The number of Queenslanders testing and maintaining their smoke alarms in the past 12 months is significantly higher than 2021, and 46 per cent of Queenslanders have interconnected smoke alarms, significantly up from 2021. Sixty-two per cent of those who don't have them installed say they are likely to install them in the next 12 months.

Fifteen per cent of respondents had experienced a disaster or emergency event in the past year – a significant increase from 2022 – and about two-thirds of respondents felt prepared for the events.

Seven in 10 people who had experienced an event felt the experience had improved their preparedness for future events.

Cyclones are perceived to be a greater risk in Far Northern, Northern and Central and lower in South Eastern, South Western and Brisbane regions, while storms and heatwaves are a perceived risk across all regions.

More than three quarters of Queenslanders believe climate change will increase the impact of storms, heatwaves and floods, and more than two thirds believe it will increase the impact of bushfires, cyclones and storm surges.

All reports are accessible to the public on the Queensland Open Data site.

You can read the 2022 Community Insights Survey at [qfes.qld.gov.au/about-us/corporate-services/reports-plans-and-reviews](https://qfes.qld.gov.au/about-us/corporate-services/reports-plans-and-reviews)

## Community perception of risk and preparedness

Event	Perceived risk	Perceived preparedness*
Storm	74%	77%
Heatwave	64%	75%
Pandemic	44%	70%
Flood	43%	64%
Cyclone	38%	67%
Storm surge	36%	56%
Transport accident	33%	53%
Bushfire	31%	56%
Structure fire	23%	56%
Vehicle fire	20%	45%
Hazardous material accident	11%	39%
Terrorism	10%	30%
Earthquake	9%	40%
Tsunami	5%	38%

\*of those who responded 'slightly likely or very likely' for perceived risk.

# Responding to the climate crisis

Climate change is forcing emergency service agencies across Australia to adapt and innovate their policies and procedures, to continue providing effective emergency services in a climate-challenged world.



*Fire behaviour is changing due to climate change.*

As the climate changes, people will face more frequent and severe storms, warm, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Addressing these unpredictable and compounding events is an urgent challenge for emergency services.

Principal Program Officer Matthew Dyer said climate change was having a significant impact on QFES and all emergency service agencies in Australia, including the way services were delivered.

“As climate change leads to more frequent and severe weather events, QFES is facing a growing number of natural disasters, such as bushfires, floods and cyclones. This has put a strain on emergency response systems and resources, potentially putting pressure on response and stretching capacity,” Matthew said.

“Add associated health impacts and the need for new training and equipment to the mix and we start to see how climate change is affecting all aspects of disaster and emergency services.”

Matthew said there were several barriers that government agencies, including QFES, faced when implementing new climate initiatives. These range from political opposition, costs and funding, and regulatory complexity to public opinion and awareness and institutional barriers.

“Climate change is a highly politicised issue in Australia. That’s why we need strong leadership, an involved and interested workforce and effective committees and groups, such as the QFES Climate Change Advisory Group and the QFES Alternative Energy Systems Advisory Group, to help overcome potential institutional barriers.”

## Not just talking the talk

Originally established as a working group in 2018, the QFES Climate Change Advisory Group, chaired by Deputy Commissioner Wassing, provides advice and support to assist decision-making on climate change transition and adaptation.

In 2020, the group delivered the QFES Climate Change Position Paper and QFES’ first climate-focused action plan, Integrating Climate Change at QFES (2020-22).

“The QFES Climate Action Plan 2022–26, which builds off the inaugural action plan and is aligned to the Queensland Climate Action Plan 2020-2030 (QCAP), includes actions that prepare the department for operations in a climate-challenged world,” Matthew said.

“In May 2022, the Climate Change Advisory Group and the Board of Management worked with peak disaster and emergency service bodies to develop and apply

climate and socio-economic/demographic scenarios, to test our long-term climate strategy.

“This research and the workshop findings, which were published in the Australian Journal of Emergency Management in October last year, were a powerful tool for leaders and decision-makers to not discredit novel or weaker signals of change, and to prepare for an uncertain future.”

## Sustainable solutions

Government agencies and many other organisations are transitioning to new ways of doing things that have fewer emissions.

“Climate adaptation and transition is something we can all do. Taking action, in addition to reducing emissions, helps save money and reduces our exposure to future climate risks,” Matthew said.

“QFES is doing its bit to reduce emissions and to be more sustainable. A great example of QFES applying the principles of emission reduction is the work to renovate the Maryborough Fire and Rescue Station.

“Here, sustainability of materials used in the renovations was a key consideration, and locally sourced timber was used for large parts of the renovation. The station contains about 500m<sup>3</sup> of timber, all Australian grown in softwood plantations.

“It only takes 38 minutes to grow back that much timber in the plantations, meaning timber has a much lower carbon footprint than other building materials. This amount of timber stores 140 tons of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of taking 30 passenger cars off the road for a year.”

“QFES is also researching an alternative fuel fleet transition strategy to support the QCAP and help identify opportunities for lower carbon emission vehicle options, where appropriate, across the QFES fleet.

“Investing time and resources into tangible climate-driven actions, could save a lot of money in the long run and people will be doing something good for the environment.”



# The good fight

QFES celebrated the impressive achievements of the Women in Fire and Emergency Services Award winners on International Women's Day.

The awards recognise paid staff and volunteers who have made outstanding contributions to embracing gender equality and promoting the rights, interests and wellbeing of women in QFES.

*Response* caught up with some of this year's winners.



## Annette Garwood – Outstanding Female Leader, RFS

Annette, known as Annie, has been unofficially involved with Tirroan Rural Fire Brigade since it formed in 1993, but officially since October 1995.

“When I started, we had a couple of female firefighters, but we mainly patrolled after the males had put the fire out. As time went on things changed for the better,” Annie said.

“I completed all the training I could over the years. I was Treasurer and Secretary for about six years and gained the respect of most members as I moved through the officer positions.

