

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE OCTOBER 2023



Sky-high view
Aircraft on the fire line

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ON THE COVER

Aircraft are supporting ground crews at bushfires across Queensland, including this one at Calavos. Photo by Ben Macht.

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QFES acknowledges and recognises Traditional Owners as custodians of the lands where we work together with the communities of Queensland. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors of these lands, their spirits and their legacy.

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FOREWORDS



GREG LEACH AFSM

Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

From my in-field visit to the Incident Control Centre at Boonah in my first week as QFES Commissioner in December 2019, I was impressed with QFES members' dedication to Queensland's communities.

Since then, my respect for your skills, resourcefulness and dedication has only deepened.

This will be my last foreword for *Response*, as I'll be leaving QFES at the end of October to take up the role of Chief Executive Officer at Victoria SES.

Working at QFES has challenged me, inspired me and most of all it has filled me with pride toward the wonderful staff and volunteers I've worked with.

More than anything I've enjoyed travelling from region to region, meeting so many of you face-to-face and hearing your stories of resilience. You have always inspired me to work harder and do more for the people of Queensland.

Part of what drew me to QFES was the organisation's terrific reputation with the community. The people of Queensland place their trust in you because they know when disaster strikes they can turn to you for help.

We have also experienced our share of tragedy with the loss of our colleagues, SES volunteer Merryl Dray and First Class Firefighter Izabella (Izzy) Nash. We were all touched by those losses, because in many ways the emergency services is one big family.

I am proud of the work we've done to advance our organisation, from incorporating First Nations knowledge into bushfire management, developing our new mental health strategy, sharing our expertise with our counterparts in Papua New Guinea, and hosting national conferences such as AFAC23.

A special experience for me was representing the state government as the Government Champion for Coen. It was a privilege to advocate for their community.

It's the people at QFES I'll miss the most – people doing everything they can to help, rolling up their sleeves on dark days and doing what needs to be done. It will always be a source of inspiration for me.

It has been an honour to serve as your Commissioner.

Thank you and stay safe.



MIKE WASSING AFSM

Deputy Commissioner

READINESS AND RESPONSE SERVICES

I want to express my gratitude to Commissioner Leach for his courageous and clear-sighted leadership through four years of challenges and opportunities.

He has consistently led by example and at the heart of everything he does is a deep-rooted respect for emergency services personnel. He has helped our organisation advance toward a more sustainable future and he has faced challenges with courage and respect.

On a personal note, I will miss the humble generosity he brought to every interaction with people at all levels of the organisation. I feel privileged to have worked alongside him and I wish him all the best in his new role.

Our people are the most important part of our organisation, which is why it's important to take the time to acknowledge them.

During State Emergency Service (SES) Week, we said thank you to our SES volunteers. I'm glad we had one last chance to celebrate our SES colleagues before they move across to the Queensland Police Service (QPS). Read more on page 14.

I also acknowledge our disaster management personnel as they transition to QPS at the end of October. Regardless of which department personnel fall under, they will always be driven by their passion for helping others in need.

On Yellow Ribbon Day, we acknowledged the hard work and resilience of our Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers.

Hundreds of fires have burnt across Queensland already this season. Our people are always ready but being prepared is also the community's responsibility. Encouraging Queenslanders to complete their Bushfire Survival Plan is so important. Read more about our bushfire response on page 4.

On the 10th of this month, QFES members across the state gathered to pay their respects to firefighters who lost their lives on duty.

It was with great sadness that we added another name to the Honour Roll: First Class Firefighter Izzy Nash, who sustained critical injuries at the Slacks Creek fire. Our thoughts are with her partner Bec, her family, as well as her crewmate, Senior Firefighter Lia Drew, who suffered serious injuries and continues to recover.

A lot of work has been done over the last few months to progress the QFES Reform in line with the 1 July 2024 deadline for the new Queensland Fire Department.

It's a busy time and I want to encourage everyone to be mindful of fatigue and practise empathy towards each other while we work through this complex process.



Battling the bushfires

With major bushfires burning across Queensland, our people are on the ground keeping communities safe.

Driven by high winds and heat from El Niño, fires first broke out in southern Queensland before spreading further north.

The AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook suggested we're facing a much more active season than recent years. While the La Niña brought plenty of rain, many areas have since dried out.

As temperatures continue to rise, our people will always be ready, but being bushfire prepared is a community effort.

If you work or live in a bushfire-prone area, now is the time to remind your community of the importance of having a bushfire survival plan.

Air support

In preparation for bushfire season, QFES bolstered its aerial fleet with three more aircraft, including a specialised intelligence-gathering aircraft and two waterbombers.

The Large Air Tanker (LAT) touched down in early September, and a UH-60 Black Hawk also joined the fleet for the first time since the 2019 season.

The Black Hawk offers greater speed and endurance and can carry up to 4000 litres. Both the LAT and the Black Hawk are based in Bundaberg and were used within a week of their arrival.

QFES' aerial fleet now includes 13 aircraft contracted for the fire season, with about 150 more planes and helicopters on call if needed.

Our airbases have also improved their processes and now use a Retardant and Suppressant Computerised Aircraft Loading (RASCAL) system to load retardant more safely and accurately into the aircraft.

Hard scrabble

Noel Walker, First Officer of Lamb Island Rural Fire Brigade, was deployed as a Strike Team Leader to a huge fire west of Cecil Plains in early September.

The fire burnt about 22,000 hectares of bush in the Kumbarilla State Forest after being sparked by a lightning strike. Just a week before, another fire nearby had forced the township of Tara to be evacuated.

"It was a large fire with the potential of being very serious," Noel said. "When we got there, the fire had already wiped out 4500 hectares.

"The bush was tinder dry. It was shocking country, the kind I call hard scrabble.

"A lot of dead gumtrees started burning on the inside. We call them candle trees – the fire burns through the middle and comes out the top, with six- to seven-foot flames and showers of live embers."

Noel's strike team consisted of six firefighters from the southern Moreton Bay islands and six from brigades around Caboolture.

"We had three medium attack vehicles, two light attacks and an 81 command vehicle," he said.

"There were 86 firefighters in total, including seven crews from Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as five trucks from the Fire and Rescue Service and six trucks from Rural Fire Service (RFS) North Coast.



“Between the fire and Cecil Plains was a dingo fence, and we had to stop the fire jumping the fence, because it would take us too long to drive down and reach a gate. The dingo fence was six or seven feet tall and electrified, so we couldn’t touch it or get water on it.”

Aircraft, including the LAT, supported the firefighters by quelling outbreaks with waterbombing.

“The aircraft also supplied us with photographic maps of the fire area,” Noel said. “That was a big factor in making the deployment a success, because we could see exactly where the fire had burnt.”

As the Strike Team Leader, Noel liaised with the Incident Management Team (IMT) in Dalby, the forward control at Cecil Plains Fire and Rescue Station and the Sector Commander at the fire.

“They shared information about the fire with me and I looked at the site and decided where to put trucks, what areas to avoid and so on.

