

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE

AUGUST 2023



Canada wildfires
QFES lends a hand

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Firefighters Cameron Anderson (left) and Pat Burns (right) from Brookfield Rural Fire Brigade on the fire ground in Canada. Photo by Crew Leader Dean West from Rocksberg Moorina Rural Fire Brigade.

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FOREWORDS



GREG LEACH AFSM

Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Welcome to your 50th edition of *Response* magazine. We've shared many stories about our people's dedication and achievements in these pages since the first edition back in June 2015.

The annual Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week celebrations kicked off on 30 July at Mount Nebo Rural Fire Brigade. The event honours our dedicated volunteer force of more than 26,000 who help Queenslanders before and after emergencies and disasters.

Volunteers were formally recognised for their contributions at regional award ceremonies across the state. I'd particularly like to congratulate our State Volunteer of the Year and Young Volunteer of the Year recipients, who you can read more about on page 19.

It was great to meet so many RFS staff and volunteers from Far Northern, Northern and Central regions at the RFS Volunteer Summit at Cairns in June. It was a fantastic agenda that left volunteers equipped with knowledge to help their communities become more prepared and resilient.

In late July, the last of our Canadian deployment teams returned home. This was the first international deployment of RFS volunteers – a recognition of their expertise in bushfire management. I know the affected communities and Canadian firefighters are grateful for our assistance and it's great to return the favour after Canada lent a hand during our intense 2019-20 fire season. You can read more about the Canadian deployment on page 4.

I attended the NAIDOC celebration at Kedron, where we heard stories from Uncle Norm Clarke, the first Indigenous firefighter in Queensland. Uncle Norm's contributions to the fire service have been instrumental. He helped raise awareness for NAIDOC and the importance of First Nations cultural awareness within the fire service.

State Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) Coordinator Chris Clark and artist Duane Doyle spoke about the new RAAP First Nations artwork and Acting Executive Director Jane Houston shared QFES' Path to Treaty. Read more about QFES' NAIDOC Week events on page 14.

In late June, I travelled to Adelaide to see our excellence in road crash rescue in action at the Australasian Rescue Challenge. Hear firsthand the experiences of our teams on page 28.

Station Officer Nathan Roper travelled to America to accept the prestigious Higgins and Langley Memorial Award for swiftwater rescues during the 2022 flood event. Seven rescues by 37 firefighters were recognised for their expertise and outstanding achievements during difficult rescues. I'm proud QFES is continually being recognised for our technical excellence. Some of the swiftwater rescue stories are highlighted on page 10.



STEPHEN SMITH AFSM

Acting Deputy Commissioner

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

It has been a busy six months since I started as the Acting Deputy Commissioner Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), looking after the FRS portfolio and reform implementation work.

In June, three QFES personnel were awarded top honours – the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) – as part of the 2023 King's Birthday Honours List. Their dedication to their communities, QFES and our values of respect, integrity, courage, loyalty and trust is inspiring. You can read more about our well-deserving recipients on page 31.

As you would be aware, the Slacks Creek fire is being investigated by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) on behalf of the Coroner as well as Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ).

While these external investigations seek to understand the circumstances that led to the tragic outcome, the incident provides an opportunity for the FRS to review our operational doctrine, equipment and processes to best ensure we're using safe and contemporary practices for structural firefighting.

In July, an operational debrief was conducted at Beenleigh with the crews that were on site in the early stages of the fire. The debrief focused on the factual account of observations and actions of the attending crews.

This information was provided to an Operational Advisory Group (OAG), a small team with representatives from the United Firefighters Union, the Senior Officers Union and members of the Fire and Rescue Directorate.

The OAG will review the information from the debrief as well as other information already provided to QPS and WHSQ. This will enable the OAG to consider positive actions we need to sustain and strengthen as well as other matters that may require changes, research or further work to best ensure the safety of our firefighters engaged in structural firefighting.

Firefighter safety is a top priority for QFES and we will consider any measures that lead to continuous improvement.

I look forward to supporting the OAG over the coming months and will keep you updated as the group's work progresses.

In July, the Reform Implementation Taskforce (RIT) held townhall meetings on the upcoming Queensland Fire Department (QFD). It was great to speak at the FRS townhall and answer your questions in person and online. The RIT will use feedback from engagement to map the required capabilities of the new FRS in QFD, with consultation and input from the FRS Reference Group, industrial bodies, internal stakeholders and the QFES ELT. The reform will support FRS to be appropriately resourced, ensuring we are a contemporary fire and rescue service.

This year's Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week took place from 31 July to 6 August with regional events being held around the state to recognise volunteers who have demonstrated a special contribution to the service. I would like to take this opportunity to honour the hard work and outstanding efforts of RFS volunteers across Queensland.



Australia and Canada work side by side

QFES firefighters answered the call for help during Canada's most destructive fire season on record.

Helicopters carried firefighters to remote parts of the forest.

Hot and dry conditions in spring led to wildfires across Canada, particularly the north-west and Quebec.

At the time of writing, more than 12 million hectares had burnt and the fire season was expected to continue for another month of summer. The largest fire season on record before that was in 1989, when 7.6 million hectares were burnt.

In July four firefighters and a pilot were tragically killed in the line of duty. More than 1000 fires were burning and 120,000 people had evacuated their homes.

Firefighting resources were stretched thin and Canada put out a call for international firefighters from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the US, Europe and South America.

From 26 May, 68 QFES personnel were deployed to various towns in the Alberta region, one of the worst hit by the wildfires.

Long Lake Fire

Queensland's Arduous Firefighting Team 1 was at the forefront of the action, securing the fire line in thick forest.

Mark Saunders, Rural Fire Service (RFS) Area Director for Caboolture, led the team of 18 firefighters based out of Rainbow Lake, a small town in north-west Alberta.

"When we arrived there were about 70 fires burning in Alberta, stretching their resources," Mark said. "The fires were numbered from when they started on 1 March. We worked on fire 36, also known as the Long Lake Fire. On our last day, the fire had a perimeter of 580 kilometres, covering 160,000 hectares.

"The whole province was very smoky and the air quality was far below healthy levels. On some days they couldn't even fly helicopters, visibility was so low.

"We worked with US Hot Shot firefighters, South American firefighters and Canadian firefighters from the Albertan Forestry Services.

"The forest was generally flat, with aspens and spruce pines. It was so thick we had to cut paths with chainsaws to reach the fire. In more open areas the shrubs were as thick as lantana, forcing us to go on hands and knees to reach identified spot fires.

"The average daytime temperature was 18 to 22 degrees, but some mornings were only one degree, with arctic winds. The coldest day on the fireground only reached about 10 degrees and our Queensland turnout gear isn't designed for that."

Burning underground

Mark said his team learnt a lot about how fire behaves in the Canadian wilderness.

"Fire actually burns underground," he said. "It sits subdued under the surface, invisible, smouldering in muskeg."

Muskeg is a peat or bog layer made of moss and broken-down organic matter, common in arctic or sub-arctic environments. Although it resembles grass, it is soft and waterlogged and often grows on top of ponds or streams.

"Walking on muskeg was like walking on a trampoline or marshmallow," Mark said. "It really sapped your energy. Hand-cutting a fire line in muskeg for a couple of hundred metres could take a crew a whole day."

Thirty centimetres below the muskeg was a layer of permafrost. The muskeg acted as a blanket to keep it cold.

"When we exposed the ice it melted, creating a swamp, and we had to work through knee-deep mud. Sometimes the dozers broke through the permafrost and their tracks disappeared.



“It was crazy conditions. The ground was literally wet and yet it still burnt.

“The fires beneath the muskeg were benign most of the time, but in the middle of the day, when the sunlight hit the muskeg, the fires would become active, heat up and climb ladder fuels. Then the fires torched the trees and if it was windy the torching trees would transform into a crown fire.

“We had evacuation zones every kilometre along the fire break. We always knew where we had to fall back to.

“The smouldering muskeg was like playing whack-a-mole – we’d put a fire out and it would come back the next day. We did that over and over, with pumps running all day, turning the ground into a paste.

“We ran sprinklers for two or three days on some areas to cool them off. In Australia if we put a fire out, it cools down 30 minutes later, but in Canada it’s not like that at all.”

Stalked by wolves

The crew had to keep an eye out for animals such as bison, moose and black bears.

“Before we got to the fire ground, we had a full briefing at Edmonton with a sheriff about local animals,” Mark said.

“He wore a bullet-proof vest and carried bear spray, a handgun, a side arm and magazines for an assault rifle on his chest, so we knew he was serious.

“After we walked a fire line, sometimes we found wolf tracks in our footprints the next day. They were following us, but we never saw them. Their footprints were massive.

“We saw a lot of black bears and some were agitated because they’d been injured in the fires. There were cubs around so the mums were protective. One injured male bear came within 10 metres of my vehicle.



An RFS arduous firefighter negotiating a creek.

“One of the Hot Shot crews had a bear come up and try to take things from a backpack. They chased it away three times – first by shouting, then by revving a chainsaw, then by cutting a tree and dropping it onto the backpack.

“The bear didn’t just rip the backpack – it pulled the zipper open with its claws and looked inside. The bears were very smart and surprisingly dextrous.”

Mark said his team used pumps to draw water from the many beaver dams in rivers and streams.

“The beaver dams were useful but we upset them sometimes. A few beavers came up to us and slapped their tails as a warning.”

On the fire line

The team had to do almost everything on foot because the forest was so dense.

“We walked in from the nearest road and carried everything in our backpacks – food, water, chainsaws, hoses and pumps,” Mark said. “If we worked somewhere really remote, we were deposited by helicopters or amphibious tracked vehicles called häggglunds.”

Häggglunds are Swedish military machines normally used in Canada for forestry harvesting and planting. They’re designed for traversing snow or bogs, which makes them ideal for muskeg.