“Over the last eight to 10 years, there were times when I was the only female on the fire ground, but most of the men treated me as an equal, although they did keep an eye on me.”

As the brigade's first officer, Annie uses her collaborative leadership skills to manage incidents.

“When it comes to the fire ground I ask for opinions and listen to my fellow firefighters, but the final decision ultimately remains with me.

“I lead by example and wouldn't ask anyone to do what I'm not willing to do myself. I endeavour to be inclusive with the decision making, but I rely on my own judgement and experience and try to maintain a unified brigade.”

Taking on the first officer role took courage as a female in a largely male-dominated brigade.

“I was the only female first officer in our area of Bundaberg when I was elected four years ago – now there are two of us, and a few more as officers.

“At several fires we've had an all-female crew. I class every trained member of our brigade as a firefighter regardless of gender.

“I feel it a privilege to serve my community and have enjoyed all the roles I've played throughout my firefighting career to make my community safe.

“I look forward to seeing other females in the service step up into leadership positions including first officer.”



## Leonie Corcoran – Outstanding Female Leader, SES

Kawana SES Group Leader Leonie Corcoran changed the culture of the group from a boy's club to an inclusive community where diversity, equity and mentoring are common practice.

“Kawana Group had a blokey culture, a bit rough and ready with a trucking culture that would have been confronting for women to come into,” Leonie said.

“It started with a small group of dedicated members and slowly we built traction. With a shared vision, we developed a more respectful, inclusive and kind culture.”

Leonie encouraged members to call out poor behaviour, set standards and develop trust.

“If the members know poor behaviour will be addressed, they're more likely to approach myself or one of the senior members to discuss issues,” she said.

“Mentoring and making known those who strongly uphold the QFES values of respect, integrity, courage, loyalty and trust means there's a range of highly experienced people available for members to select from and discuss issues.

“Having regular meetings to focus on developing a positive culture and promoting it regularly through the group has been important.

“Everyone's behaviour can be referred back to the QFES values by simply asking, ‘How does your behaviour reflect the value of respect?’

“When the focus is on teamwork, it takes away from the fact that women are doing jobs that are sometimes seen as the domain of men.

“Without the ongoing support, in often difficult times, of the senior Kawana members, none of this would have been possible. The trust and advice of North Coast Region's executive is invaluable.”



**Outstanding Female Leader RFS Highly Commended - Jessica Eadie**

**Outstanding Female Leader Corporate Support/Administration - Ann-Marie O'Grady**

**Outstanding Female Leader Disaster Management - Jane Zsombok**

**Mentor of the Year - Jennifer Millers**



#### **Trina Roberts – Outstanding Female Leader, FRS**

Trina joined the Dunwich Fire and Rescue Station on North Stradbroke Island in February 2013 as an auxiliary firefighter, progressing to Lieutenant in 2017 and Captain in 2019. She also works as a Registered Nurse with Yulu Burri Ba Aboriginal Corporation for Community Health in Dunwich.

“Working and living in community, I know a lot of the Traditional Owners. I am proud to have several at our station including my daughter,” Trina said. “Seeing a familiar face turn up at an incident can help people feel at ease, and also helps having that local knowledge.

“Last week there was a fire on Traditional Owner land, and people rang our clinic asking for Trina and the receptionist advised them to call Triple Zero, then informed me as my pager was going off.

“I have a great boss who lets me leave work to attend jobs. She even drove me to the station one day as my car was at the mechanics.”

Trina’s daughter Kaiala also joined the station as an auxiliary firefighter.

“Kaiala wanted to give back to community and loves every aspect of being an auxiliary firefighter.

“I remember when she was younger, my pager used to go off and if I was in the yard doing something she would come running out and say, ‘Mum, fire call!’”

Trina often takes the lead on training scenarios and has mentored several female recruits who have joined her team.

“We have some great female firefighters over the three stations on Straddie – these young women put in 100% at every job and I feel proud to be able to mentor them through their journey.

“Everyone gets treated as an equal, we are a close team and use each other’s strengths to get jobs done safely,” Trina said.

“I’m really hands on, leading by example. Being a small island community, separated from the mainland, there’s sometimes only two or three of us in a truck (and sometimes all females), so it’s all hands-on deck.

“I am lucky to work with a great bunch of guys and girls I consider as family, we have each other’s backs, and I am always there to provide guidance and directions as needed, making the calls to get the job done safely.”

#### **Peta Miller-Rose AFSM – Champion of Change**

As an RFS Superintendent, auxiliary firefighter and volunteer firefighter, Peta is proud to be a part of QFES.

After hearing a young female volunteer say they would never join the organisation because of how they perceived women to be treated, Peta was determined to make a change.

“It was a lightbulb moment for me where I realised I was in a privileged position to influence the change needed,” Peta said.

“How many others had that perception and didn’t feel our department was worthy of their time?”

“I’ve had some incredible mentors in my career, from volunteering to now, who have encouraged me to have a voice and embrace the opportunity to query some perceptions and start conversations that help us move forward.

“I realised I had an opportunity to pay that forward and help others to do the same. I realised that day, if I didn’t make that decision to step up, I was a part of the problem.

“I often feel like I play a role in myth busting and breaking down mistruths.”

Peta believes that gender diversity and equality is about all staff, volunteers and community members, not just women. She works collectively to create an inclusive culture that represents the communities QFES serves.

“To me it is important that we work together across all genders as we all share the responsibility of equity and diversity. A society where men and women are valued as equals is proven to be safer, happier and healthier.

“It is a basic human right that we all have a seat at the table, have a voice and feel safe.

“We have some incredible champions of change among our people who will continue to drive change. I am blessed to be on that journey with them and I encourage others to be brave and use their voice – we are all part of the solution.”



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Matt Sperring and Tim Grose shaved their heads to raise money in the fight against leukaemia.