“My job was to look after my crew the whole time, like making sure they were fed and got enough rest, and if anything went wrong I reported it back up to the IMT. We had an excellent IMT – they were so cooperative and solved any issue we raised with them.”

Night shift

Noel’s strike team was on night shift, the first time he’d worked nights on a deployment.

“I’ve done six or seven deployments, including to Canberra and NSW during the 2019-20 bushfires, but night shift was very different,” Noel said. “At night there are usually only two teams working in each sector, so you’re not exactly on your own but you don’t have a lot of support.

“The first night was freezing – only one degree – but we were so busy we didn’t notice.

“We blacked out the areas burnt during the day so they didn’t jump containment lines. The number of trees falling was a big danger. Normally when you black out you go 30 metres in, but at night and with trees falling, we only went about five metres in. As Strike Team Leader, I kept everyone working in pairs.”

It was hard for the night shift crews to see where they were driving, a significant challenge since they were using roads pushed by bulldozers the week before.

“The roads – I use the term loosely – were really just firebreaks. There were no maps or anything.

“The bulldust was terrible. When the graders dug the road, they broke up the crust on top of the earth and it became a fine sandy mess, as deep as a metre.

“If you hit a bulldust pit in a medium-attack vehicle, you can lock your tires, put your foot down and get through it, but if you stop or change gears you just sink down into the bulldust. One truck got bogged and it took some work to get it out.

“Those night shifts wear you down. We got back from the fire line just before sunrise and tried to get some sleep at a mining camp at Dalby, but we were full of adrenaline.

“After three or four days of that, you’re really buggered. Getting to the end of the deployment was magic.

“You’ve just got to roll with the punches. The situation can change in an hour. All sorts of things can happen – accidents, injuries – and you have to be prepared. If the Strike Team Leader says get out of there, you don’t question it, you just get out of there.



“My team members had been on other deployments together, so we got on extremely well and I was really impressed with everyone’s work.”

Ticking timebomb

During the week Noel and his team were fighting the fire, it burnt about 7000 hectares. After firefighters eventually managed to extinguish it, they left the land in the care of Queensland National Parks.

“That fire spread so quickly, it just went crazy,” Noel said. “I think we’re in for a very serious fire season.”



The Large Air Tanker assisted ground crews at a fire in Kinkuna. Photo by Ben Macht.

“But QFES is well organised. The Regional Operations Centre in Toowoomba was well prepared, even before they put out the call for strike teams, so we hit the ground running.

“Here on the islands, we have four brigades and we’re organising training for volunteers who want to go on deployments. It will help them know what to expect, because deployments involve a different kind of firefighting – on the islands, we mainly respond to house fires.

“If you go on a deployment thinking it’s going to be the same as fighting fires at your local station, it ain’t. But when the call comes, our crews will be ready.”



Air support played a crucial role at the Kinkuna fire. Photo by Ben Macht.



More than a dozen RFS crews had help from the skies as they worked to contain a 330-hectare fire in pine forest near Duckinwilla.



RFS volunteers have already fought hundreds of fires across the state.



A fire in Bybera burnt more than 16,000 hectares. Photo by Cambooya Rural Fire Brigade.

AFAC comes to Brisbane

QFES proudly hosted this year's Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) conference over three days in Brisbane, for the first time since 2016.

AFAC23 explored the theme of 'Creating a sustainable future: the challenges and opportunities'.

As Australasia's largest emergency management conference, AFAC23 welcomed delegates from emergency services, government, research, academia, and equipment and service businesses. The exhibition featured hundreds of local and international exhibitors across 15,000 square metres.

A highlight for QFES was signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Fire Service to build on our long-standing partnership and improve community safety in PNG.

Commissioner Greg Leach delivered a keynote speech on building a sustainable fire service that meets current and future needs. Other QFES presentations included heatwave impact forecasting, a hydrogen framework, the Karuk Women's Training Exchange and creating psychological safety in the workplace.

The speed of trust

Central Region Community Engagement Officer Julianne Webster-Scott was presented with the AFAC People First Award during the conference.

Julianne is the Chair of the Regional Community Engagement Network. She took part in developing QFES' Regional Community Engagement Strategy and Regional Multicultural Action Plan, among other initiatives.

"I joined QFES in 2006 because I thought it would be rewarding to go to work every day knowing you were helping people," she said.

"My role is to help our region develop community engagement strategies to assist our communities to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

"It's about understanding the complexity of our communities, their awareness of the potential risks and what they're capable of doing."



Julianne was honoured for helping to create a safe, capable, diverse workforce.

Julianne said she listened to the wants and needs of our people and partners to create collaborative projects.

"It's been fantastic to see ideas from our people on the ground become state-wide initiatives," she said.

"I'm proud of our people in the community engagement networks and groups. It's an inclusive environment and we try to have members who reflect our community.

"The most rewarding part of my role is when I see people passing on the correct information to others – community helping community.

"I'd like to thank all our people and partners who have participated in our community engagement networks, event management teams and community engagement working groups over the years for their passion towards their communities.

"Building relationships and connections with people takes time. Progress moves at the speed of trust."

An advocate for women

The Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFA) conference was held concurrently with AFAC. WAFA23 had a strong focus on recruiting women to the fire and emergency services.

The event also recognised women already working within our services, and QFES Superintendent Peta Miller-Rose received the WAFA Champion of Change Award.

Peta has been part of QFES for many years across several roles, including as a Rural Fire Service volunteer and support member, and an auxiliary firefighter at Beaudesert. Peta has tirelessly advocated for and mentored women in QFES.

Thank you to everyone from QFES who worked behind the scenes to make the conference a success.



WAFA President and QFES Area Commander Quinn Cramer presented at WAFA23.



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Take Charge campaign kicks off

QFES has launched a public safety advertising campaign to highlight the risks of Rechargeable Lithium-Ion Batteries (RLIB) and how to charge them safely.

RLIBs store more energy in less space than traditional batteries, but if not charged safely they can cause intense fires and explosions.

Sales of RLIBs are increasing rapidly, from e-bikes and scooters to phones, laptops and power tools. RLIBs are also found in larger systems such as solar power and grid-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

According to the Battery Stewardship Council, RLIB sales will increase from about 200,000 in 2020 to 750,000 in 2044.

Last year, QFES attended 108 fires caused by RLIBs. So far this year (up to 26 September), crews have already attended 98 fires.

The outcomes of RLIB fires can be tragic. In March 2022, after a scooter battery started a fire in a caravan at Logan Central, a young man lost his life protecting his pregnant partner from the flames.

Industrial systems like BESSs can also be affected. In late September, firefighters responded to a Tesla battery on fire at the \$60 million Bouldercombe Battery Project near Rockhampton, but received advice from Tesla representatives and the site's Emergency Management Plan to let the affected battery module burn out, while cooling adjoining modules to prevent fire spread. This is typical of the recommended firefighting strategy in these types of facilities.