While Mark’s team was putting in fire breaks, their chainsaw operators would knock down trees.

“Five or six trees fell near us each day because they had such shallow roots,” Mark said. “The risk was very real.”

They cut the fire line with Pulaski tools, which combine an axe with a mattock so they can both dig and chop wood.

“In Canada they place an alpha-numeric grid system over the fire ground. So the whole fire ground was mapped out with square grids and we used those to communicate our location with aircraft and back to the Incident Control Centre. It’s quite an efficient system, easier than trying to broadcast latitudes and longitudes.”



A bogged häggglund at the Long Lake Fire.



Nations joining forces

The first international crew Mark's team worked with were the Prineville Hot Shots from Oregon. In 1994, nine of their team members were tragically lost in a burnover during a large fire on Storm King Mountain near Colorado.

"They showed us the ropes for our first four or five days and taught us this new style of firefighting," Mark said.

"Once we'd demonstrated to the Incident Management Team (IMT) we were up to the job, they made us a direct attack team and tasked us with jobs right at the forefront of the action. In our third week we were the only direct attack team on the fire ground.

"By the last week, multiple divisions were requesting my team because they were impressed with our work.

"My team members were volunteers from different parts of life. Many had never worked in those conditions before. They were put on short-term contracts so they were paid for their time over there.

"Our chainsaw operators were really valuable. Splinter, one of our volunteers from North Coast Region, has been an arborist for 15 years and he was teaching Hot Shot sawyers how to drop trees. His skillset was really appreciated."

A Queensland first

Each day started with a brief at 7.30am and the team worked the fire line until 7.30pm.

"We stayed in a mining camp so we didn't have to use our tents and sleeping bags like some Australian crews," Mark said.

"After our first 12 days on the fire ground, we had two rest days at a hotel. There was a Canadian firefighting crew staying there and they invited us to a barbeque in the car park. We set up a marquee, had a few beers, threw a football around and swapped some hats and T-shirts.

"After our break we did another 15 days straight. Two firefighters in the last few days had some muscular injuries related to fatigue

and one had to be evacuated by helicopter, but they were well looked after by the medics.

"By the end of our deployment we'd attacked, patrolled and extinguished about 65 kilometres of the fire's perimeter.

"This was the first time Queensland sent a volunteer team overseas. It was an absolute privilege to lead that team and show the world what we can do as Queenslanders.

"I kept telling the team, no one can take that away from us – we'll always be the first Queensland team to deploy overseas. We set the bar. It was one of the real highlights of my life."

Long days

Mark Stuart was the Incident Commander (IC) in an IMT for the Fox Creek Complex of fires, about three hours west of Edmonton and 10 hours away from Mark Saunders and his team.

The fires in this complex covered 122,000 hectares. For context, the Brisbane City Council area is 134,000 hectares.

"As IC, I have overall responsibility for operations on the fire ground and the objectives of the incident action plan," Mark said.

"I dealt with stakeholders and requests to access the fire ground. The area had a lot of forestry, oil and gas industry, including mines and oil wells.

"The stakeholders wanted to get their oil wells up and running, harvest forest areas, assess the fire's impact on timber, start reclamation work or re-plant cleared areas.

"The fires had a huge impact on these industries. Forestry is a big business there – one timber mill within our fire complex had a winter supply of timber worth \$160 million.

"Since the timber is worth so much money, they don't conduct backburning operations like we do in Australia. It comes down to the individual landholder to mitigate where possible and deal with leftover vegetation."

Sunset wasn't until 11pm, and even then it was never dark.



Queensland firefighters with the Prineville Hot Shots.



About 70 million people in North America were affected by poor air quality.

“Firefighters don’t do night-time operations in Canada, but the day shifts are long. We were still undertaking aerial firefighting at 9 or 10pm.”

International teamwork

Mark said Canada had fewer firefighters and fire trucks than Australia, but more aircraft and heavy equipment.

“We used more than 50 bulldozers and excavators,” he said. “At one stage part of the fire escaped, and within an hour I had six fixed aircraft waterbombing it including a Large Air Tanker, in addition to 15 other helicopters available at my incident.

“The main agency we worked with was Alberta Wildfire, along with local IMT personnel and firefighters. We also collaborated with Hot Shots from British Columbia, Idaho and Utah, and 120 South African firefighters.

“We had a lot to do with the community of Fox Creek, which has a population of 2000. I was in constant communications with the mayor and fire chief at the Fox Creek Fire Department.

“The community put on a thank you barbeque for us and the South African firefighting crews. While we ate dinner we watched the local dance company do highland dancing. It was surreal to be in a rural Canadian town watching highland dancing alongside American and South African firefighters.”

A new environment

Mark said when he first arrived, he was surprised the fires could even burn when the vegetation was so green and lush.

“There’d been about 100mm of rain just before we arrived. A fire wouldn’t have started in Australia in those conditions, but their vegetation has a lot of resin and ladder fuels.

“We often had storms come through with lightning and strong winds so we had to pull firefighters in from the fire ground.”

Mark and his team also had to deal with muskeg.

“Under the surface layer of organic material, fire can continue to burn unseen through winter snowfall and then pop up next spring.

“The shallow roots of the trees act like a web with organic material on top, creating voids under the roots where the fires burn.

“At one point we were using dozers to cut containment lines and there was a raging fire on one side and on the other we were cutting up chunks of ice.

“It was a great opportunity for us to assist the Canadians and return the favour after they helped us during the 2019-20 bushfire season. Everyone was absolutely wonderful. They couldn’t do enough to assist us and were extremely happy for the Australians to come over and lend a hand.

“My IMT had some challenging times learning what bushfires were like in Canada, but we all adapted and worked really well together.”

Staying safe

Neil Kelso, Executive Manager Operations RFS, travelled to Canada as an Agency Representative (AREP) based out of Edmonton and Whitecourt.

“There were many fires in Alberta and British Columbia over the weeks before our deployment,” Neil said. “One hundred and seventy-nine active fires had burnt over two million hectares, well more than the annual average.

“The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) was operating at National Preparedness Level 5 – the highest level.”

As an AREP, Neil was responsible for ensuring the Australian contingent’s wellbeing.

“AREPs monitor safety, promote safe work practices and work diplomatically with local incident management structures to resolve any safety issues.

“My days would start around 5am and finish around 10pm. I travelled to meet with Australian and New Zealand crews, checking on their welfare and monitoring safety and fatigue management issues.

“The Australian crews were well respected wherever they went. The Canadian Forest Area Managers and support staff were accommodating and grateful for our assistance. The community in general were very appreciative of the support provided by the Australian and New Zealand crews.

“This was a terrific opportunity to work with other jurisdictions. We learnt a lot about fire management and different suppression techniques from around the globe.”



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A search against all odds

The State Emergency Service (SES) helped find a person who was missing near Yarrabah for a week.

SES Area Controller Far Northern Region Matt Currey said the missing person's car was reported by tradies working nearby. It had already been there for three days.

"The Queensland Police Service (QPS) investigated and found the person's wallet and phone in the car," Matt said.

"We were called late in the afternoon to help and by the time we arrived at search HQ it was getting dark. The area was mostly rainforest, along with a creek that ran out to the ocean.

"After about 40 minutes, we found some of the missing person's clothing. Teams stood down at 6.45pm to resume in the morning."

The next day, the SES searched on foot through the rainforest and Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) teams flew over the creek, which was up to four metres deep. None of the teams found anything.

On day three, they covered creeks and additional search areas, while ATVs covered drivable tracks expanding out from the search base.

"Swiftwater teams arrived to search deep waterholes in the creeks," Matt said. "They could only search so far down before the creek crossed the main road and became a tide area with crocodiles.

"As time went on with no result and a profile was built around the missing person, it was hard to stop teams from thinking the worst, but we had to maintain focus. I encouraged teams to keep searching and block outside influences.

"On day four, the ATVs and RPAS kept helping the foot teams with the search. Police divers arrived to help search deep waterholes again.

"One team re-covered areas already searched but pushed out even farther into the bush. At 8.45am, they basically walked into the missing person. He was hungry and a bit dehydrated but overall in quite good condition for someone who'd been missing for a week."

The missing person walked with the SES team to an ATV, which took him to the search HQ where Queensland Ambulance Service teams tended to him.

"It was a great feeling to find him alive and in such good condition after a week. It just proves that until all resources are exhausted you should never give up. Follow the methodology and you get results."



The yellow dot near the centre of the map shows where the missing person's car was found. The coloured lines show the extent of the search over four days.

After the missing person was found, their family sent a message of gratitude to the SES:

"We cannot express our gratitude enough for the incredible work that the Far Northern Region SES team put into the search and rescue operation at East Trinity last week. The organisation's professionalism, dedication, and expertise were evident every step of the way, and we are forever grateful for your successful efforts.

"The situation was incredibly difficult and hot, but your team was able to navigate the terrain with skill and precision, and your resourcefulness undoubtedly saved our family member's life.

"The coordination and communications between SES and Queensland Police Service and other Emergency Services were impressive and we felt confident during the search and rescue operations that you would find him.

"The commitment from all the SES team from Innisfail, Yarrabah, Atherton, Cairns, Gordonvale, Edmonton up to Buchan's Point in serving the community provided us great comfort and we are very proud of the Far North Queensland communities.

"Once again, we cannot thank you all enough for your incredible work."

Global award for flood rescues

During the 2022 Brisbane floods, firefighters worked long days and nights, going from job to job in the pouring rain and pulling hundreds of people from floodwaters. For their dedication and expertise, they won a prestigious Higgins and Langley Memorial Award in Swiftwater Rescue.

With 14 lives lost, the floods were one of Queensland's worst disasters and the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) conducted more than 660 swiftwater rescues.