**In the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the World's Greatest Shave, a duo from Northern Region took the plunge and shaved it all off to help raise funds for the Leukaemia Foundation.**

Firefighters Matt Sperring and Tim Grose from Townsville Fire and Rescue Station put up their hands for a good cause.

Tim's family has been affected by cancer and while he's donated money to support groups in the past, this year he wanted to do more.

"The World's Greatest Shave seemed like a way I could physically do something and show support for people who are suffering and the families who go through it as well," Tim said.

"Cancer is indiscriminate – it doesn't care if you're rich or poor and some people can afford to deal with it and some can't.

"My brother has been doing the shave for a few years, so this year I finally put my hand up.

"I thought I've really got to get involved in this now or I'll forever sit on the sidelines. It was a way of getting some money donated to help families.

"I don't know if my wife was happy. We met 15 years ago and I've always had long scrappy hair and she said you're never cutting it off.

"I half-seriously committed to the shave one night and a few days later I registered and sent the link to my father-in-law and he told her about it before I had a chance to."

The pair got their hair shaved at a local salon by one of their fellow firefighter's daughters.

"She was happy to do it, and before the shave she gave me a style cut because she was at the end of her apprenticeship and she needed an example for a class assignment.

"So she gave me a really nice haircut and then shaved it off. It was like building a sandcastle and jumping on it.

"There's a bit of fun that goes with shaving your head. I know I've got a bit of an egg head, so it was an interesting look when I walked in the door at home.

"Our crew really jumped on the chance to donate to the cause and we raised just short of \$1500 in a week.

"I'm thankful to Matt for going through it with me – it was good to have someone to share the experience with and have a laugh."

Thank you to all QFES staff and volunteers who participated in the World's Greatest Shave.



Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station hosted the Iron Traks team in March.

# Connecting with First Nations' cultures

**Brisbane Region First People's Consultative Group won a Closing the Gap Award for their work engaging with First Nations people in the community and sharing knowledge about First Nations culture.**

Assistant Commissioner John Cawcutt established the group in 2021, following an 'Our People Yarning Circle' event.

The group's Chair, Acting Chief Superintendent Steve De Pinto, said their plans started off quite conversational and then they focused on what they could actually achieve.

"We've built a Gateway page that staff can use to find information on topics like Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, and who to contact," Steve said. "The page also features a map of our region with First Nations names.

"We're working on adding a layer inside TOM mapping that identifies places of cultural significance.

"We've also received permission to buy Aboriginal art and we're exploring the idea of putting a First Nations sticker on fire appliances, as well as adjusting the naming conventions on stations.

"The executive team are looking into the possibility of a First Nations Liaison Officer,

and they're piloting cultural awareness training for our staff.

"One of the reasons we started the group was sometimes people don't know what's appropriate, and they don't want to insult anyone by accident, so knowing where to find guidance is important.

"Winning this award helps promotes conversation and break down some barriers."

Regional Community Engagement Officer Julie Ward, the group's secretariat, recently helped organise a collaboration with Iron Traks.

"I met Tracey Thompson, the founder of Iron Traks, at a NAIDOC event last year," Julie said. "She's this incredible woman and she's all about empowering young women to aim high, make good choices and be determined and motivated.

"She used to be a police officer, so through that avenue she reached out to QFES, the Australian Police Force and Australian Defence Force to engage with young women

and help them explore different career options.

"We organised for a group of young women to visit Durack Fire and Rescue Station. Two female firefighters gave them a motivational talk and a tour.

"In March we held another visit to Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station, this time with some fitness challenges – a dummy drag, equipment haul and hose drag. It was another brilliant day.

"We hope to continue working with Iron Traks to make this collaboration bigger and better. Tracey and her partners organise Iron Traks with very limited funding, so the more awareness they get, the more of these events they can do.

"It's important to show young women that determination and self-belief are vital and they can gain that through being part of a team and feeling like they belong. It helps them make good choices in the future and for their future careers."



QFES firefighters climbed the Gold Coast's tallest building to help raise funds for mental health awareness.

# Firefighters put one foot after the other

A team of five firefighters represented QFES in the Skypoint Sea to Sky Q1 Stair Challenge, raising much-needed funds for LIVIN, a Gold Coast-based mental health awareness charity.

Senior Firefighter James Austin helped organise the stair climb and participated on the day, climbing all 1331 steps of the tallest building on the Gold Coast.

"The challenge has been running for a few years now, with hundreds of people giving it a go," James said.

"QFES staff and volunteers have been participating in various stair climbing events for years, locally, interstate and internationally. I've personally participated in several local and interstate stair climbs.

"As first responders, mental health is something we deal with every day and it will affect all of us at different times in our lives, whether on a personal or professional level.

"The catchphrase of LIVIN is 'It ain't weak to speak!' and for us, we work in an environment that means we need to look out for each other and create a space we can be open with each other about mental health."

James and his fellow firefighters decided to climb the Q1 building in full turnout gear while carrying breathing apparatus of about 15 to 20 kilograms.

"It was a great opportunity to challenge ourselves and raise funds and awareness around mental health," he said.

"It could be said wearing the heavy gear symbolises the burden we might all carry from time to time with mental health, and the tower represents the journey we go on to feel better."

James said the climb wasn't easy, particularly in full turnout gear.

"Obviously climbing 1331 steps is quite daunting and not everyone's idea of fun. You're wearing hot, heavy gear, it's stuffy in the stairwells and your body is screaming at you.

"But you can't stop walking. It very much becomes a mental game of endurance as much as a physical one. You keep going until you get to the end.

"The fastest time was around 18 or 19 minutes and the average between 25 and 30 minutes. It's not necessarily about being the fastest but there's always some friendly competition.

"I think we all felt physically exhausted but very proud to have reached the finish line."

At the time of printing, the challenge had raised more than \$100,000.