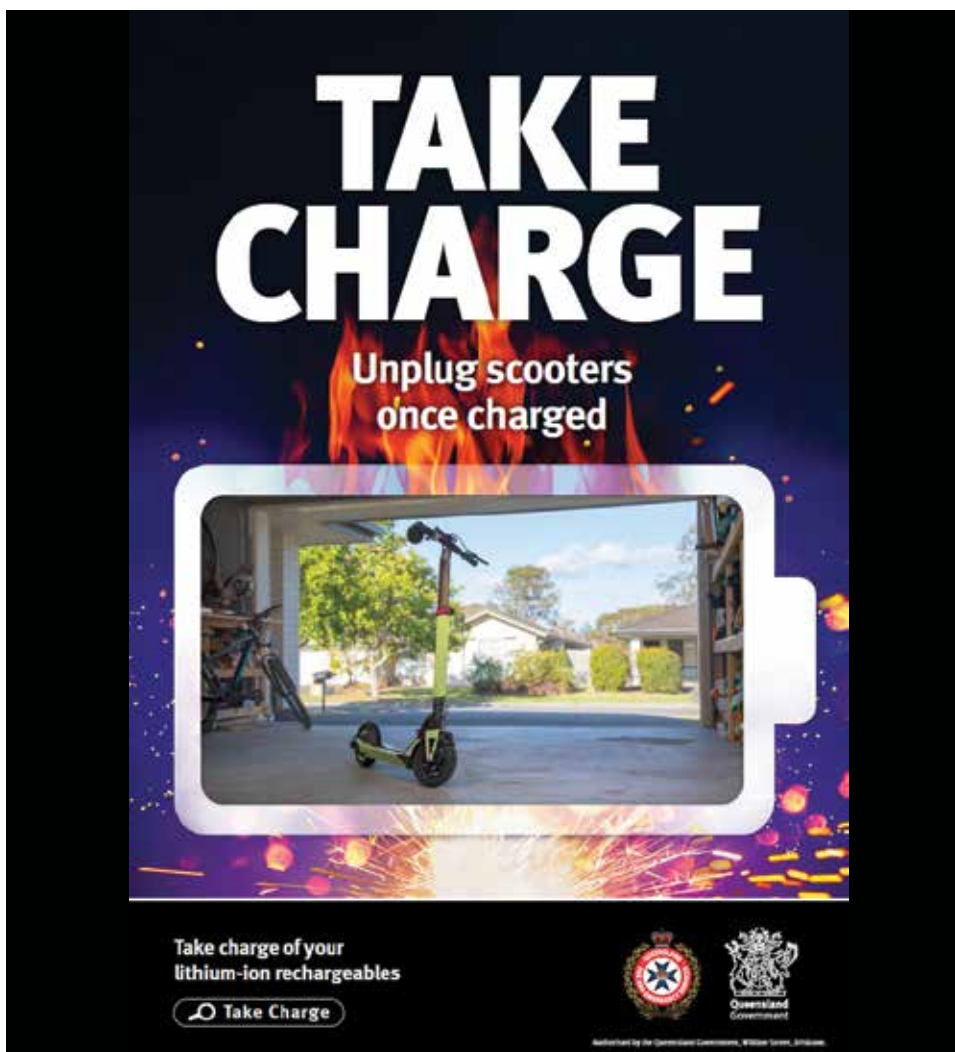
Take charge

QFES research found that many Queenslanders don't understand the dangers of RLIB devices and don't charge them safely.

For example, 78 per cent of Queenslanders leave RLIB devices charging when they leave the house or go to sleep, and almost 50 per cent charge devices on soft surfaces or in sunlight.

The ad campaign shows three examples of how to charge your devices safely: charge in the shade, charge on hard surfaces, and charge to full and unplug.

Ads will appear on YouTube, catch-up TV, billboards, radio, Facebook and Instagram and other channels.



Reported lithium-ion battery incidents

165

incidents in NSW in 2022, resulting in 14 injuries

216

e-bike/scooter incidents in New York in 2022, with six fatalities and 147 injuries

116

e-bike/scooter incidents in London in 2022

3,777

e-bike fires in the first quarter of 2022 in China

63

Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) failures globally since 2011

17

other energy storage system failures (transport, manufacturing, recycling)

*Figures from presentation by Fire and Rescue NSW at AFAC23.



Lessons learnt about lithium-ion batteries

An incident at Griffith University's Nathan campus in March 2020 underscored the potential dangers of rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (RLIB) and QFES learnt many important lessons as a result.

The risk is real

Firefighters responding to RLIB fires can encounter many hazards, from toxic vapours to stranded electrical energy. Fires can take a long time to extinguish and even then, they can re-ignite.

Explosions came from a battery room on level five of the Sir Samuel Griffith Centre, a self-sufficient building powered by solar and hydrogen. A 200-square-metre solar array on the roof charged 1,024 lithium-ion batteries.

Station Officer Craig Barber said when he and other firefighters arrived around 9pm, smoke was issuing from the building along with an acrid electrical smell.

"From the road we could see fire coming from the battery room's double-doors," Craig said.

"We proceeded to Level Five equipped with BA and attack packs. Yellow flames pulsed from the base of the door and black smoke pumped from a side vent. At 9:15pm there was an explosion, a high-intensity flash."

They didn't yet know batteries were involved.

"The other firefighters struck the door with a sledgehammer," Craig said. "The door flexed and blue-green flames pulsed out, but the door was too strong.

"They eventually managed to get it open with a disc cutter, even though the door was thicker than the blade."

The firefighters cut an inverted V into the base of the door and sprayed water into the room.

"The firefighters went about a metre inside to suppress the fire," Craig said. "There were no flames but the room was filled with heavy black smoke so they withdrew."



The fire broke out on the fifth floor of a self-sufficient building at Griffith University.

While they retreated, the firefighters stopped spraying water for about 30 seconds. That was enough for another explosion to happen at 9:44pm.

"Our crews stopped firefighting due to large amounts of electrical arcing," Craig said. "There was another, smaller explosion at 9:53pm. Five minutes later we isolated the power and started gas cooling."

Gas cooling is a technique used for compartment fires with no external ventilation. It consists of a wide, high-pressure spray pattern with intermittent pulses of water. This helps stop the smoke plume from igniting.

Even though the building had been disconnected from the grid, there was still a huge amount of stored energy in the batteries. Just after 10:20pm, a large explosion knocked over two firefighters.

"Our crews withdrew to a safe location and we took the injured firefighters to a Queensland Ambulance Service first aid base," Craig said.

"The Research and Scientific Branch advised the batteries would continue to flashover, so our crews remained in defensive mode outside the room. It wasn't until 10:55pm that we managed to put the fire out."

Too close for comfort

The firefighters knocked over by the explosion were Senior Firefighter Paul Eccleston and Firefighter James Harris.

"Shortly after we arrived, the first flash occurred and we were tasked with protecting the other firefighters," Paul said. "The fire had flashed twice on them before we relieved them and took over.

"James crouched with the branch behind the left door, which was secured. I stood behind the right door and opened it so James could gas cool the room.

"We did this two or three times and then James checked the room with a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC).