The awards, which honour outstanding achievements in swiftwater and flood rescue, were established in 1993 in honour of Earl Higgins and Jeffrey Langley. Earl was a writer and filmmaker who lost his life in 1980 while rescuing a child from the Los Angeles River. Jeffrey was a firefighter and paramedic with the Los Angeles County Fire Department who lost his life in a helicopter accident in 1993.

QFES was awarded the Incident Award "in recognition for technical expertise and successful completion of complex rescue operations conducted in challenging swiftwater conditions, resulting in the rescues of civilians and response personnel."

The award was specifically for seven rescues conducted by 37 firefighters. *Response* spoke with three of the firefighters about their experiences saving lives during those frantic weeks in early 2022.

Imminent threat

One of the rescues took place in Aspley, where Station Officer Marc O'Brien and three other swiftwater technicians responded to reports of a car being swept off a road.

"It was very difficult to get to the scene," Marc said. "We had to traverse Gympie Road with a lot of water across it.

"An onlooker led me out the back of Harvey Norman and pointed out where the car was sitting in the middle of the flow, backed up against a tree about eight metres from the bank. A mother and her 20-year-old son had climbed out of the car and up the tree to escape.

"This was at Little Cabbage Tree Creek, which flows under Gympie Road. Their car had been pushed off Gympie Road and washed down a few hundred metres."

The creek had risen about four or five metres. The onlooker told the firefighters the water had just pushed over a tree near the car, so they had to act fast.

"I yelled to the casualties to stay where they were," Marc said. "I asked if there was anyone else and the mother said her daughter had been washed away a few minutes earlier. The pressure and speed of the water made the daughter's situation life-threatening.

"I tested the water but it was flowing way too fast and deep for me to wade out to them. It was a really nasty patch of water."

The crew prepared their Motorised Swiftwater Rescue Craft (MSRC), nosed it upstream and made their way over to the car.

"The tree gave us an eddy to pull the boat into," Marc said. "I climbed out of the boat, up the car and into the tree.

"I helped the mother and son put on lifejackets and assisted them down into the boat. As I was guiding the mother she stepped from the tree onto the bumper bar and her foot slipped straight out from under her.



Three people were rescued from this car in Aspley.



Firefighters searched for a missing person during floods in Gympie.



There was widespread flooding on the Sunshine Coast.

“I was standing on the front of the boat and she was above my head. I grabbed her and almost went overboard with her. She landed in the water with my hands under her armpits. I was hanging off the side of the boat.

“I don’t know if her foot snagged, but somehow she didn’t get pulled out of my arms. I leaned back into the boat and she landed on top of me.

“If I hadn’t got a good grip on her, we would have both been in the water and the two firefighters on the bank would have had to swim after us out into the middle of the flow to rescue us both.”

In the back of their minds, the firefighters were thinking of the daughter who’d been swept away. Crews farther down the flow hadn’t found anybody.

“We were struggling to survive in our full protective clothing and lifejackets, so a civilian had a slim chance,” Marc said. “The assumption was she’d probably drowned. It was hard to put that aside and do the job.

“When we got to the bank, I radioed the crews downstream to let them know the two casualties were safe. I gave them a description of the daughter. The mother and son were distraught because they thought they’d lost her.

“Thirty seconds later, two swiftwater technicians called to say they’d pulled the daughter out of a tree hundreds of metres downstream. They’d paddled out to her around the same time we were rescuing the others. I told the mother and she broke down in tears and hugged us.

“It was one of the best feelings I’ve ever had in my life to know we’d given that mother back her daughter.”

The firefighters had no time to rest before they jumped in their truck to rescue more people.

“We kept going for seven or eight more hours after that. So many people needed help that we’d finish one rescue and another would come up straight away.

“This was flash flooding on a scale no one has seen in Brisbane. Across three or four days, I pulled more than 50 people out of circumstances where they were worried for their life.

“That was the longest and hardest I’ve ever worked. It was all hands on deck for as long as we could possibly do it.”

A pitch-black expanse

A team of just two firefighters – Station Officers Nathan Chadwick and Stephen

Wilson – were landlocked at a prison when they took a call for a desperate rescue in Gatton.

“A lot of roads were cut off and all the bridges were under, so getting from job to job was almost impossible,” Nathan said.

“Steve and I were on a specialist appliance from Bundamba Fire and Rescue Station. We’d been on shift for 12 hours and had done several rescues.

“We were trapped on a small island of land just north of Gatton, flooded in on all four sides by creeks and rivers. It was about 3pm and dark as night with all the cloud cover and rain. The only piece of infrastructure was the women’s prison.

“We drove to the prison to try and find some food. We had nothing but our wetsuits and we looked like a couple of drowned rats, so the prison staff didn’t know what to do with us.

“Thankfully there were some contractors working on site who unlocked their dongas for us, and the staff brought us some food from the prison kitchen. There weren’t any showers but we could at least take our wetsuits off and dry out a bit.

“FireCom had been calling us all afternoon but we couldn’t get to any jobs, which



was terribly frustrating. They called again at about 6.20pm to say a car had been washed off Gatton Esk Road. We were the only rescuers who could reach it, so we jumped in the truck.

“When we arrived there was nothing but a vast, pitch-black expanse of water. I told Steve to wait in the truck while I had a quick look.

“I waded through shallow water but it quickly grew deep and fast. I was about to turn around when my torch lit up a man hanging onto trees in roaring floodwaters about 100 metres away.

“We found out later he’d been trying to get home from the grocery store. He hadn’t been able to get his car through a crossing so he waded through, but at the next crossing he got washed away. He’d left his car at a neighbour’s place, and the neighbour got worried and called for help.

“There were only two of us to conduct the rescue.

“We somehow managed to get out adjacent to this guy in fast-flowing water. On the far side of the water we saw the neighbour, but we couldn’t communicate with him.

“The only real option was for one of us to swim down to the casualty on a tethered swim. It’s the least desirable option in swiftwater rescue, but in this case we had no choice.

“I attached my throwbag to Steve’s, giving us 40 metres of rope in total. We attached both throwbags to Steve and he swam

down to the casualty, passing through a few barbed wire fences.

“As soon as Steve grabbed him, the casualty let go because he was so fatigued. He was fully hypothermic and had nothing left.

“It was incredibly difficult to pull Steve and the casualty back. Fortunately, the neighbour threw a tow rope to Steve and between the pair of us we hauled them onto the bank.

“We gave the casualty 10 minutes to catch his breath, put him between us and walked back through one-and-a-half metres of water to our appliance.

“FireCom had contacted the prison and some of their staff transported the casualty back to the prison, where he was looked after by a nurse.

“Steve and I spent the rest of the night checking the waters and trying to get out. We managed to reach Esk at about 3 or 4am. From there we took up another few jobs and made our way back to station around 10am.

“It was one of the more spectacular rescues I’ve been involved in. There were only two of us, it was dark, no backup, no plan B. Thankfully we pulled it off and no one was hurt.”

Rooftop rescue

Senior Firefighters Kai Borchert, Ian Baker, Catherine Duchock and Chris Brett were packing up after a straight-forward evacuation of people from flooded homes

on Ashgrove Avenue when the situation rapidly became more dangerous.

Floodwaters from Enoggera Creek rose quickly and a Triple Zero call came in from someone trapped at the back of a house.

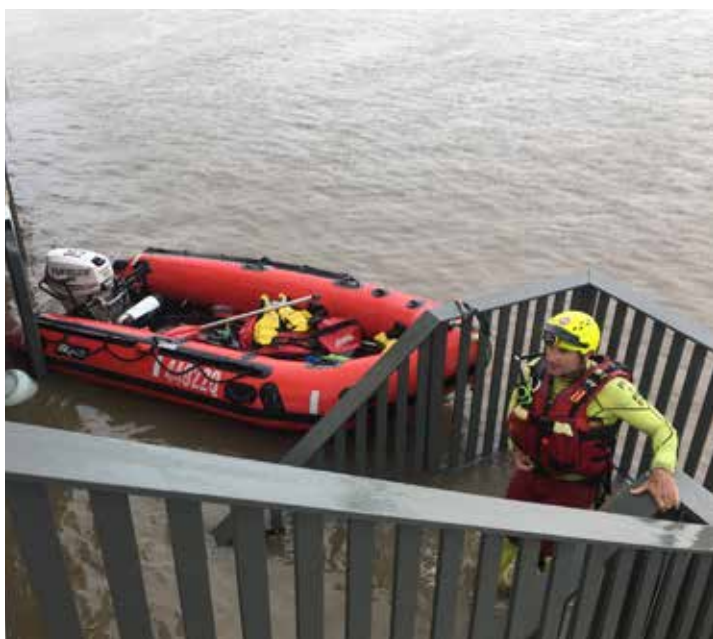
“The water just kept rising and things got hectic,” Kai said. “We set up our gear across the road, behind another house, and rigged up our Inflatable Work Platform (IWP). Even there the water was chest high. Ian and Chris constructed a belay system, anchored to a power pole.

“If you imagine all the objects in a suburban backyard and multiply that by all the houses upstream of us, that’s the kind of debris that washed down around us, along with garden sheds, fences, bins and other rubbish. Goalposts from the soccer club washed down past the house and lay crumpled in a vacant block.

“The quickest way to the casualty was straight through the flow, but that was too dangerous, because if we caught a corner of our IWP on a piece of debris we’d be in trouble. Instead, Catherine and I moved across to the neighbouring house and used the side of it as a shield.

“We thought we only had to rescue one occupant, but there were actually two. Then we discovered three more people in the neighbouring house.

“The casualties were upset because all of a sudden knee-deep water had come through their house and started rising, and now they had nowhere to go.”



Firefighters had to change their plans on the fly when rescuing people from inundated homes.



Station Officer Nathan Roper attended a ceremony in the US to accept the award on behalf of QFES.