"I'd like to thank the firefighters who climbed Q1, Roma Street Station for the use of their equipment and Brisbane Region senior officers for supporting the climb."



# NORTHERN REGION

## Starlight swim-a-thon

The inaugural QFES Northern Region Starlight Foundation swim-a-thon was held in February. Twenty-one swimmers swam a total of 51.2km in eight hours and raised \$1371 for the Starlight Foundation, which supports sick kids inside and outside hospital. The swimmers are keen for next year's event, as planning discussions are already underway.



## Townsville Defence welcome expo

Each year Townsville farewells and welcomes a large number of Defence members and their families, as the area is home to a large Defence Force population. To assist families on their arrival, the Defence Member and Family Support unit hosts a welcome and information expo for them to engage with community organisations and services. Defence families already residing in Townsville are also encouraged to attend the event.

Staff and volunteers from the Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service and SES joined more than 100 exhibitors at Murray Stadium to discuss smoke alarms, emergency kit preparation and the Australian Warning System.

## Batkovic Winter Cup

The JCU Townsville Fire women's basketball team hosted the annual Batkovic Winter Cup as a curtain raiser event before their final home game of the regular season. The cup is a game between the Australian Army and a team of firefighters and police officers.

Scores were locked at half time, but the Defence team went on to win in the second half by eight points. This was the closest an emergency services team have come to the Army. The 'Sirens' team will be back next year to win the trophy for the display cabinet.



## St Patrick's College careers expo

Northern Region FireCom attended the inaugural St Patrick's Girls College careers expo in March. The students were interested in hearing the many roles QFES has to offer including firefighters, scientific officers, fire communications and corporate support roles, both in a paid and volunteer capacity.





# CENTRAL REGION

## CALD communities get disaster connected

In early March, QFES had the pleasure of hosting a workshop at the 'Disaster Community Connectors' run by Central Queensland Multicultural Association in Rockhampton.

Disaster Community Connectors are passionate about sharing preparedness and emergency information within their own communities. Participants were from China, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Bangladesh and Brazil.

The participants learnt about the roles of QFES, the Australian Warnings System, local risks and about the value and process of volunteering. There was a great discussion on understanding the disaster preparedness information needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the group brainstormed communication and engagement methods for reaching the groups.



## Congratulations Sue Connors on 30 years of SES service

Group Leader Sue is stepping down from the role to spend more time with her family.

Sue's commitment and dedication to the Whitsunday community and fellow SES groups is outstanding and commendable. She has played a major part in many disasters and events that have impacted the area.

Thank you to Sue for her contribution to the SES over the past 30 years and we hope she enjoys some well-earned time with her family.

We also welcome Greg Yuskan, who steps into the role of Proserpine SES Group leader.



## Big splash for Cancer Council

Firefighters from the Rockhampton area command joined the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) family barbeque day to help raise funds for the Cancer Council. Representatives from QAS and QFES volunteered to be in the chair to receive the big splash.

All funds raised on the day were donated to the Cancer Council through the local Mystery Box Rally event, which a QAS member and their friend are participating in.



## Leading Self meets Emerald

QFES members throughout the region joined the Leading Self facilitators in Emerald for an insightful and educational weekend. Leading Self is about developing a level of self-awareness to better understand yourself, your own preferences and working style to better recognise the preferences and working styles of others.

Facilitator Simon Joyce said their biggest take away was the enthusiasm shown by the participants.

"Everyone who attended was fully engaged and committed to the course. Their willingness to allow themselves to be vulnerable showed how courageous they were and how trusting they were of their fellow participants.

"The enthusiasm shown by the group is easy to understand when you see how encouraging Acting Superintendent Brad Lambourne is. Under his leadership the group was interactive, open and honest about their biggest challenges and their best successes. It showed that on the ground during the toughest times, these same people will not only survive but thrive in the face of disaster, flood and fire.

"The resilience of the group we met in Emerald was incredibly inspiring, it went well above the old saying that people from the bush are 'built tougher'. It showed these people are committed to their community and dedicated to building themselves up to serve their communities as best they can. Their genuine passion and drive to support each other and the community shone through."



# NORTH COAST REGION

## Help is here from North Coast Region

North Coast Region deployed 82 volunteers and staff to the Western Downs bushfires in January and February. This included Strike Teams in the field at Chinchilla and Miles, Air Base Operators at Miles, Incident Management personnel at the Miles and Roma Incident Command Centres and the Regional Operations Centre at Toowoomba.

The region also deployed five personnel from DART to New Zealand. They worked closely with Fire and Emergency New Zealand and undertook rapid damage assessments.



## Community and emergency services morning tea

Queensland's first Regional Cabinet for the year was held in Maryborough, which showcased the investment, innovation and abundant opportunities available in the Wide Bay region.

Commissioner Leach and QFES staff and personnel joined Fire and Emergency Services Minister Mark Ryan, Commissioner Paul Stewart from Queensland Corrective Services, Commissioner Katarina Carroll from Queensland Police Service, local Members of Parliament and the community for a pre-Cabinet breakfast at North Coast's Regional Office.



## SES training

Over a weekend in February, the annual North Coast Region SES flood boat competency maintenance session took place at Bjelke-Petersen Dam in South Burnett.

The annual event brings existing flood boat operators from all over the region to maintain their flood boat skills with an added upskilling scenario or task. Members were invited to camp over the weekend for a social experience as well.

At the end of the session, 30 flood boat operators renewed their existing competency for another 12-month period. Well done to all participants.



## SES helping the community in more ways than one

The inaugural North Coast Region SES Flood Boat Exercise linking with the Clean Up Australia Day was a huge success.

Ten vessels and 30 volunteers and staff loaded one single axle trailer and a tandem trailer with rubbish from the Noosa River and Maroochy River.

A big thank you to all that assisted.