"The TIC showed we'd cooled down part of the room but there was still significant heat behind the left door. We were directing our water farther to the left when the room exploded.

"The door I was behind was already open, so the explosion threw me back and I lost my helmet, but I wasn't thrown as far or as violently as James."

Senior Firefighter Brett Gehrke was two or three metres behind Paul and James.

"Without any obvious warning signs, the room flashed, bursting open the double doors and knocking James about two metres onto his back," Brett said.



“The explosion wasn’t like any flashover or backdraught I’d seen. It was reminiscent of the gas explosions created at the Live Fire campus – violent but short lived, bright orange and red in colour.

“Once we removed Paul and James, we forced back the left door and applied water at an acute angle.”

Crews remained in defensive mode outside the room. It wasn’t until 10:55pm that they put the fire out.

A pivotal event

Building Approvals Officer Chris Markwell reviewed the incident at Griffith University, focusing on Fire Investigation and Building Fire Safety outcomes.

“It’s one of the major incidents of this type to occur on Australian soil,” Chris said. “It was a pivotal fire event for QFES and we learnt valuable lessons for the wider fire services.”

He said the explosion that knocked over the firefighters projected five to seven metres out of the doors.

“The only thing that stopped the firefighters going over the edge of the building was a balustrade.

“It was lucky they were crouched down because most of the blast wave went over their heads.

“Both of them were hospitalised with concussion and were off for a couple of weeks.”

Chris said there was no signage to warn firefighters about the batteries, because it wasn’t a legal requirement at the time.

“RLIB incidents are causing firefighters massive logistical complexities,” he said.

“We know one of the batteries in the room went into thermal runaway and produced a massive off-gassing of fumes, which set off a smoke detector.

“Seven seconds later, the battery system reported a voltage drop in the battery, which led to a short circuit and a heat-producing reaction.

“The battery racks were stacked vertically, which allowed the heat to rise in a V pattern, exposing more batteries.

“About nine seconds later, a temperature sensor on the roof recorded 110 degrees and then stopped working. We later found it melted off the ceiling on the floor.

“After the fire was out, TICs indicated the batteries remained unstable for several hours, with the potential to reignite.”

Keeping firefighters safe

QFES remained on site for 12 hours after suppressing the fire.

“The scientific team conducted atmospheric sampling and sampled the fire stream runoff to establish contamination levels,” Chris said.

Over seven days, QFES worked with Griffith University to monitor the temperature of the remaining batteries, de-energise the electrical infrastructure, assess the building’s structural integrity and laser-clean all surfaces in the battery room.

“By our estimates, only about 10 per cent of the fuel load in the battery room was involved in fire, so if we hadn’t intervened, the fire may have caused major damage to the building,” Chris said.

“Firefighters should be aware of any changes in the smoke plume or rate of fire development when engaging with RLIB fires.

“A high level of personal protection is really important. The chemical residues from the battery room fire were hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride, sulphur dioxide, sulphur cyanide and carbon monoxide.

“Anything recovered from the site also has significant transportation and long-term storage issues.”

Chris said that after the battery room fire, the Community Infrastructure Branch engaged with legislators to review Building Code requirements for BESS installations.

“This incident prompted a review of National Construction Code (NCC) Performance Requirements for the things a building design should include to keep occupants and firefighters safe,” he said.

“The risk profile of these battery systems has not been fully evaluated by existing NCC requirements. The review is ongoing, with all fire services across Australia involved.

“QFES also has a working group reviewing exposure risk to firefighters from all types of infrastructure for alternative and renewable energy.

“The lessons fire services across the country have learnt about RLIBs can contribute to increased safety for firefighters when facing these types of incidents.”



The explosion was caused by the batteries producing hydrogen gas as they decomposed.



The atmosphere was suffused with fumes from the spirits. Images sourced from the State Library of Queensland.

Blue fire in Bundaberg

A distillery struck by lightning, flames lashing the sky, a river running with flame. One of the strangest and most dramatic fires in Queensland history was at the Bundaberg Rum distillery in 1936.

Incorporated in 1888, the Bundaberg Distilling Company's factory and bond store were situated on the bank of the Burnett River, beside the Millaquin Sugar Mill.

The distillery was destroyed by fire in 1907 and was out of action for seven years, partly because rum must be distilled for at least two years before it's ready for market.

The distillery burnt down a second time when it was hit by a lightning bolt on the evening of 21 November 1936.

A finger of fire

"The rising land from the river-bank, known in the district as Magnetic Hill, had always been an attraction for lightning, and on this night a great bolt flashed down, touching the distillery with its finger of fire," reported the Sydney Morning Herald.

A blaze started in the woodwork of the building's eastern corner.

The general manager, Mr G. S. Moore, lived about 70 metres away. The Courier-Mail described how he "ran into the building

with a night watchman, and together they vainly endeavoured to quell the outbreak. They were joined by others, but their task was hopeless, and the fire quickly spread to vats of rum."

The distillery contained 63 wooden vats, each holding 10,000 gallons (45,000 litres), along with hundreds of smaller drums of denaturant, a substance used in distilling.

The alcohol fed the flames and, in the words of the Townsville Daily Bulletin, "In a few minutes the whole of the distillery was a raging inferno."

According to The Courier-Mail, there were "flames leaping hundreds of feet into the air. Exploding drums of denaturant and spirit boomed like huge guns, each explosion sending sheets of iron and other debris into the air."

Help arrives

The Bundaberg Fire Brigade was established in 1884 under the Fire Brigades Act 1881. Queensland's first Rural Fire Board formed nine years before the

distillery fire, but it was suspended in 1931 due to the Great Depression and didn't reform until 1948.

In the meantime, the Bundaberg Fire Brigade continued to keep people in the area safe. The brigade sent two fire trucks to control the flames at the distillery, with firefighters working up to 11 hours at a time.

Thousands of spectators gathered and police cordoned off the area to protect them from the intense heat.

The Townsville Daily Bulletin noted how, "The spirit burned furiously and defied

"While the spirit burned, the whole river from bank to bank was covered by a low curtain of flickering blue flame."

– The Sydney Morning Herald, 21 September 1946



the Herculean efforts of the fire brigade, engineers, police and hundreds of civilians, who were powerless to subdue the outbreak in the distillery and concentrated their efforts upon the adjoining buildings.”

The firefighters were helped by the wind, which blew in the opposite direction as they sprayed the buildings with water. They saved the general manager’s home, the boiler and engine room, and three molasses tanks with a combined capacity of two-and-a-half million gallons (more than 11 million litres).

When the distillery’s metal chimney threatened to fall on the other buildings, the firefighters and engineers had no choice but to demolish it.

“The towering iron smoke stack, 80ft. high, and weighing 30 tons, endangered the machinery room,” The Courier-Mail stated. “Engineers, with the aid of a traction engine, pulled it down. This was a big undertaking, within the danger zone of the fire and the explosive material.”

After three hours the fire started to die down, but it wasn’t until midnight that firefighters brought it under control, and even then the spirits burnt brightly.