The crew changed their plans to rescue the group of three casualties first, followed by the other two. Luckily they'd thought to bring five lifejackets with them.

"We hauled everyone up into the boat, but now there were five of us in the IWP, which was dangerous in that kind of water," Kai said.

"I climbed up onto the roof to size it up and I thought it was the safest place for these people. The water was still rising quickly so the roof gave us time to change our plan. We couldn't be sure how high the water was going to go.

"After we'd lifted them onto the roof, a second crew of four swiftwater technicians turned up. We asked them to bring their IWP to the front of the house and climb over the top of the roof. They set up ropes over the roof and we used them as tethers and guides.

"It was loud and wet and very slippery. The roof was steep and the old tiles were

covered in moss and lichen, so we had one of us behind each casualty and one right in front."

The firefighters used their own bodies as human ladders and at times had to pin the casualties to the roof to stop them sliding off into the water.

Eventually they got the casualties down off the front of the house into the second crew's IWP. In all, it took the rescuers two hours to get everyone safely to higher ground.

"We were just glad all the teamwork led to a good outcome," said Kai. "We were so busy that day, we just packed up and went on to the next rescue. We didn't finish until late that night.

"It's what we train for. We don't want to see people getting hurt. Our state instructors work hard all year round delivering training to us. The workshops and refreshers they give us prepare us for these situations."



Jiman man Duan Doyle (third from right) spoke at the Kedron event about 'Borree', the artwork he created for the Road Attitudes and Action Planning program.

For Our Elders

QFES held events across Queensland during NAIDOC Week to celebrate the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

A NAIDOC celebration at Kedron featured several guests including QFES' Elder, Uncle Norm Clarke AFSM, who became Queensland's first full-time First Nations firefighter in 1976.

QFES also participated in community events such as the Ipswich NAIDOC Family and Cultural Celebration and the Musgrave Park NAIDOC Celebration, which was attended by thousands of visitors.

Rural Fire Service members also took part in a cultural burning workshop at Yowah in South Western Region.

New First Nations Branch

At the NAIDOC event in Kedron, Acting Executive Director Strategy Directorate Jane Houston announced QFES' new First Nations Strategy and Partnerships Branch.

"This year's theme, 'For Our Elders', is so important because as an organisation we draw so many lessons from the wisdom, knowledge and experience of Traditional Elders, in everything from land management and cultural knowledge to justice and human rights," Jane said.

"The new branch will be led by a First Nations identified Director, who will develop and implement a program to align QFES with national and state government First Nations policy.

"The Director will also work to embed cultural capability across QFES, including the development of a First Nations Framework to articulate the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our agency and the communities we serve.

"This is an incredible opportunity to learn from First Nations peoples who bring so much experience – in fact more than 65,000 years of culture, history and lore – to better understand how to build enduring relationships.

"The establishment of this team is just the beginning and if we can embed an inclusive and respectful mindset into everything we do, we will see not only better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but all people."

Helmet tell a story

At a ceremony in Northern Region, Mick Priestly (Boondagee) and his son Ian presented three painted helmets to QFES. The helmets came from the region's cache and Mick painted them with his interpretation (dreaming) of what the emergency services represent to people and communities.

Mick is a proud Biripi man and artist. Biripi country is in northern NSW on the Barrington Coast. His son Ian is the Second Officer at Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade on Yunbenun (Magnetic Island).



Wulgurukaba Elders gave Mick permission to paint the helmets on country.

The Fire and Rescue Service helmet features the Great Spirit Goanna (Bayami Girriwa), which represents the first responders of a fire brigade. As he moves through the bush or suburbs, he uses his mighty body and tail to put out fires and doesn't stop until the fires are extinguished and everyone is safe.

The Rural Fire Service helmet is adorned with a death adder (Munnulgung) representing volunteers. The death adder sits ready and waiting and when it needs to, it strikes fast and stands its ground. The circles represent cultural burns by First Nations peoples to regenerate and replenish country.

The State Emergency Service helmet is painted with the Great Rainbow Serpent (Bayami Yulangga), who was sent by Mother Earth (Naaguu Barry) to replenish country and put things right again. The black dots represent people and communities in danger from natural disasters. The yellow dots represent volunteers doing what needs to be done to keep people safe.



A visit to the Lost City

A three-day cultural burning workshop at a cattle station in South Western Region led to some unexpected discoveries and story-sharing.

The Indigenous Land Council acquired Mt Tabor Station, north-east of Augathella, in 1997 for its cultural significance. The 70,000-hectare station is abundant with rock art and cultural artefacts.

The Bidjara people control the station and their name for it is Goorathuntha. In recent years they've installed camping facilities and a yarning circle so they can deliver cultural workshops to students and the community.

The station's hilly terrain is covered with dense timber and the Bidjara people use traditional methods to care for country, including cultural burning.

Southern Queensland Landscapes (SQL), a community-owned organisation that supports communities to take care of their landscapes, organised a cultural burning workshop at the station in conjunction with cultural burning practitioner Robbie Williams from Fire Lore.

Participants included local traditional owners, Fire Lore fire practitioners, SQL staff and six young people from local communities.

Adam Osborne, a Wiradjuri man and QFES First Nations Bushfire Safety Officer (BSO), was invited through his connections. Adam joined the RFS when he was 17 and previously worked as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the Queensland Police Service.

"I love this role because I connect with mob," Adam said. "Everyone knows everyone – even in the farthest reaches I travel to, people know my family."

The workshop was led by Station Manager and Bidjara woman Keelen Mailman.

"Keelen is a woman who lives and breathes her culture," Adam said. "She is a respected Bidjara Elder who has lived on the property for the past 26 years."

Keelen was the first Indigenous woman to run a cattle station and was awarded an Order of Australia in 2020. Her autobiography, *The Power of Bones*, tells

the story of her life, from a childhood of poverty, abuse and racism to managing the cattle station at the age of 30.

The book also describes her struggle to return ancestral remains to the Bidjara people after they were stolen by grave robbers in the 1920s.

"You get a sense within the first 30 seconds that she's a very hardened woman," Adam said. "She's gone through a lot and she's worked and worked and worked. She's very passionate about preserving culture for the next generations.

"Keelen took us to a place called the Lost City, where sandstone caves, cliff faces and cathedral-like structures are littered with evidence that First Nations people lived here.

"She walked us through these sacred sites, stopping to explain the stories so we too felt connected. This was important to her, so we felt a responsibility to care for the place like it was our own.

"Trying to picture myself back then growing up, I could see the Lost City was like a natural playground. I was in awe of the artworks and how well preserved they were.

"Anthropologists have identified scrapes in one of the caves as bullet holes where people were massacred. So there was a range of emotions, but overall a sense of pride.

"Keelen also took us to a tabletop where we looked out over the property. On the horizon was a little mountain that marked the boundary. The station staff recently buried a co-worker there as that was one of his favourite spots."

At these sacred sites, Robbie Williams explained the theory of cultural burning, such as looking for ignition points and whether the country was sick or healthy.

"We drove around and assessed the country," Adam said. "Finally we put our skills into practise and burnt some country."

"The Bidjara people use the burning practice to mentor youth, walking side by side. This is their classroom. One day it would be nice to have a group of young people out there doing the burning themselves."



Keelen told the stories behind the rock art, including this depiction of a spirit net used to capture good spirits.



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Getting bushfire-ready together

QFES is working with the community to get prepared for bushfire season as part of Operation Sesbania.

Rural Fire Service (RFS) Director of Capability Development Matt Inwood said Operation Sesbania was about planning mitigation and working with our partners, community and stakeholders in accordance with the Queensland Bushfire Plan.

“Operation Sesbania is an ongoing program that continues throughout the year as weather permits,” Matt said. “From the start of the year until 14 July, more than 550 activities were completed, including mitigation burns and community engagement.”

Matt said conditions were drying out across many parts of Queensland.

“According to the Bureau of Meteorology, we’ve had below average rainfall across southern, south-eastern and central Queensland,” he said. “However, northern and north-western Queensland have received well above average rainfall.

“The El Niño Southern Oscillation Outlook is at El Niño alert. When El Niño alert criteria have been met in the past, an El Niño has developed around 70% of the time.

“All models suggest a positive Indian Ocean Dipole event is likely, which could exacerbate El Niño’s drying effect.

“Warmer than average daytime temperatures and below median rainfall are expected across most of Queensland in August and September.”

Matt said the severity of the bushfire season would vary across the state, depending on fuel loads.

“Across northern and north-western Queensland we’ve seen increases in grass and forested fuel growth – the grass is likely to dry out in winter and early spring but unlikely to keep growing.

“Central Queensland has pockets of elevated fuels along exposed grasslands and in elevated parts of subtropical climate zones around the Central Highlands, Coalfields and inland parts of the Capricorn Coast.

“In some parts of central and eastern Queensland, grasses range from moderate to elevated fuel loads. Drying conditions are forecast to continue across southern parts of the state into the late winter months.”

One of this year’s mitigation activities was Exercise Ignis, a bushfire exercise in Brisbane to practise Queensland’s multi-agency emergency response.

The exercise involved local, state, interstate and commonwealth government representatives, including Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Defence Force and NSW State Emergency Service.

Non-government organisations, such as Powerlink, Telstra and Queenslanders with Disability Network also participated.

The exercise was based on the record high temperatures, unusual patterns of fire behaviour and catastrophic fire danger ratings of the 2018-19 bushfire season. The exercise simulated fires on Mount Morgan, K’gari and Stanthorpe.

Matt said every year QFES reviewed previous fire seasons and looked for lessons to be learnt for the season ahead.

“Our focus is ensuring our brigades and stations are operationally ready and preparing our communities in understanding their risk and things they can do to mitigate it, such as having a bushfire survival plan and preparing around their property.