## Biggenden Fire and Rescue station has new recruits

Biggenden Fire and Rescue Station is on the up! Acting Captain Ed Monahan is as proud as punch of his five new recruits – Raymond Nichol, Jess Hardy, Kim McCarthy, Cheyenne Slaats and Jessie McKenzie. The new recruits will become operational after completing the Auxiliary Recruit Training and Education Program in May.





# BRISBANE REGION

## First Nations Public Administration conference

QFES personnel who attended the First Nations Public Administration conference learnt about and networked with fellow First Nations and non-First Nations public servants.

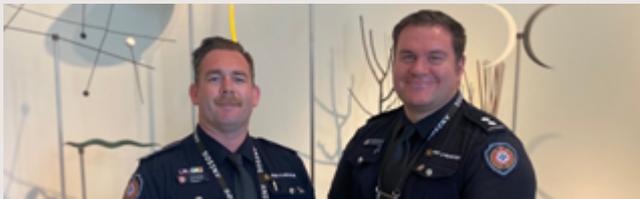
Participants heard from leaders within the First Nations community about the challenges and the triumphs they have experienced. The theme of the conference was 'First Peoples to All Peoples,' examining the intersection between First Nations knowledge and modern public policy.

Brisbane Region's Community Engagement Officer Julienne Ward said a key take away was a point discussed by the New Zealand Member for Māori Crown Affairs, the Honourable Kelvin Davis MP.

"Minister Davis discussed the need for Indigenous knowledge to be seamlessly ingrained into Anglo-centric government policies. He used the analogy of a bridge connecting First Nations Peoples to Anglo-centric governments. This bridge has long been crossed by First Nations Peoples as they seek to operate and understand Western government policies and processes.

Instead of this bridge being a one-way, single-lane pathway (as it traditionally has been), the Minister stressed the need for this bridge to be a free-flowing, multi-lane path that facilitates easy and productive transactional relationships between First Nations peoples and governments. The sharing of knowledge, language and culture is key to this process."

The First Nations Committee within QFES is a key element of this relationship and is a great first step in building relationships with First Nations staff.



## FRS LPG Mobile Structural Flashover Training Cell

The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) LPG Mobile Structural Flashover Training Cell (MSFTC) is in its final stages of research and development by the Tactical Training Unit and will be trialed as part of the recruit training at Live Fire Campus this year. The non-carbonaceous cells' mobile capability means it can be deployed across the state for live fire structural firefighting skills and competency maintenance.

Along with multiple safety features, the gas fired cell is cleaner as there is no need to clean-out and reinstall fuel loads. Multiple training evolutions can be completed with little to no set up time, as the gas is remotely ignited and shut down. State-wide training sessions will take place in the coming months.



## Technical rescue high point and anchor training prop

The new vertical rescue rated highpoint and anchor system and roof structure provides a facility for both basic and advanced level vertical rescue training at a central Brisbane location. This benefits not only the staff based at Roma Street Station but offers an excellent training facility for the region.

Brisbane's Technical Rescue Training team, based at Roma Street Station, will now be able to make full use of the facilities to enhance the regions' technical rescue capabilities, while providing an appropriately certified training facility to carry out the skills maintenance activities required to maintain units of competency.



## University of Queensland expo

As part of Orientation Week at the University of Queensland, international students met with community groups and emergency services to learn more about what resources are available in their times of need. This was the first of many engagement possibilities for international and regional students to learn more about home fire safety, bushfire safety and storm and severe weather preparation.

## Training workshops for RFS

The Volunteer Emergency Services Training Command hosted workshops about operational driving for Rural Fire Service staff and volunteers.

The three-day workshop brought together an experienced cohort of trainers from across the state and allowed the trainers to undertake the practical and theoretical skills required to deliver this course back in their regions.

Participants gained the knowledge and skills to drive vehicles safely, including the systematic and safe control of all vehicle functions and the management of hazardous situations under operational conditions.

Thank you to all instructors and participants for your time and efforts.



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# SOUTH EASTERN REGION

## SES and Energex drone operation

During the 2022 south-east Queensland rainfall and flooding event, Logan SES flood boat crews were dispatched to the upper reaches of the Logan River for a medical evacuation and to deliver a technician from SEQ Water to restart an essential water pumping station.

During the trip on the river, several power line crossings had to be negotiated by the crew, and given the poor weather conditions, the lines were incredibly hard to see from the boat as there were no markings on them. As the area is uncharted waterways, they did not appear on any of the maps on the boat's sounder.

The issue was raised during an internal debrief and was escalated to the Local Disaster Management Group. Energex offered a solution involving a drone trial that was underway to attach markers to powerlines in the field.

In late 2022, a two-day operation including 40 personnel from Energex, SES and the drone company took place to attach spinning reflective markers, called rotor markers, to powerlines in difficult to access locations using new drone technology.

Logan SES supplied two flood boats and assisted with a variety of tasks including providing local knowledge of the river system, advising drone operators of the best locations for the marker from the river position, being available to retrieve the drone in the event of a malfunction, and ensuring there was no private boat traffic during the operation.

The identified line crossings were successfully marked, making them easy to see day or night and in challenging conditions. The operation improved safety for flood boat operators in the future and is a great example of services joining together to provide a safer response to severe weather events.



## RFS appliance handover

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) south coast area received four new appliances in recent months, thanks to the RFS appliance replacement program. At an official handover in February, the new Ford Ranger Light Attack appliances were handed over to Tamborine, Rocky Point, Canungra and Woodhill brigades.

A naming ceremony was held for the new Woodhill 41 appliance, which has officially been named "Bertie" in dedication to retired Woodhill Rural Fire Brigade member Albert Headland, commonly known as "Bert".

For more than 25 years, Bert contributed significantly to the brigade. He coached, mentored and trained many members of the brigade, developed leaders and was instrumental in fundraising much needed funding for appliances and equipment in the early days of the brigade.