The building was in ruins, its brickwork crumbled from the heat, the distilling room a mass of wrecked pipes and twisted iron.

River of spirits

It wasn’t just the buildings that were damaged. Burning spirits from the vats flowed into the Burnett River, setting wharfs alight.

The News and Mail wrote: “Thousands of gallons of spirit flowed with the waters of the Burnett, which was a seething mass of blue flame.”

Rather poetically, the Daily Times Bundaberg observed that, “Strong men stood with bowed heads and a suspicion of a tear in their eyes as they watched the bubbling toddy just stream past them.”

The Sydney Morning Herald reported that, “The next day was a Sunday that will never be forgotten in Bundaberg. All the fish in the Burnett were drunk on proof rum!

“From 200lb gropers out of the holes under the railway bridge, to inch-long sprats from the gravel shallows, the fish floated on the river, some turning over and over slowly,

but most just floating. Every serviceable boat for miles around was pressed into service, and fish was on every table in the district.”

According to the Daily News and Mail, “For miles, both banks of the river were strewn with thousands of dead fish of all sizes and varieties. There was quite a collection of catfish, stingray and other suchlike vermin,

“By the time fire engines arrived, the situation was hopeless. The bond stores were an inferno, the roof had fallen and exploding drums of methylated spirits were sending flames into the air. Sheets of galvanised iron were red hot and they were shooting up in the air like pieces of paper.”

– Daily News and Mail, 23 November 1936

including sharks, but there were also fine specimens of salmon, barramundi and cod.”

Locals fried up the fish on the hot coals of the distillery.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported that, “Men with an eye to business hurriedly knocked up cases and bags of salt, and tons of fish were railed south to the Brisbane market.



Fish killed by burning spirits washed up on the bank.

“But the bonanza was over in 24 hours ... the weather was very hot. Soon, all hands were feverishly digging to bury the fish, which were already making life in the nearby houses of Bundaberg unbearable.”

The price tag

No-one was killed or seriously injured in the fire, but a firefighter sprained his ankle. The damage amounted to £200,000.

Based on The Courier-Mail’s figures, the commercial value of rum at the time was £2 a gallon retail and methylated spirit was worth 2/6 a gallon.

Thus, according to the Townsville Daily Bulletin, “the potential loss of rum, had it actually gone into consumption and the duty been charged, would have been about £2,000,000.”

The company received £145,000 in insurance, which covered the buildings, equipment and a year of lost profit. According to The Courier-Mail, it was the largest insurance payout in Queensland history, except for the Millaquin Sugar Mill, which was destroyed by fire in 1927.

Three years later the distillery was rebuilt on the site where it operates today.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, “The biggest loser was the Federal Government, which lost £750,000 in excise on the spirit which had flowed into the Burnett.”



The bond store being struck by lightning.



Three men, possibly refinery workers, survey the aftermath of the fire. Images sourced from the State Library of Queensland.



Best and brightest of the SES

This State Emergency Service (SES) Week, the last before the SES joins the Queensland Police Service, we celebrated our SES staff and volunteers for supporting Queensland communities.

Over the past 12 months, SES members completed more than 92,000 hours of operations and 330,000 hours of training, administration and other tasks.

Many of those hours were spent during the floods in Northern, Far Northern and Central Queensland early this year. SES volunteers also deployed to flooded communities in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

The SES Week Awards recognised volunteers and units who went above and beyond the call of duty. *Response* spoke with four of them about their work with their communities.

Thank you to our SES Principal Community Partner Suncorp, and to all SES staff and volunteers for the wonderful work you do.

Sidrah Harcourt Young Member of the Year

Since joining the service at age 21, Sidrah has played a pivotal role in mentoring new recruits for the Redland Bay SES Group, creating a positive and inclusive culture.

“It was such an honour to be nominated for this award when there are so many outstanding young members around the state,” Sidrah said.

“It filled me with pride to know I was nominated by my team, who have helped me grow beyond what I thought possible.

“The SES has been one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I’ve learnt things about business, life and all the ins and outs of the world.

“Our orange family holds such a special place in my heart and is beyond irreplaceable. The people I’ve met are so giving with their experience and knowledge.”

Sidrah said the 2022 floods were the first time she experienced SES operations.

“We spent six long days in the Redlands helping our community recover from the downpours, followed by another four days up in the Moreton region helping them finish about 600 jobs.

“Having such an incredible team with me the whole time and using all the things we’d learnt in training was an unforgettable experience.

“We have such an array of qualities in our volunteers but I think passion is key – our passion for community, for helping others.



“If you’re new to the SES, know that you get out of it whatever you put in. Your team is there to help you grow. Ask all the questions – there are so many directions the SES can take you.”

Blair Bloustien Member of the Year

Blair joined Holloways Beach SES Group about three years ago at age 17 and is now the Group Leader.

He was first drawn to the SES as a child when he experienced the 2011 floods in Toowoomba.

“I remember watching SES members working in my street,” Blair said. “That was where I first got inspired, watching them clean up and rescue people on the news. Since then I’ve always known I wanted to join.”

Blair said he valued giving back to the community.

“I work as an Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) Educator and I’m on the tertiary pathway to become a school psychologist, so I’m very involved with community engagement, specifically school groups.

“I visit a lot of schools with my fellow volunteer Bethany. We’re the youngest members in our unit and we’re both OSHC educators. I really value empowering and inspiring the next generation of SES.”

Blair also participates in monthly ABC Saturday Breakfast radio segments.

“Bethany and I wanted to reach a wider audience,” he said. “We approached ABC Radio and they thought it was a great idea.

“In winter we talk about things like land search and how to stay safe while hiking, in summer we talk about getting storm ready, where evacuation centres are and so on.”

Blair said he’d never forget his first land search for a missing person.

“We were looking for a teenage boy at Emerald Creek Falls, near Mareeba. To this day, it was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done – a full day of searching, going up and down creeks constantly, looking for him.

“It took a lot out of everyone, partly because I think everyone feared how it might end. I think it hit close to home because it was someone about my age.





“It was my first operational activity, and it set the scene for my future with the SES. Even though it was really hard, everyone stuck together as a huge family.”

Alexandra Baines Suncorp Spirit of SES Award

Hailing from the Redland City SES Unit, Alexandra has assisted on countless activations, as well as supporting her unit by mentoring a new Deputy Group Leader of Training.



“There are many members throughout the SES who do amazing work, so to have my work recognised at this level is very special,” Alexandra said.

“I get a lot of support from the members in my unit, so I feel like this award reflects on what a great unit Redlands has become.

“I was inspired to join the SES in 2016. I’ve always volunteered in one way or another, from coaching sport to assisting at a drug and alcohol counselling clinic.”

The Ipswich hailstorms stand out in Alexandra’s memory.

“I remember being shocked at the devastation out there,” she said. “Some houses were so damaged the only advice we could give families was to move out until their home could be made safe.

“I remember one woman crying on my shoulder because during the hailstorm her dog ran out into the yard and a piece of hail hit and killed him. My team leader got me to stay with her while the rest of the team fixed her roof. It made her day.