“I want to say a big thank you to our personnel for their ongoing efforts in making our community safe, whether in assisting with mitigation activities or community engagement.

“Likewise thank you in advance to all our people for being available to respond to fires and other emergencies to protect our communities. It’s a fantastic effort and our people deserve praise.”

The QFES response to the bushfire season will be known as Operation Melaleuca and the Commissioner’s Intent for the operation is now on the Gateway.



RFS and FRS firefighters took part in a multi-agency hazard reduction burn at Bribie Island in June. Together with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Moreton Bay Regional Council, they burnt around 500 hectares.

Volunteers gather for summits

Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteer summits bring together staff, volunteers and industry experts to share ideas and discuss the future of the RFS.

This year a total of almost 300 volunteers attended two summits in the Sunshine Coast and Cairns.

The summits' theme of 'Planting the Seeds of Opportunity' reflected the exciting times ahead as QFES works toward the next evolution of the RFS.

Inspector Shaune Toohey, the MC for the Sunshine Coast summit, said the atmosphere at the summits was always great.

"A highlight this year was getting feedback from our RFS volunteers around a range of projects currently underway to support our future," Shaune said. "The planning team created a safe and open atmosphere.

"The difficult part of RFS is its size and the geographical areas we cover. Being able to engage with our people on a regular basis about issues that affect them and their community is a special thing.

"I hope the summits provide our volunteers with the feeling of being valued and acknowledged, as they are the backbone of our department.

"The speakers highlighted the changes going through QFES and the positive

opportunities for our people, such as user-focused IT solutions, training packages that enhance our capabilities, and the reform.

"The feedback I heard was positive. People enjoyed seeing the upgrades in fleet and hearing about other brigades who faced similar challenges, which reassured them they weren't alone."

Julie Carmody, Brigade Secretary of the Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade, was the MC for the Cairns event.

"The summit was brilliant," Julie said.

"There was a real sense of communication and people getting to know each other. It was an amazing opportunity to network and engage in one-on-one conversations with members of our executive leadership.

"There was a lot of camaraderie and people went away with tools they can adapt in terms of where we're going with the RFS during the change to the Queensland Fire Department.

"The Commissioner said in his opening address that we all have a role to play in where we're going as a department. It's up to us to shape the future of the RFS.

"Bruce Beasley from the Firefighters Cancer Foundation Australia told his personal story about being diagnosed with prostate cancer, which resonated with many people because it came from the heart.

"Kylee Clubb from Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade talked about her journey to California for a Women in Fire Training Exchange.

"Paul de Gelder was an elite navy diver whose life changed in 2009 when he lost an arm and a leg in a shark attack. He discussed mental health and how to improvise, adapt and overcome.

"We appreciated the dedication and professionalism of the state staff who participated.

"At the summit you have a voice, and the people who make the decisions are listening. I spoke to a lot of people and every single one of them got something great out of the summit. At the end of the day, we never stop learning."



At the trade exhibition, attendees engaged with internal stakeholders and external suppliers.



Session topics included the future IT experience for RFS, unpacking training, frontline technology, next generation communications and more.



Stars of the RFS

Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week gives us a chance to say thank you to our more than 26,000 RFS volunteers. With the RFS Week Awards, we recognise those who have made a special contribution.

Benjamin Naday, First Officer of Tallebudgera Valley Rural Fire Brigade, was named State Volunteer of the Year for his service to his brigade and the southern Gold Coast community.

Benjamin joined the RFS in 2009 at the age of 16 and has held several positions, including Volunteer Community Educator, Crew Leader, Treasurer, Fifth Officer and Member of the Gold Coast Local Area Finance Committee.

"I joined the RFS when I was in high school," Benjamin said. "Our neighbour was an officer in the brigade and encouraged me to join. I was very community-oriented and it was a great way to get involved."

On 10 August 2019, just before the Black Summer bushfires, Benjamin was elected as First Officer at 27 years old.

"It was a very interesting few months in my life," he said. "A week after I was elected, I got engaged to my now wife. Then within a month we were cracking on up at the Canungra fire.

"Nothing can prepare you for a season like that, but I was lucky to have great people around to mentor and support me. I spent a lot of time worrying about team members on the fire ground. I swear I aged a few years.

"The evening when the Lower Beechmont fire flared up was a hairy night. Two of our members were there with a 41 unit, helping coordinate and communicate back to Incident Control (IC).

"When I arrived, I was exceptionally proud to see what my team members were doing and to receive positive feedback from the IC about their work."



The RFS was named a 2023 Queensland Great in June.

Benjamin has developed connections with many local stakeholders, including the Tallebudgera Valley Community Projects Association, Burleigh Heads Rotary, Burleigh Heads RSL Sub-branch, Gold Coast councillors, state and federal MPs, and local schools and childcare centres.

"You never know when those connections will come in handy," Benjamin said. "After the last few bushfires, there's a heightened awareness of what the RFS does. We need to continue raising that awareness so we can do more."

Benjamin has always been vocal in ensuring volunteers are valued and seen as the professionals they are. He advocates for volunteers as a board member and company secretary of Volunteering Gold Coast. He is also a member of the RFS Reference Group as QFES transitions to the Queensland Fire Department, providing valuable insight by drawing on his legal expertise as a registered migration agent.

"One of the things that's really important to me as a rural firefighter is the sense of community we have with our members and the wider community. When you're having a bad day or dealing with mundane paperwork, that's what keeps you going."

Augustus Grigg from Brookfield Rural Fire Brigade in Brisbane Region was named State Young Volunteer of the Year. He was recognised for embracing the full range of commitment as a volunteer in his three-and-a-half years as a brigade member. He has been on deployment to the Western Downs and Stradbroke Island and responded to fires outside his brigade area at Bribie Island, Kobbie Creek and Mt Nebo.

The RFS was also recently honoured as a 2023 Queensland Great in the Institution category. This award recognises the efforts and achievements of Queensland organisations for their remarkable contribution to the history and development of our state.



Benjamin also received the QFES Medal in 2020.



SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Morning tea for a good cause

In May, South Western Region HQ collected items of necessity for victims of Domestic and Family Violence.

More often than not, victims of Domestic and Family Violence flee with little to no personal possessions, making it difficult to regain independence or normalcy in their life moving forward.

Centres like Domestic Violence Action Centre Toowoomba receive no funding and rely on donations like this to further assist families who use their services. Some of the items in high demand are personal hygiene items and long-life food items.

We were able to link up with representatives of Domestic Violence Action Centre to present these donations. We hope to make this a regular event in South Western Region.



Brushing up on skills

Auxiliary firefighters from South Western Region took part in several courses throughout the region over the past month.

Hazmat, Auxiliary Recruit Training and Education Program (ARTEP) and Multirae courses were held at Charlton Regional HQ. ARTEP and road crash rescue were also conducted at Charleville Fire and Rescue Station.

The region has also seen several Vertical Rescue L1 and Swift Water L1 courses conducted at local fire stations.



A sculpture for Roma

The Roma community held a competition called ‘Roma Outback Sculptures’ where people constructed items that reflected the area of Roma. This annual event is supported and sponsored by Maranoa Regional Council.

This year Auxiliary Firefighter Daniel Ferry from Roma Fire and Rescue Station constructed a replica of the town bell from barbed wire. He called his creation ‘Semper Paratus’.

This bell hung in a tower beside the old fire station and was used by Roma Fire Brigade to inform the crew of a fire. The old bell is being restored and will hopefully be reinstated soon next to the new station.

While Dan didn’t win a prize, he kindly donated 25 per cent of the sale price of the bell to the fundraising effort for fellow firefighter Izabella (Izzy) Nash and her family.



A busy day in Warwick

Eighteen rural firefighters from Karara, Freestone and Dalveen took part in a day’s training in road crash rescue, hazmat and electric vehicles at the Warwick Fire and Rescue Station.

They participated in stabilisation, glass management and operating the hydraulic rescue equipment using different techniques to remove the doors, roof and dash.



FAR NORTHERN REGION

Vertical rescue training at Copperlode Dam

Level 2 Rescue Technicians recently trained at Copperlode Dam, the main water supply for Cairns. The exercises simulated the rescue of council workers around the dam site.

The first exercise involved a worker who had a heart attack while descending the ladder system within a tower out in the water.

Crews descended the internal ladder system to locate the casualty, assessed their condition and formulated a plan to retrieve them to the top. They used the Arizona Vortex, a piece of equipment that creates a high point for rope systems to run through.

Crews established the high point above the access hatch and lowered a stretcher with a rescuer attached, before packaging the casualty and hauling them to safety.

A second exercise simulated a council worker trapped in a tunnel under the dam. QFES technicians reached the worker via the base of the dam wall, packaged them in a stretcher and walked them out with a rescue trolley.

They then established a haul system to bring the stretcher, trolley and casualty up an embankment.

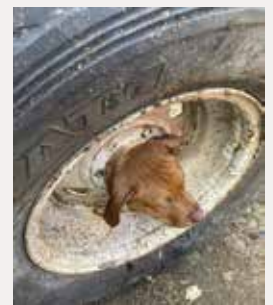
The day allowed crews to become familiar with potential scenarios at the dam and local council staff to understand what methods the crews would use.



Paw patrol tyre

We never tyre of a good news story, especially when there are pets involved like little Bonnie, who got herself into a tricky situation.

Luckily the crew from Mareeba Fire and Rescue Station were on hand to assist Sundance Veterinary Services with Bonnie's release, although she had to be sedated. Olive oil and a lot of patience also came in handy.



Mascot mania at the Cairns Show

The Cairns Show has been held in Cairns for more than 100 years and is one of the largest regional shows in Australia. This year, more than 70,000 visitors attended over the three days.

Along with operational Fire and Rescue Service crews based at the showgrounds and staff and volunteers at the QFES stand, there was a QFES kids' corner with mascots Blazer, Bushy and Paddy. The trio joined forces to keep the kids, parents and visitors entertained.