The Woodhill and Aratula brigades were presented with the keys to additional support appliances purchased through brigade fundraising efforts, including Woodhill 81, a Ford Ranger Utility; Woodhill 35, a Polaris Ranger All-Terrain Vehicle and Aratula 81, a Ford Ranger Utility.



## Jimboomba Seniors Expo

Crews from Jimboomba Fire and Rescue and Logan SES attended the Jimboomba Seniors Expo, along with Logan City Council and a range of community services, government departments and healthcare providers. Fire and Rescue Service crews delivered a home fire safety presentation and SES members engaged with attendees about storm and flood preparedness. More than 100 people attended the expo, who enjoyed connecting with other seniors in their community and accessing much-needed information.



# SOUTH WESTERN REGION



## Under the scorching sun

Bollon’s scorching 38 degrees couldn’t deter Fire and Rescue Service crews from their road crash rescue training.

Firefighters from Bollon, St George and Dirranbandi faced two scenarios – a vehicle that collided with a tree and an upside-down vehicle.

In each scenario, crews followed a step-by-step process on how to effectively assist other attending agencies by identifying and managing hazards such as glass, stabilising the vehicle and casualty management.

Participants familiarised themselves with hydraulic tools, using different techniques to gain access to inside the car to safely disentangle and extricate trapped occupants.

Thank you to Chris Gilchrist for travelling to Bollon to deliver the training.



## Multi-agency training

After months of hard work, south western’s Regional Training Officer, Scott Frame delivered a successful multi-agency exercise in conjunction with Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS).

The exercises covered hazardous materials, armed siege, mock drowning and road crash rescue scenarios.

Scott worked with QAS staff to design scenarios that specifically addressed their training requirements for staff to complete core skills competency maintenance.



## Congratulations Tyson Raymond

Captain Tyson Raymond from Goondiwindi Fire and Rescue Station received his Diligent and Ethical Service Medal second class, for 30 years of diligence, integrity and ethical service.

At 21, Tyson joined the Goondiwindi station, and has spent 33 years (26 years as Captain) serving QFES and keeping Goondiwindi and surrounding communities safe.

He first heard about the service from his uncle, Jimmy Gallegos, who was the Fire Chief in 1989.

“Uncle Jimmy encouraged me to join, so I started turning up at the station on Tuesday nights for training,” said Tyson.

“I never let a job beat me, there is always another way. I have learnt from being an auxiliary firefighter that we must look after one another and use plenty of communication on the job.

“One of the most satisfying aspects of the role is seeing young firefighters gain confidence and take control of their different roles. What I love is the mateship within the crew – we are all different ages and come from different backgrounds, but we’re all good mates.

“We support each other both on the job and in our personal lives, just one big happy family.”

The Goondiwindi station truly are a family, as there are three father and son teams.

“I am very proud to see my son Webster following in my footsteps, as well as Duncan Trehearn and Zac Farrell following in their fathers’ footsteps.

“I’m not planning on retiring anytime soon, but I am looking forward to being in my new van on the coast somewhere, with a fishing rod in one hand and a beer in the other – maybe some prawns and oysters as well.”

Tyson has faced tough situations over the years, making difficult decisions. But like all QFES members, he has embraced the tough jobs and performed with excellence.

“People rely on us to keep our communities safe.”

Congratulations and thank you for your service, Tyson.



# FAR NORTHERN REGION

## Royal Mail Ship Quetta and Mahina Memorial Service

Far Northern Region's Acting Assistant Commissioner Jason Lawler and his support team travelled to Thursday Island in the Torres Strait for the inaugural blessing of the marine monument dedicated to the 1880 RMS Quetta shipwreck and the 1899 Cyclone Mahina disaster.

The event was part of Closing the gap initiatives, as it gave formal recognition and truth telling to more than 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who lost their lives. Through dedicated research and community engagement, the organisers were able to put names to all people killed, giving the recognition they deserve in what was Queensland's worst maritime disasters, shaping maritime operations and safety across the Torres Strait and Australia.

The event was hosted by numerous parishes and community groups, who brought together people of all religions, culture and beliefs, to reflect and celebrate how far things have come. QFES was represented by the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) and Marine Rescue Queensland (MRQ). Attendees experienced the wonderful cultures of the Torres Strait, and the community came together in the evening for a large celebration full of kai-kai (feast), including traditionally prepared turtle and dugong, cultural dancing, singing and yarning with people of the Kaurareg nation.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Lawler also met the crew from the Thursday Island Fire and Rescue Station for a barbecue lunch and to speak with auxiliary staff on how they find working and operating in what are the most remote, isolated and challenging commands within FRS.

Mr Lawler heard the numerous issues the team face and how they overcame them through the interoperability between government and community agencies within the Torres and the Cape. Of particular interest was the rapidly developing relationship between Thursday Island FRS and VMR (soon to be MRQ). The region looks forward to watching this relationship develop over the next 12 months and the delivery of the new vessel.



## Australian Warning System cyclone workshop

In February, the QFES Warnings and Alert Unit conducted a workshop on the Australian Warning System (AWS) for cyclone warnings in Cairns. The workshop was attended by emergency management coordinators, Maritime Safety Queensland, District and Local Disaster Management officers and coordinators, media staff from local councils, as well as the Bureau of Meteorology and QFES personnel from the State Disaster Communications Centre. The workshop reviewed the potential look and feel of future cyclone warnings. Discussions also centred around who is responsible for, and how, any future warnings could be released.





Andrew joined the Peer Support Program in 2015.

# A shoulder to lean on

Station Officer Andrew Vaughan has supported QFES personnel on their darkest days.

Andrew was awarded this year’s Olga Wilson Peer Support Officer (PSO) of the Year Award. He received multiple nominations from colleagues for his compassionate nature, professional approach and dedication to providing high-level support during challenging situations.

Throughout his working life, Andrew has always had a volunteer support role, usually in the mental health sector.