“We have such a mix of members from all different walks of life, but the qualities all great volunteers display are passion, dedication, loyalty and putting others before themselves.

“Joining the SES doesn’t just provide great experiences and open up pathways for a future career, it gives you a second family. I met my fiancé and some of my closest friends through the SES.”

Lakeland SES Group Operational Response of the Year (Highly Commended)

On a December night, a car carrying two adults and seven kids went off the road and crashed into a tree 200 kilometres from Cooktown. One adult was entrapped and a child was thrown from the car.

The Lakeland SES Road Crash Rescue Team were among the first on the scene, even though they drove more than two hours to get there. They had no radio or mobile service, just a satellite phone to communicate with.

“We were called to a single vehicle rollover north of the Hahn River Roadhouse,” group member Alec Stemmler said. “Our group covers a large area, but this was the most remote rescue I’d been to.

“When Neville Shepherd, Martin Garate and I arrived on scene, the entrapped adult had been removed from the car and the injured child was being treated by a nurse from the Laura Clinic.”

“We helped the nurse with the boy,” Alec said. “The rescue helicopter couldn’t land on the road because of the trees, so Neville drove the boy to a nearby station airstrip to meet a Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) plane.

“Martin and I checked on the other six children. The Queensland Police Service (QPS) took them back to Laura and the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) took the adult patient to airstrip, where the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) carried both patients to Cairns Hospital.

“Our collaboration with the Laura Clinic, QPS, QAS and RFDS was great. We were just happy we could help the best we could.”



This year’s winners

Assistant Commissioner’s Shield for SES Operational Response of the Year

Ipswich City SES Unit

Highly Commended: Lakeland SES Group

Commissioner’s Cup for SES Group/Unit of the Year

Deception Bay SES Group

Highly Commended: Scenic Rim Regional SES Unit

Minister’s Cup for SES Member of the Year

Blair Bloustien

Highly Commended: Daniel Cordner

Suncorp Spirit of SES Award

Alexandra Baines

Highly Commended: Alison Maclean, John Winn, Donald Charles

Joyce Scorey Shield for SES Trainer of the Year

Melonie Bewick

Director’s Cup for Young Member of the Year

Sidrah Harcourt

Life Member Awards

Karen Weston
Giordano Laguna
Brendan Jones
Robert Carl Griffiths



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Australia gets earthquake ready

QFES members have been gearing up for future disasters with a series of major training exercises, preparing for everything from earthquakes to road crashes at a military base.

What would happen if a high-magnitude earthquake hit Brisbane?

This was demonstrated when Brisbane hosted the annual International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) four-day Asia Pacific Earthquake Response Exercise (APERE) at the Sofitel Hotel.

The exercise, a response to a hypothetical earthquake in Brisbane's CBD, envisioned collapsed buildings and loss of life. Participants explored how they would coordinate the response nationally with international assistance.

The exercise is held annually in South-East Asia and this was the first time it was held in Australia.

More than 300 participants from 30 different countries — all Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) experts — took part. The event featured representatives from QFES, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Fire and Rescue NSW.

"This is a really important opportunity to get our people together with international response personnel to test our procedures, knowledge and training around earthquake responses," Commissioner Greg Leach said.

"If something like this happened in Australia, we would certainly need assistance from the international

community and this is where the INSARAG arrangements are so important.

"Crews from anywhere around the world can deploy here and get to work because we're operating to the same standards, the same training, the same procedures."

Australia experiences more than 100 earthquakes of magnitude three or greater each year, without warning or forecast.

"It was the earthquake that devastated Newcastle in NSW in 1989 that first brought to light Australia's need to have our own experts trained in earthquake response," Commissioner Leach said.

QFES' USAR teams were deployed to the Türkiye earthquake and New Zealand floods this year, and previously responded to earthquakes in Christchurch in 2011 and Indonesia in 2009.

"Australia is renowned for our USAR expertise, led by QFES and Fire and Rescue NSW," Commissioner Leach said. "Exercises such as this are integral to ensuring our systems and processes are efficient and effective before a disaster strikes."

Out of nowhere

Executive Manager Graeme Hall said participants came from the greater Asia Pacific region, Europe and the Americas, along with Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) who worked under the World Health Organisation.

"We tested how we would deal with a large catastrophic compounding event like an earthquake that overwhelmed our capacity to cope with the sheer amount of rescues.

"How do we bring those teams to Australia in terms of customs, border control and working with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for quarantine arrangements? How do we get those teams on the ground as quickly as possible to save lives?

"Using a map program from Geoscience Australia, we placed a magnitude-eight earthquake on a fault line that extended from Stafford down to the Tweed-Coolangatta border, with the centre in the Brisbane CBD.

"There are about 1000 Unreinforced Masonry Buildings (UMB) in the CBD like the city hall, churches, casino and old treasury building that were built at the turn of the last century. When the earthquake struck, they were either structurally damaged or totally collapsed.

"Most of the UMBs aren't accommodation — they're workplaces, schools or day-care centres — so we based the earthquake at 9:18am, when most people were in those buildings. We simulated that there were about 3000 people missing, with 1000 casualties.

"In Brisbane, accommodation is mostly in newer high-rise buildings. Sometimes the stairs get damaged or doors jam so you get



stuck in the building, but they're relatively safe in earthquakes because they're designed for high wind loadings.

"Earthquakes are sudden onset. You don't get a warning like with a cyclone, so people can't prepare or try to evacuate. Sometimes people are safer staying inside their building anyway, because if they try to evacuate as they would in a fire, pieces can fall off the façade and hit them.

"In Queensland many of our firefighters are trained in basic response and search and rescue, but we only have about 260 USAR technicians who can tunnel into collapsed buildings.

"We'd only be able to work on two or three collapsed buildings so we'd need assistance from places such as NSW, New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, China, Pakistan, Malaysia, Japan and the US, who can deploy heavy teams of about 70 personnel.

"Teams from NSW, New Zealand and Singapore could be in Brisbane within 12 hours. Even a team from the US can be in Brisbane within 24 hours.

"The idea is to get as many teams as possible within 72 hours, which tends to be the maximum amount of time people can survive in a building collapse, although there are cases of people surviving up to seven days."

Graeme said the exercise demonstrated the federal government's willingness to review their policies, procedures and even legislation to ensure Australia could quickly accept international USAR teams.

"For example, they could reduce the visa processing time for those teams from a fortnight to an hour or two."

Once the teams located missing and injured people, the next challenge was having adequate resources in place to treat them.

"Our hospital system may be overwhelmed, so we'd need to bring EMTs into Australia," Graeme said. "We'd need to make sure those EMTs can practise in Australia and treat the victims as soon as possible."

Water Wings

The multi-agency exercise Water Wings simulated a passenger ferry colliding with another boat near St Helena Island late at night. The exercise was held in late August in Moreton Bay with 230 participants, including 150 State Emergency Service (SES) members.

Ali Lane, Exercise Director and Group Leader, SES Brisbane Unit said the objective was to exercise the response of SES members to a multi-casualty incident involving 13 SES flood boats, along with Queensland Police Service (QPS) Water Police vessels.