Under the watchful eye of a guide, the three mascots raced dodgem cars, danced, woodchopped and raced their way around the showground, taking in all the rides and sites the show had on offer.

Competition was fierce as they jostled for first place on motorised eskies around the Cairns racetrack. Paddy the Platypus was the winner, proving he can move just as well on dry ground as in the water.



NORTHERN REGION

Supporting the NTI Townsville 500

Townsville Fire and Rescue Service and Black River Rural Fire Brigade crews were on hand at Reid Park to provide support for three days of racing during the NTI Townsville 500 Supercars championship.

Crews provided a presence within the race track circuit for any alarm activations or fires on the track. Some QFES members also took on the role of fire marshal.



SES Magnetic Island exercise

State Emergency Service teams from Halifax, Clare, Charters Towers, Thuringowa and Townsville attended a regional training exercise on Magnetic Island in late June.

The crews took part in activities to enhance their land search and flood boat skills.



Celebrating decades of service

Congratulations to Inspector Dave Rutter and Acting Station Officer Steve Brown, who recently celebrated major milestones.

Northern Region personnel gathered together on two separate occasions to congratulate Dave on 30 years of service as a firefighter and Steve on 35 years of service.



Our Townsville

Townsville-based Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service personnel attended the Townsville City Council's 'Our Townsville' event at Anderson Gardens in June, helping to celebrate the city they call home.



Amazing Day Out

The crew from South Townsville Fire and Rescue Station visited the Amazing Grace Early Learning Centre to be part of the inaugural Amazing Day Out. Hosted by the Townsville Hospital's Brighter Lives Foundation, the event was for young burn victims and their families.





CENTRAL REGION



Captain Robbie Price retires after 37 years

Baralaba Fire and Rescue Station's Captain Robbie Price recently celebrated his retirement after 37 years of service.

Acting Inspector Scott Castree said, "Robbie has been a key figure in Baralaba for over 37

years and is so respected by his community that on Australia Day in 2022, he was awarded the Banana Shire Citizen of the Year, a shire of around 15,000 citizens."

Robbie has balanced his responsibilities as Captain with his work as Baralaba's only mechanic and fuel store. He received incredible support from his friend and workshop administration officer, Sharon Tucker.

Sharon was presented with an Assistant Commissioner's Certificate of Appreciation for her ongoing support to Baralaba Station.

Robbie recalled how he was recruited into what was then known as the Baralaba Fire Brigade. He was talking to the local fire officer, who received a fire call during their conversation and told Robbie to 'get on the back of the truck', a 1972 Ford F100. A now-iconic photo was snapped as he took off down the street to assist in his new role.

Robbie continued his role until the day before he turned 65 and immediately transitioned to Baralaba's Rural Fire Service. Scott said there was no sign of Robbie slowing down as he continued to do what he loved, supporting Baralaba and surrounding communities.



SES support the Big Red Bash

This year's Big Red Bash festival was a sell-out with about 10,500 tickets sold. Up to 5000 vehicles were expected to arrive in Windorah for the event.

Due to the risks from this influx of people, Central Region deployed two State Emergency Service teams for 12 days to provide support to the Windorah Group with traffic control and road crash rescue.

Seven members travelled more than 1000 kilometres to Windorah and, due to the forecasted weather conditions, they packed wet weather gear and were prepared to keep warm.



Preparations for fire season

Hazard mitigation, operational readiness and community preparedness are key considerations in the leadup to this year's bushfire season in Central Region.

The region has been working together with stakeholders to identify high-risk areas and mitigation strategies to reduce potential risks.

A part of these mitigation strategies is community education and engagement. In collaboration with key stakeholders, QFES has engaged with the community to discuss their local risks and how to best prepare for the upcoming fire season.

QFES services have collaborated with many stakeholders including brigades, local councils, First Nations and multicultural service providers and other emergency service partners to assist in community readiness.

Major events throughout the community have spread the message, including NAIDOC Week, multicultural group educational talks, emergency services days, community festivals, agricultural shows and Under Eight days.

The region has also prioritised operational readiness. In July, 32 QFES members participated in Level 2 Incident Management Training in Rockhampton to develop skills in managing larger scale incidents.



During the operation, the teams worked 610 hours and assisted with managing traffic queues more than two kilometres long, with up to 112 vehicles.

They also undertook the following tasks: five vehicles recovered, one missing persons search, one road traffic crash and one Queensland Ambulance Service assist.



NORTH COAST REGION

Guns and Hoses charity cricket match

The Police vs Fire ‘Guns and Hoses’ Charity Cricket Match was held at Tewantin Noosa Cricket Club in July.

Organised by Noosa Heads Station Officer Rob Frey in partnership with Matt Mayo from the Queensland Police Service (QPS), the charity match brought together local police officers and Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) staff for a friendly game of T20 cricket under the lights.

This year’s teams were also dotted with cricket stars, including Big Bash and Indian Premier League superstar Ben Laughlin.

The evening included displays from both FRS and QPS with gold coin entry and a barbeque, all raising funds for the Fire and Police Legacy.



The Great Nanny Race 2023

Members of the Maryborough Fire and Rescue Service team recently took on the Mayor of Fraser Coast Councillor George Seymour in the Great Nanny Race at the 2023 Mary Poppins Festival.

The festival celebrates the Mary Poppins novels and their author, PL Travers, who was born in Maryborough in 1899.

The races see participants pushing their pram along the road until they cross the finish line with their ‘charges’ undisturbed.

There is to be no running, pushing, crossing in front of other competitors, sticking with hat pins, poking with umbrellas or sledging and participants must always stay in charge of their prams.

With this year’s festival over, firefighters are already starting to practise their nanny racing skills ahead of the 2024 festival. Thank you to those who were involved on the day – a great show of sportsmanship in the community.



Recognising our own

Fire and Rescue Service medal ceremonies were recently held in Gayndah and Monto. Acting Assistant Commissioner Matthew Bulow and Acting Inspector and Area Commander Kev Bertwistle were honoured to present medals to the following auxiliary personnel:

- Lieutenant Cameron Zieth, –Monto Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal (10yrs)
- Firefighter Peter Sinclair, Monto Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal and 1st Clasp (20yrs)
- Firefighter Brett Elsaesser, Gayndah Fire and Rescue Station – National Medal (15yrs)
- Firefighter David Shepherd, Gayndah Fire and Rescue Station – 1st Clasp to National Medal (25yrs)
- Firefighter Leighton Kreis, Gayndah Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal (10yrs)
- Retired Captain Russell Baxter, Kilkivan Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal (10yrs)
- Acting Captain Brendan Linsket, Mundubbera Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal (10yrs)
- Firefighter Jimmy Wardell, Goomeri Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal (10yrs)
- Retired Firefighter Gregory Barnett, Monto Fire and Rescue Station – QFES Medal (10yrs).

Congratulations to all medal recipients.



BRISBANE REGION

Engaging with the Taiwanese community

QFES members shared information with 80 members of the Queensland Taiwanese Community Group of Seniors about fire safety and prevention in the home.

The group, who are aged from 60 to 90, meet weekly at Acacia Ridge where they invite guest speakers to educate, inform or entertain on various topics.

Firefighter Bri Ostapovitch, Acting Superintendent Tim Clark and Regional Community Engagement Coordinator Julie Ward attended the session and provided printed material in Simplified Chinese. The topics covered included how to call Triple Zero and the importance of smoke alarms and fire escape plans. An interpreter translated the session into Mandarin.



Three farewells

After 33 years of service, Brisbane Region HQ wished Acting Chief Superintendent Simon Ball all the best as he headed off on pre-retirement leave. Thank you Simon for your contribution to Brisbane Region operations and the Director Regional Operations role in the last two years. The region acknowledges Simon's commitment to ensuring a fitting acknowledgement each year at the Firefighter Remembrance Day Commemorative Service.

Congratulations also to Peter McVeigh on his retirement after 37 years of service. A morning tea was held for Peter at Taigum Fire and Rescue Station with Acting Assistant Commissioner Matthew Bulow, Superintendent David Brazel and about 30 well-wishers.

D Shift Mount Ommaney Fire and Rescue Station farewelled Station Officer Trevor Rush into a well-deserved retirement after a lifetime of service spanning 40 years. At a morning tea attended by family and friends, Assistant Commissioner John Cawcutt spoke about Trevor's long and distinguished career.

SERT exercise

QFES participated in an awareness exercise with the Queensland Police Service's Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) at Durack Fire and Rescue Station.

The exercise was designed to enhance interoperability between the two agencies when responding to unique and challenging situations. Participants shared and developed techniques to ensure a smooth joint response can be put into effect when required.



Chainsaw operators at the ready

Brisbane Region has a higher capability in chainsaw operations for the 2023 weather season, thanks to regional courses held in May and July that saw 30 new chainsaw operators ready for action.

The State Emergency Service Brisbane Region training team have built a strong relationship with PGL Kindilan Adventure Camp at Redland Bay, who have kindly donated the use of their facility to host these courses and provided a sustainable supply of trees.

As problem trees arise, PGL, along with local council, use their mapping programs to mark out which trees need to be removed. During the chainsaw course, participants remove the trees for practice and leave behind a pile of firewood for the school kids to use during camps.



SOUTH EASTERN REGION

Lamington National Park rescue

In July, a hiker was reported missing at Lamington National Park in the Scenic Rim after being separated from his friend. Emergency crews spent the next two days searching around the last known location.

Thanks to assistance from members of the public, the missing hiker was located, injured over a cliff. State Emergency Service (SES) crews administered first aid and kept the casualty calm while a Rescue 500 helicopter winched in a paramedic. The injured hiker was then loaded into a stretcher and carried to the winch site before being flown to hospital in a serious but stable condition.