“When I was young, I worked for the Red Cross, then I moved into a hospital-based patient advocacy role. After that, I joined a university suicide prevention and awareness team,” Andrew said.

“I’ve always found immense value through these roles by giving back to others and the organisation you serve. Being a PSO teaches you good skills to manage yourself and your loved ones.”

Andrew said it felt magical to watch people grow – seeing where they came from and where they got to.

“The biggest thing for me is that you meet people at a point of crisis. You walk alongside them on journey of support and see them come out on the other side. They get better, return to work and move on.”

Andrew finds being a PSO complements his role as a Station Officer.

“A Station Officer is a team leader role, and any team leader needs to care about their people and invest in their team,” he said.

“We need to not only care for our team members’ physical health, but their mental health too – inside and outside of work.”

The Peer Support Program has 179 PSOs from a range of ranks and roles who volunteer their time to assist and support their colleagues through life’s difficulties. PSOs can also guide colleagues to further support such as counsellors.

At QFES, the main reasons people seek peer support are for trauma or critical incidents, grief and loss, personal or family health issues and relationship conflict.

but when you connect, you will naturally absorb some of their emotions. So, it’s important to have your own way of dealing with it.

“Everyone I help, helps me. However, I couldn’t do it if I didn’t have the support from the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network, counsellors, supervisors, team members and my wife and family.”

Andrew said that more people were becoming comfortable to reach out for support and discuss mental health issues.

“It’s definitely improved in my almost 10 years with QFES. The culture has changed, with people willing to be more vulnerable at all levels, including executive positions. People are showing it’s okay to have a hard time, come back and be stronger.

“A lot of those people may not realise it, but if you are someone people turn to, respect and value your guidance, you’re already doing something like the role.

“By doing the PSO training, you can only improve your ability to help others and yourself. It’s a valuable skillset to have within the organisation, and to do what matters most, which is help people.

“It’s why many of us joined QFES in the first place – to help people.”

### Other Peer Support Officer Award winners:

- Daniel Rasmussen
- Kelli Hinton
- Petina Gledhill
- Rosi Trencher
- Belinda Morier
- Jodee Squire
- James Gegg
- Scott Cross
- Allan Carlson
- Glennis Kelly

“You’re coming across people who are going through genuine crises, whether it’s a cancer diagnosis, death of a loved one, family separation or dealing with an acute mental health issue such as PTSD, you feel that pain,” he said.

“To do your job well, you have to connect,



# Building the next generation of emergency service volunteers

The PCYC Emergency Services Cadets (ESC) program helps young people find purpose in the community through exposure to local emergency services.

The free program, delivered by PCYC on behalf of QFES, is a chance for those aged 12 to 17 to meet like-minded people and learn under the leadership and guidance of emergency services personnel.

Ray Williams is the inaugural Local Cadet Coordinator for the Woodford Emergency Services Cadet Unit (ESCU), which was established in February 2022.

Ray, who celebrated his 60th birthday earlier this year, has served more than 30 years at Woodford Fire and Rescue Station and is a well-respected firefighter and trainer.

“I have to juggle my full-time employment with Moreton Bay Regional Council, Auxiliary Captain and Cadet Coordinator duties, as well as family. It’s quite difficult sometimes, however I do manage,” Ray said

“I have a good team of support. The Adult Leaders within our Cadet Unit are always there to help out.”

The Woodford Fire and Rescue Station is the Cadet host facility, and is supported by the Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service,

State Emergency Service, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) and Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR).

Ray said there was also interest from the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard and the Australian Defence Force.

“Working with other leaders in the emergency services space definitely helps promote interagency capability. I’ve always had a great relationship with other agencies, and we all work very well together,” he said.

In little more than a year, the Woodford ESCU has grown to 13 adult leaders and 18 cadets, with six cadets joining in 2023 so far.

Some initial challenges were finding new cadets, keeping cadets engaged and organising different venues for training.

“I have been training auxiliary firefighters now for more than 29 years and enjoy seeing people grow from civilians to firefighters. Cadets are the same — we have witnessed cadets grow and become

leaders, seen their confidence grow and watched them come out of their shells.”

Cadets take part in different drills from hose bowling, first aid, using a fire extinguisher, conducting inventory on equipment, learning ropes and knots, radio communications and learning ‘prowords’ on the radio.

The unit is already seeing the benefits of the program. Last year, a high-achieving cadet was chosen from the Unit to attend ESCape Week — a once in a lifetime six-day training experience where cadets visit a local VMR Unit, Fire and Rescue Station, Rural Fire Brigade, Surf Life Saving Club and the QPS Academy.

The diverse range of emergency services skills the cadets learn develops their leadership potential while they contribute to their community as volunteers. Cadets are also encouraged to explore a future with emergency services.

Search ‘PCYC Emergency Services Cadets’ on the Gateway to be involved with the cadet program or email [volunteerstrategy@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:volunteerstrategy@qfes.qld.gov.au)



Cadets learn a range of practical life skills, including first aid.

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# SES geared up for training



The volunteers were joined by trainers from Townsville SES and Mount Isa SES.

The Isaac SES Unit recently had seven volunteers complete an intense four-day road crash rescue (RCR) training course.

Isaac Unit's Deputy Local Controller, Brandon Goode, said SES volunteers were the primary response for any road crash in their area.

"We are heavily relied on for this capability, as the Mackay Fire and Rescue station may be up to an hour away, depending on the location of the incident," Brandon said.

"The Isaac region is surrounded by coal fields, so there's a plethora of mining vehicles, hazardous materials and heavy mining equipment moving around the region.

"Our Unit was gifted two ex-Fire and Rescue Service appliances to replace our aging fleet. We are now at the forefront of training and equipment with these appliances and new Homatro battery equipment."

Volunteers learnt to cut and gain access to trapped or encapsulated casualties in a variety of locations with the cutters and spreaders, used specialised airbags to lift vehicles, as well as performing a dashboard lift and roll to free trapped or injured occupants in the front seat of a car.