"In the exercise, survivors took refuge on and around St Helena Island," Ali said. "SES and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) paramedic teams deployed at first light to conduct search and rescue operations.

"The SES Incident Management Team set up an Emergency Operations Team at Fort Lytton National Park and worked with QPS, Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator

(SARMC), QAS and 20 University of Southern Queensland paramedic students who set up a triage area."

The SES floodboats took members to the island, where they conducted search and rescue operations.

"The participants located all 35 casualties, who were suffering from hypothermia, shock and exposure, and transported them back to the triage area at Fort Lytton National Park."

Planning such a large-scale exercise across two locations presented a unique set of challenges.

The exercise control team needed for such a large-scale exercise was huge, which was a challenge because it took people away from actually participating as players.

"Bringing the casualties to the search location was another logistical consideration. A team of set-up crew camped over at Fort Lytton the night before to ensure all the equipment was ready in the morning.

"It's always great to work with other agencies on our large exercises. We asked the latest class of QPS recruits to volunteer as our casualties and they fully embraced it and had a fun day with moulage.

"Practising our skills in exercises like this is vital to our ability to respond to large-scale events. Participants learnt about casualty handling, general rescue, search, floodboat operations, incident management and much more."





Amberley exercise

FRS crews from Ripley, Bundamba and Camira participated in a major exercise with military firefighters from the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Amberley Fire Section and Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics. The exercise simulated a multi-vehicle road crash with multiple casualties at the RAAF Base.

Station Officer Jed Crosby from Camira Fire and Rescue Station created a number of multi-agency major exercises due to several emergency incidents at the RAAF Base and surrounding areas where both military and civil fire services worked together.

“The exercise created an excellent learning environment to enhance the integration of all emergency services personnel for a joint response,” he said.

“RAAF Base Amberley is by far the largest geographical site and risk within the Ipswich Command.

“The purpose of the exercise was to integrate each service in a simulated emergency, testing our capability and technical ability to work side-by-side in a challenging scenario-based environment.”

The exercise included crashed vehicles with a mixture of rescue mannequins and live casualties replicating injuries and entrapments.

Both FRS and RAAF firefighters worked closely with paramedics to identify the nature of injuries and entrapments and create a casualty extrication plan.

Firefighters used a wide range of rescue equipment to stabilise the vehicles and carry out the disentanglement and extrication.

“All firefighters and paramedics performed exceptionally well with a positive learning outcome achieved. Afterwards, our personnel discussed their roles and capability over a barbeque supplied by the RAAF.”





SOUTH EASTERN REGION



SES Week Awards

The South Eastern Region State Emergency Service (SES) Week Awards ceremony was held in September at Towri Sheep Farm, Allenview.

Congratulations to the SER award recipients:

- Operational Response of the Year – Ipswich City Unit
- Unit of the Year – Scenic Rim Unit
- Member of the Year – Graham Stumer (Scenic Rim Unit)
- Young Member of the Year – Jonesy Cairncross (Logan Unit)



Kooralbyn Open Day

Kooralbyn Fire and Rescue Station hosted an Emergency Services Open Day in September alongside Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, Scenic Rim Regional Council and HealthWise.

Vehicle displays, disaster preparedness packs, recruitment information and demonstrations were on offer.

Attendees also enjoyed live music, kids' games, coffee and ice cream vans and a barbeque thanks to Kooralbyn RSL.

More than 300 members of the community came along and several registered their interest in joining the team as an auxiliary firefighter.

Grandchester Rural Fire Station opening

QFES celebrated the official opening of the new Grandchester Rural Fire Station on Saturday 29 July. The new station is a four-bay shed featuring a training room, office, kitchen, storage area and toilet and shower amenities.

The new station replaces the previous decommissioned site and will enhance volunteers' capability to support the local community in the management of bushfires and other emergencies.

Donna Jackwitz, First Officer Grandchester Rural Fire Brigade, was instrumental in securing the site for the new station and was presented with a dedication plaque for her commitment and service to the Grandchester community.

Donna has devoted more than 34 years of service to the brigade and is their longest serving volunteer.





SOUTH WESTERN REGION

SES Week Awards

We recently acknowledged the contributions of State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers at South Western Region's SES Week Awards.

Congratulations to all this year's recipients:

- Regional SES Week Awards:
 - Bianca Yarrow
 - Thomas Morfee
 - Dan McArthur
 - Pauline Van Bael
 - Timothy Loistroh
- Trainer of the Year – Janine Hegarty
- Young Member of the Year – Claudia Stiller
- Operational Response of the Year – Western Downs SES Unit
- Group/Unit of the Year – Wallumbilla Group
- Member of the Year – Scott Pogan

This year saw a slightly reduced crowd as volunteers from across the region were still answering calls for assistance from their communities.

After leaving the awards ceremony, many SES members went back to managing air bases, preparing community evacuation centres and conducting resupply operations for firefighters on the fire lines.



Milwaukee presented equipment to the Tara SES Group.



Airbase operator awareness training

South Western Region has forecast a high potential for active grassfires in western areas.

To prepare for this threat, several of our crews travelled through several small towns to help local QFES members understand how to safely work around waterbombing aircraft.

The crews demonstrated safe methods for filling fixed-wing bombers, showed participants around rotary wing aircraft and discussed air attack strategies.

The crews started in Roma with participants from the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), State Emergency Service (SES) and Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Moving further west, the crews dropped into Taylors Plains to meet with the Wetlands Rural Fire Brigade. QFES can potentially use this site when servicing areas in and around Chesterton National Park.

The crews then called into Augathella to meet with local FRS and council members.

The following morning, the crews worked with a large group in Charleville. The final session was in St George with FRS crews from St George, Bollon and Goondiwindi.

Special thanks to Station Officer Mark Haddow, pilots Brendan Cooper and Jason Speedy, and Miriam Troy from the State Air Operations Unit for helping to develop the teaching tools.

Exercise Paperbark

Exercise Paperbark was a joint exercise between Rural Fire Service (RFS) Western Rivers Area and Dalby Command Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). RFS volunteer leaders and FRS auxiliary leaders came together at the Tara Fire and Rescue Station to prepare for bushfire season.

The RFS volunteers were from Weranga, Bennett, Tolmah, Bell, The Ridge, Braemar and Kogan, along with area staff members.

The exercise was coordinated by Inspector Ross Stacey, Area Training and Support Officer Nathan Greer, Acting Brigade Training and Support Officer Lachlan Poetschka and Inspector Stewart Lange.

Crews tested Incident Management Systems, including field testing a portable UHF radio repeater and 318 Sierra as a Forward Control Point.

Everyone gained a sound knowledge of the equipment and learnt that establishing an incident structure early at bushfires leads to effective communication systems.



FAR NORTHERN REGION

Hazmat incident on Walker Bay Beach

A team of two scientific officers and three specialist hazmat technicians recently attended a cylinder of anhydrous ammonia found on Walker Bay Beach.