The rescue was a great demonstration of interagency teamwork by SES, Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue Service, Rescue 500, Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Queensland Remote Area Tracking.



Third-generation firefighter

Melodee Mutzelburg graduated from the Auxiliary Recruit Training and Education Program in June at Beaudesert. Over the following nine days, she attended a structure fire, two road crash rescues, two automatic fire alarms and a vehicle fire.

Melodee has a lifelong family association with QFES and is a third-generation firefighter at Laidley Fire and Rescue Station. Melodee's grandfather Kelvin joined Laidley in 1961, became Captain in 1982 and retired in 1992. Melodee's father Ross joined Laidley in 1983 and is currently an Inspector in South Eastern Region.

Firefighting has changed over those years. In 1961, Laidley had a trailer pump that firefighters towed to fires with their private vehicles. By 1983 this had been replaced with 1972 Ford F250 pumper and a 1958 Land Rover pumper. Today, Laidley has two Type 2 appliances, one equipped with a Compressed Air Foam System and the other 4WD.



Emergency Services Cadets Commendation

Assistant Commissioner Kevin Walsh recently presented an Assistant Commissioner's Commendation to Bailey Muller from the Beaudesert Unit of the PCYC Emergency Services Cadets, for providing first aid and assistance at a road crash.

Bailey originally joined the Wolffdene Unit of the PCYC Emergency Services Cadets in 2018 and continued until he turned 18 in 2021, totalling three years as a cadet.

On 30 November 2021, Bailey was travelling in a vehicle with his mates when he came across a two-vehicle crash with a large tree over one of the vehicles. The driver, a male in his 60s, was still inside and appeared uninjured but visibly shaken.

Bailey stopped and provided first aid and reassurance to the driver until the arrival of 506A, giving a brief sitrep to the Station Officer upon his arrival. Bailey said he probably wouldn't have had the confidence to jump in and render assistance before his time with cadets.

He is still involved with cadets and is currently on course to become an adult leader with the Beaudesert Unit. He's also in the process of joining the Beaudesert Fire and Rescue Station as an Auxiliary Firefighter.

Your chance to join the SOC

Interested in contributing to deployments while expanding your skillset and supporting communities? Now's your chance to join the State Operations Centre's (SOC) flexible workforce.

The team in the SOC needs both corporate and operational staff, even during relatively quiet times or low-level deployments.

The SOC encourages managers across QFES to release their staff to work in the SOC, taking shifts on days off if they're shift workers or working with their manager to manage their workload.

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing said, "The SOC provides a terrific opportunity to work in a highly functioning team to support state-wide, interstate and international operations during disasters and incidents.

"Skills learnt while working in the SOC can be of benefit to any business unit or region. Staff can broaden their skillsets with meaningful nationally accredited courses, along with deployments to the Regional Operations Centre (ROC) or Incident Management Team to support interstate."

The SOC has had no shortage of deployments in recent years, including the NSW and ACT bushfires in 2019, the WA cyclones and bushfires, the NSW floods and the deployments to Canada this year.

The flexible workforce plays a big part in filling requests for assistance and making sure QFES staff and volunteers are well informed during deployments.

Even when a deployment or activation stops, the SOC continues to support the community through the recovery phase.

Chief Superintendent Mark Stuart, Acting Assistant Commissioner South Eastern Region, said he gladly allowed his staff to join the SOC flexible workforce.

"Apart from supporting the SOC, their work provides support to all seven regions of QFES," Mark said.

"This helps them maintain their skills in their given role, which benefits our region when we have a major event requiring Incident Command Centre (ICC) or ROC activation.

"The majority of South Eastern Region personnel who form part of the SOC flexible workforce undertake this work outside their normal rostered hours so there is minimal impact."

When you join the SOC workforce, their training provides all the necessary knowledge for your duties. The training is flexible, allowing you to complete it for the position and level of commitment that's right for you, including nationally accredited incident management courses.

The SOC's administrative tasks and activities across all functions require a lot of support to keep the centre functioning and supporting frontline personnel. These duties allow the corporate workforce to be directly involved in significant operations while using their skills in new and interesting ways.

Kay Krinke, Principal Policy Advisor, Royal Commission Implementation said joining the SOC flexible workforce gave her wider experience of operational and emergency management aspects of QFES.

"I have learnt a lot about the QFES operational response which gives me greater insights and context when returning to my corporate role," Kay said.

"Working in the SOC can be a fast-paced and challenging environment where time sensitivity, time management and workload prioritising is essential.

"You get a different experience seeing how QFES supports Queensland communities. Being a community-minded person, I find this extremely rewarding."

Inspector Douglas King, Manager BA Safety Equipment, became a member of the SOC flexible workforce because it allowed him to keep in touch with operations.

"Sometimes my 'day job' is about running the 'business' but this helps remind me what our 'business' is.

"It's satisfying that I'm helping and I enjoy the problem solving and working towards a common goal."

Station Officer Graham Wells was working at Kedron during a major event and stepped in to assist.

"I enjoyed the work and decided to keep coming back to assist. It was a great learning curve at the start as it gave me a different perspective from working on the frontline or in an ICC. I now have a better understanding of Incident Management at ICC, ROC and SOC level."



A cut above

A team of Toowoomba firefighters placed second overall in the highly competitive Australasian Rescue Challenge (ARC), which took place in Adelaide over June and July.

The three-day road crash rescue competition showcases emergency services expertise and teamwork, testing the participants' problem-solving abilities in high-pressure situations.

Twenty-three teams from Australia, England, Hong Kong and New Zealand participated in the challenge. This year QFES sponsored three teams to attend: Brisbane South, Toowoomba and Cairns. A fourth QFES team representing Brisbane self-funded their own attendance.

Station Officer and Toowoomba's team leader Mark Haddow said he was proud of his team.

"They performed brilliantly considering they'd never been exposed to a competition before as a team. Four out of the team of six are new members, and this was my first competition as team leader," Mark said.

"We've only been together since the start of May, so to achieve this result and have the Fire and Rescue Service and Toowoomba once again on the dais was very impressive."

As a seasoned ARC competitor, Mark used his experience to guide his team.

"I first competed in the Toowoomba team around 2004 when regional and state competitions were happening, and

I continued up until 2009 and finished on a high after we won the Australasian Challenge in Sydney. During that time, we also competed in World Rescue Challenges."

Firefighter Tom Patterson was the team's medic, and Senior Firefighters Ken Duncan and Matthew Kendall and firefighters Rachel Dove and Jason Ebnetter were the technicians.

The team competed in eleven events: two trauma, one industrial rescue, one CPR, four workshops and three rescue challenge events ('controlled', 'entrapped' and 'time critical').

The challenges replicated real crash scenarios that emergency services are called to. Cars were crushed in advance and actors role-played as car accident victims with realistic injuries.

"It was an unbelievable accomplishment considering most of the team had no idea of the stress and pressure that comes from these challenges."

The team drew on their day-to-day road crash rescue experience.

"Unfortunately, Queensland's road toll is the second highest in the country to date, and the importance of these challenges shouldn't be taken for granted," Mark said.

"All the experience and information gathered from the challenge filters through to the firefighters on shift – highlighting the most up-to-date techniques on extrication, vehicle technology and crew preparedness as well as ongoing training throughout the region."

Team members sacrifice their free time to prepare for the competition.

"Building a new team is a very challenging task. I'd like to acknowledge the Toowoomba Fire and Rescue team for all their hard work, including the support of senior management."

Mark said the team will be back for next year's challenge.

"We will keep pushing to improve on these results for next year and hopefully get the opportunity to represent QFES at the World Rescue Challenge in Luxemburg in April 2024, to show other countries what Queensland can do."

A living legacy

QFES was well-represented on the leader board, as Brisbane South finished sixth, Cairns finished eighth and Brisbane finished tenth.

Brisbane South's team leader Craig Barber said there were many benefits from competing.

"From being part of the learning symposium, then undertaking new skills, competing and meeting like-minded people – it's a great place for all participants to network, exchange ideas, build camaraderie and socialise at the formal dinner and award presentation," Craig said.

"My highlight was to watch the growth, teamwork and camaraderie from within our team.

"In the competition we were constantly under a time constraint to achieve an outcome but we remained controlled and measured in our operations."



Teams had 30 minutes to complete each challenge.



Games mark 10 years of cadets

2023 is the 10-year anniversary of the Emergency Services Cadets Program (ESC), a partnership between QFES and PCYC Queensland. It was only fitting that this year's Cadet Games were bigger and better than ever.

The one-day competition takes place in Townsville and Brisbane each year, thanks to funding from QFES and logistics from PCYC. Cadets compete from the PCYC Queensland Emergency Services Cadets, Rural Fire Service, Royal Australian Navy Cadets, Australian Army Cadets, Royal Australian Air Force Cadets and Military Cadets.

In the morning cadets participated in the squad challenge, which drew on skills developed in their training. The cadets broke into mixed teams in the afternoon to compete in three more challenges testing their ability to work with members of different agencies.

ESC Acting Program Manager Sue Bernard said the challenges included a follow-the-leader course, first aid relay, radio communications puzzle, bomb disposal scenario, knapsack challenge and crime scene observation.

"The Cadet Games are the ultimate gathering of cadets from all disciplines," Sue said.

"The challenges are based on the abilities of all types of cadets – some will excel in parade and marching, some will be outstanding at first aid, whereas others might have teamwork as their major strength."

A total of 31 teams made up of 186 cadets competed on the day, with about 62 leaders and 25 volunteer judges, plus families, catering staff, ESC staff and dignitaries.

"The atmosphere is one of fun and friendly competition," Sue said. "It's so good to see everyone getting along and helping each other."

"The chance to meet other cadets from different disciplines allows them to see what's different, but also what's the same about cadet life, no matter what service you participate in. Sometimes the interaction of different types of cadets can be the start of lifelong friendships."