Brandon said the participants felt a mix of tiredness, accomplishment and eagerness to help protect the community, and were empowered to pass on their new-found skills after completing the course.

"We now have 17 volunteers trained as RCR operators across two locations – with nearly half being female.

"Isaac Unit is fortunate to have RCR capability and will always uphold the professionalism of the community charter with our local communities.

"Our volunteers, who all have second jobs and families, can still turn out to an incident and put their lifesaving skills into action."

# Bushfire community engagement plans



More than 50 RFS volunteers from Brisbane Region attended a community engagement workshop.

In February, Brisbane Region's Rural Fire Service (RFS) held its annual community engagement workshop. More than 50 first officers, volunteer community educators and brigade mitigation officers came together to learn and collaborate.

Inspector Shaune Toohey said the aim of the workshop was to collectively develop two-year community engagement plans for brigades that were developed by local people and contextualised to suit their communities.

"This will enable our people during Operation Sesbania to drive community

preparedness, while building the foundations within their communities for future work," Shaune said.

"Traditionally, hazard reduction burns are seen as the one-stop shop when it comes to bushfire mitigation.

"However, with future challenges around climate adaptation and supporting our communities, it's important our people understand there is an array of mitigation treatments they can implement within high-risk communities.

"At the same time, they must be able to demonstrate the close relationship

between community engagement and prescribed burning when informing community knowledge and preparedness."

Dr Barbara Ryan from Southern Queensland University supported the RFS members to develop the plans using a range of tools she developed in her work with the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre.

This included community and population profiling, identifying key influences within the community, focus areas and critical stakeholders and best practice approaches using data.

"RFS Brisbane Region recognises that the volunteer time of our people is valuable and is in competition with family, employment, study and other priorities," Shaune said.

"The brigades used an evidence-based approach to develop community engagement plans. This means the plan complements our stakeholder and brigade prescribed burn programs while also educating our communities about their risk."



A Mount Ommaney Fire and Rescue Service crew freed a pesky water dragon stuck behind Denise’s bookshelf. The crew and FireCom officer received a ‘Rescue of the Month’ certificate and a heart-felt letter from Denise.

SES Assistant Commissioner Andrew Short presented an Assistant Commissioner’s Certificate of Appreciation to Commonwealth Bank Australia representatives, for their generous donation during the 2022 floods.



Congratulations to Andrew Richards who received the Commissioner’s Meritorious Service Medal and Janet Richardson for the Commissioner’s Distinguished Service Medal.

QFES crews captured the extensive damage in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle in New Zealand.



Multiple crews from across Queensland worked together to contain significant fires in South Western Region.



Strategic Content Services spent a week travelling around Texas, Goondiwindi, St George, Injune, Roma, Charleville and Quilpie, filming new content for localised auxiliary recruitment material.



Past and present firefighters from Brisbane Region commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Whiskey Au Go Go nightclub fire with a flower laying ceremony.



Station Officers Jon Fullard and Will Teen were deployed to Antakya, Türkiye for more than a week to assist with recovery efforts after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck the region.



Commissioner Leach worked alongside SES volunteers and community members to deliver essential supplies to the Coen community.



The composite crew from Port Douglas Fire and Rescue Station conducted risk identification and familiarisation at the Daintree River.



# Giving violence the (painted) finger

Senior Firefighter Mark Paton from Burpengary Fire and Rescue Station is on a mission to end violence against women and children – one painted fingernail at a time.

Mark has been painting his fingernails for the Polished Man campaign since it launched in 2014.

“I was always a supporter of Movember but could never grow a moustache, so when I saw an ad for the Polished Man and read what it was all about, I jumped on board straight away,” Mark said.

“I have two daughters that used to paint my nails for fun when they were younger, so now I can do it and raise some awareness and money at the same time.”

The Polished Man campaign encourages people to paint one fingernail to raise awareness of violence against women and children.

Globally, one in two children experience violence each year. Children of mothers experiencing domestic violence have higher rates of social and emotional problems compared to their peers.

As the perpetrator of violence is statistically more likely to be male, Polished Man encourages men to step up, speak out and take a stand in helping create a safer world for women and children.

“As a man, I can’t imagine ever hurting a woman or a child and I don’t necessarily fully understand why people do, but I know it happens, and it happens a lot more than you may think. So the more awareness of the

situation and conversations we can start, the better,” he said.

“The idea of painting my nails was not difficult to overcome. You get a few funny looks from people initially, but the whole purpose of the campaign is to start conversations – which it absolutely does.

“A lot of people asked, ‘Why are you doing that’, and when you explain why, they straight away agree that it is a good cause and needs to be addressed.

“I believe participating in the campaign has brought more awareness to everyone that I work with regularly on my shift and at my station, they all know exactly what the painted nails mean.

“Right from the start I have received nothing but support from everyone I have encountered in QFES. That support ranges from assistance in delivering the messages via email to supporting my campaign with monetary donations. Which can get interesting!

“If you donate \$100 or more you get to choose a colour to go onto a nail. I have one firefighter that contacts me on day one of the campaign to donate his \$100, and insists I paint my nail ‘state of origin’ maroon with sparkles – I am a passionate New South Welshman.”

The funds raised support trauma prevention and recovery programs such as the Australian Childhood Foundation, Survivors and Mates Support Network, Hagar Australia and McAuley Community Services for Women.

Mark encourages everyone join Polished Man and become part of the solution.

“You can paint as many nails as you like, it’s only for the month of October every year and it’s for a good reason. The campaign has always been about violence against children, but last year they incorporated violence against women as well.

“A special thanks to a few people for supporting me every year – my crew on D shift, Superintendent David Brazel, Regina O’Toole, Laurel Nordling, Rod McDonald and my family Amanda, Zali and Maya.”



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