Sue said everyone was happy to have participated, whether their team won or not.

"For me, a highlight was getting to shake the hands of every cadet who attended at the end when we were handing out the medal bars," she said.

"And also watching every cadet and mascot doing the Nutbush."

"It's been ten years of this program mentoring young people on how to be good humans. Nothing fills me with more joy than knowing we had a tiny part in assisting people with their goals of becoming emergency services personnel."

"I hope what we do gives them the confidence to help someone when the occasion arises, or the ability to assist their family in knowing what to do when a storm is approaching, or simply volunteering for something they wouldn't normally do. That's where the rewards are."



Emergency Services Cadets is a free program for young people aged 12 to 17.



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Top honours for community leaders

In June, Ashley Cupitt, Waine Scott and Graeme Hall were awarded an Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) for their dedication and hard work as part of the King's Birthday Honours List.

Ashley Cupitt AFSM OAM

Auxiliary Captain Ashley Cupitt has been with the fire service for more than 46 years. He is an inspirational leader to his station and community and mentors younger firefighters.



"Leadership to me is not telling or asking someone to do something I wouldn't do myself, setting a good example in and out of uniform, giving people guidance and helping them progress to the best of their ability," Ashley said.

"The most rewarding thing about my work is having the training and skills to be there for the community when they are having a bad day and there's something we can do to help.

"I have many memories but I would say the camaraderie and friendships I've made all through my service stand out the most – it's been great."

Ashley is also a Peer Support Officer (PSO), helping his colleagues during tough situations for 26 years.

"I joined the fire service before we had Peer Support and I saw some of my colleagues go through some stressful times," Ashley said.

"It was hard not knowing how to help them – we didn't know about PTSD then. When I was asked to be a PSO I could see it would be a great help for QFES.

"We have a great PSO network in our region and throughout our state. The Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) team are fantastic and I am very proud to be part of the team."

Ashley will officially hang up his yellow helmet at the end of the year.

"I'm not sure what's next just yet. I have been asked about staying on as an auxiliary support officer, also joining the Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service," Ashley said.

"But for now, I will focus on my boxing gym to help children and adults put their energy into sport."

In 2020, he received a Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division for his work as a captain and contributions to the local community.

Waine Scott AFSM

In 1985, Waine Scott joined the Cooberrie Rural Fire Brigade and has become a respected member of his local brigade, group and area.



"I was a teacher for 38 years and I've always had a drive to help people improve themselves. The Rural Fire Service (RFS) is a passion of mine and has given me the opportunity to train volunteers and continue my passion for teaching," Waine said.

During the devastating Cobraball fires in 2019, Waine drew on his history in the fire service to provide the Incident Control Centre with local knowledge.

On the day the fires started, Waine was training volunteers in P3 respirators before assisting the Incident Management Team's (IMT) operations function in Rockhampton.

"To listen to the volunteers, auxiliaries and firefighters on the radio and hear what they were experiencing, it painted a real picture of the impact the fire was having on my community," Waine said.

"I could hear what they were going through in my community, affecting my friends and family. As an IMT, the fire was moving too quickly for us to make any impact."

Waine works side-by-side with his family in the brigade.

"My wife, two daughters and son-in-law are all members of the brigade. My eldest daughter was the first female volunteer in Queensland to achieve level 2 fire training when she joined in 1999. My youngest daughter is an Area Training Support Officer.

"I am proud to work alongside them and it's a good feeling that they have the same drive to protect and support our community."

Waine and his wife, who returned from England the day the award was announced, spent time with family celebrating.

Medal of the Order of Australia recipients:

Leonard Kennedy OAM – Upper Flagstone RFB

Paul Kelly OAM – Mirani SES

Donald Stiller OAM – Guluguba Giligulgul RFB



Volunteer handlers and their dogs from the K9 Urban Search and Rescue team conducted abseiling training.



QFES members walked 110 kilometres during May to raise awareness of domestic and family violence as part of Darkness to Daylight.



Firefighters from Enoggera made a special visit to their local school on Under Eights day.



Fire and Rescue Service crews responded when a two-storey house was severely damaged by an explosion in Murrumba Downs.



QFES participated in this year's Push-Up Challenge to raise awareness for mental health. The team completed 35,874 push-ups and raised \$1,865 for November.



Firefighters brought big smiles to little faces on a visit to Townsville University Hospital's paediatric ward.



Twelve Rural Fire Service personnel completed the airbase operator course in Townsville.



Firefighters worked overnight to contain a large house fire at Indooroopilly. Witnesses pulled an occupant out of the house before emergency services arrived.



Technical Rescue Firefighters refreshed their vertical rescue skills at Kangaroo Point.



QUT hosted a delegation of public sector leaders from Vietnam and Laos.

Age is no barrier

Irene Talbot is the oldest female volunteer in Far Northern Region – but that’s not holding her back.

Irene, who recently celebrated her 91st birthday, was born in England and lived through World War II. At the age of 10, she was evacuated from London to Somerset by the British government, a measure taken to protect people from aerial bombings.

She has been a part of the Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade family since 2000. While Irene is no longer on hose duty, she’s still active in the brigade.

“While I’m a rural firefighter, I’m not on the trucks anymore but I help with lunches and supporting the crew,” Irene said. “I miss the camaraderie, but they bring me into it.

“They also say to me, ‘when are you going to slow down!’”

Irene regularly attends community days, such as Anzac Day, brigade open days and fundraisers. Her favourite community event is the annual Tablelands Toy Run, which organises donations for the Salvation Army’s Christmas appeal.

The event, which kicks off at Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade, sees motorbike riders deliver toys and non-perishable food to the local Salvation Army.

“I love the noise when the motorbike riders leave.”

Irene is one of the few female volunteers who are over 90 years old in the Rural Fire Service (RFS). She encourages the next generation of female volunteers and is proud her brigade has a high female representation.

“It’s important to recruit the next generation as they will ‘pass it on’ as well,” Irene said.

“We’re a big family brigade and many parents bring their young children along to brigade training and events. Out of 32 brigade members, there are nine sets of families who volunteer.

“I also have a great relationship with the younger brigade members – they’re wonderful.”

Outside of volunteering, Irene is part of the local women’s club ‘SWELL’ (senior women enjoying later life) and up until recently, played lawn bowls regularly.

A memory that stands out from her 22 years as a volunteer is responding to a fire near the local pistol club.

“We were extinguishing a fire near the gun club just across the paddock and all these bullets were exploding as we were fighting the fire.

“They think the bullets were left over from the old army base camps around Atherton.”

Thanks to her extensive 48-year career as a nurse, she is the ‘unofficial’ first aid officer of the brigade.

For her dedication to ethical service and the RFS, Irene was awarded the Diligent and Ethical Service Medal and first and second clasp and the National Medal.

“I felt very honoured to receive these awards, I didn’t expect it. You need to live the values – I felt very honoured to get them and I can’t explain how grateful I feel.”

In her spare time, Irene enjoys knitting and walking around Lake Tinaroo with her daughter.



Irene is passionate about supporting the next generation of female volunteers.



At 91, Irene Talbot is an active volunteer with the Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade.



Working ca-nine to five

After two years of consistent hard work, Allison and her dog Sami recently passed their Canine Urban Search and Rescue (K9 USAR) assessment.



Allison and Sami join a small team of volunteer handlers who form part of the AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART). DART volunteers deploy interstate and internationally to assist after earthquakes, cyclones and other disasters.

“A friend was training with the K9 team and suggested it might be something Sami and I would be interested in,” Allison said.

Allison has a background in international human resources, training and development, and business operations in the hospitality industry.

“I run my own business developing and validating training assessments and resources for small businesses and training organisations,” Allison said.

“The many skills I learnt from various workplaces, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, patience and tenacity, help me contribute to the K9 team and training Sami.”

Sami is a Portuguese Water Dog, a breed which is easily trained in obedience and agility skills. Traditionally, they worked alongside fishers to herd and catch fish, retrieve broken nets and carry messages from one ship to another.

The final test

For the foundation skills assessment, Sami searched a rubble pile and located two ‘casualties’. She also completed several other elements including obedience and agility work.

“Search and rescue work requires the handler and canine to work together as a team, with the handler supporting the canine by giving instructions and directions from a distance,” Allison said.

“This requires a great deal of trust from both parties and it has increased the bond Sami and I have.”

The K9 USAR team have a different capability to traditional land search squads, as USAR dogs are trained to detect people they’ve never smelt before.

USAR dogs are taught to sniff out live scent that may be unresponsive or trapped under rubble. When the person is located, the dog remains at the scene and barks continuously until their handler arrives.

Both the handler and dog continue their training after passing the foundation assessment. The K9 team trains together one day every weekend and one night every fortnight at the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy in Brisbane.

“Sami and I train together several times a week besides the time we spend in formal training with the team. This might include teaching a new skill or practising and improving learned skills.

“I might ask Sami to jump up on a fallen tree while out walking to practise her agility skills, perform an emergency stop when she’s at a distance or walk at heel.”

At formal training, the handler pretends to be a casualty. They climb into holes, over rubble, up into rafters or hide in cupboards or car boots.

Allison and Sami previously trained in obedience, agility, tricks, jetty jumping, tracking and noseworks before they found their love for K9 USAR.

“While we trained in these dog sports, we didn’t compete. I’ve competed with previous dogs and I decided I just wanted to have fun with Sami and avoid the stress of competitions,” Allison said.

“The best part about training in K9 USAR is working together with Sami on a real job rather than competing for trophies. It’s amazing to watch the handlers and dogs develop the skills to effectively search disaster areas.”

Sami is also a qualified therapy dog and makes regular visits to a mental health facility.

“This requires her to be cuddled and stroked sometimes by people who can be unpredictable. Sami loves these visits.”

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