Liquid ammonia is stored in large cylinders and when it gasses off it becomes ammonia vapour. Ammonia by nature is an alkaline, the opposite to acid.

The team moved all their equipment onto the beach, established two equipment staging areas and coated the valve of the cylinder with a full tin of WD40. Donning 3A fully encapsulated suits, they loosened the valve with a spanner.

The team captured the ammonia vapour by connecting a clear hose to the valve. They placed the weighted end of the hose into a large plastic drum filled with water, which absorbed the ammonia gas.

They were planning to pump the contents of the drum into an Intermediate Bulk Container for removal and disposal, but they had limited time before the tide came up and seawater inundated the cylinder.

Instead, the team added citric acid to lower the water's PH level. They also applied water to the cylinder to stop it freezing and monitored the drum's water temperature, which rose to 60 degrees.

They tested the water with PH strips and once it was neutralised they disposed of the water in the ocean.

They removed the valve assembly, rendered it safe with water and tested it. Finally, they removed the cylinder from the beach.

QFES' safe and efficient handling of this incident proved our processes, equipment and training are at a high level.



Air Operations training

The Far Northern Region Air Operations team recently undertook a training exercise to develop their skills and prepare for this year's bushfire and extreme weather seasons.

The training consisted of desktop exercises in mapping, navigation, intel gathering, aircraft tasking and preparing crew logs.

The team also visited Nautilus Aviation to familiarise themselves with a new type of aircraft, the Bell-GXI 407 helicopter. They undertook safety briefings, practised communications and tested personal equipment for use in the aircraft.

The team also familiarised themselves with the ancillary equipment they might assist with during operations, including waterbombing buckets and fuel trailers.

The following day, everyone gathered at the Mareeba Aerodrome for competency flight checks. They flew eight sorties and learnt more about waterbombing, search and rescue, reconnaissance, navigation, pilot briefings, mapping, intel-gathering applications, communication, crew resource management and post-incident reporting.

These types of exercises are important in maintaining the specialist skills required for Air Operations. A big thank you to the team from Nautilus Aviation (Aaron Finn, Mick Graham, Morgan Sills), State Air Operations Unit (Marty Gibson, Brett McIlwaine, Miriam Troy) and Air Attack Supervisor Jason Ryan.





NORTHERN REGION

Heronvale open day

Heronvale Rural Fire Brigade, located just back from the tranquil waters of Brisk Bay near Bowen, opened their station to the community for the official handover of their newest appliance, Heronvale 35.

The new ATV and trailer will substantially increase the brigade's capability for firefighting suppression and reconnaissance, especially along the beachfront and narrow tracks, with the trailer also able to support other brigades in the Whitsunday Shire when requested.

On the same day the brigade also unveiled their new amenities area.

Both were made possible with grants from QFES and the Whitsunday Regional Council.



Lavarack Barracks open day

The Lavarack Barracks Australian Defence Force (ADF) open day is the ADF's way of saying thank you to the Townsville community for its ongoing support.

The day was also a great opportunity to promote local community groups and what's available in Townsville to defence members and their families.

QFES received a special request to attend this year after our display was beside the ADF's at the recent 'Our Townsville' event.

Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and State Emergency Service (SES) personnel were busy throughout the day. Unfortunately, due to active fires the Rural Fire Service were unable to attend.

The SES flood boat was a popular spot to get up high and watch the tank crush, and the FRS crews responding to calls from the base attracted an even bigger crowd.



Townsville Seniors Expo

Townsville City Council hosted their annual Seniors Expo recently at the Townsville Stadium. The event is an excellent opportunity to showcase products, services and initiatives to a diverse audience of seniors and their families.

The morning was a huge success and everyone made the most of having service providers available to speak with them.

QFES was on site with two booths to discuss smoke alarms, extinguishers, fire blankets, escape plans, the Australian Warning System and preparing for bushfire and severe weather.

It was great to hear stories from people who had successfully used a fire blanket and recommended the purchase to friends who also stopped at the booth.

The QFES team was also privileged to meet a lot of proud parents, grandparents and in-laws of our QFES staff and volunteers.



Mendi Fire Academy visit

As part of the sponsorship of the JCU Townsville Fire, QFES is involved in several off-court activities such as the Mendi Fire Academy.

The academy operates from September to March each year and provides basketball coaching, strength and conditioning sessions and team building activities to girls from 14 to 17 years old.

Students from the academy visited South Townsville Fire and Rescue Station to tour the station, look over the appliances and learn more about the fire service and Firecom office.

The girls discussed the importance of communication and teamwork, as well as checking in on friends and teammates. They learnt that life is about continually learning and developing, it's okay to ask for help, and we should be accountable for our actions.

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CENTRAL REGION

Boosting water skills at Water Rats

About 60 State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers participated in Operation Water Rats 2023 at our beautiful Fairbairn Dam.

On the Friday, volunteers inspected and launched their flood boats, finalised sleeping arrangements at the Queensland Education Camp Fairbairn facility and enjoyed a fantastic feed in the common area.

Saturday started at 6am with breakfast and then onto the activities for the day in a round-robin system. Participants worked through four activities: rescuing people from a boat on fire, navigating through a series of waypoints, locating and retrieving a dummy from the water, and a team-building activity. After dinner, crews reassembled and went out on the dam for night operations.

Sunday kicked off again at 6am and all flood boat operators hit the water to have their competency maintenance requirements assessed under the supervision of Operational Capability Officers.

All other volunteers undertook a casualty handling activity, which included finding the patient, administering first aid, lashing them into a stretcher and manoeuvring them through an obstacle course.

It was a great weekend with some very tired volunteers, especially the local coordination team, who started at 4am each day. The activity gave everyone who attended additional skills to support their communities through the upcoming wet season.



Disaster resilience for all abilities

Beach Day Out is an annual all-ages, all-abilities beach party at Emu Park in Central Queensland. The event brings together around 5000 people living with disabilities, their families, carers and service providers.

QFES and our partners from Livingstone Shire Council, Rockhampton Regional Council, Carers Queensland and the Queenslanders with Disability Network joined forces to bring Resilience Lane to the event.

Resilience Lane showcased Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (PCEP), local hazards, the Australian Warning System, Fire Danger Ratings, home fire safety, severe weather preparedness and evacuation planning.

Visitors talked with local subject matter experts on how to stay safe during disasters and emergencies. QFES members also showed them how to self-assess their preparedness, capabilities and support needs.

Visitors explored how to develop a personal emergency plan for managing their support needs in emergencies, together with their support network.



Never stop looking while you're cooking

We all know what it is like to get distracted while you're cooking. Earlier this year, Rockhampton firefighters were called to an alarm at an aged accommodation facility to find a resident had left baking paper in the oven, which caught fire.

The residents and facility manager thought it would be a nice idea to thank the firefighters for a job well done and get a look behind the scenes of life on station.

The residents also thanked Firecom and were introduced to the world of Triple Zero. They showed their appreciation by baking a cake for the crews.





NORTH COAST REGION

SES recruits put through their paces

The first regional recruit course for the State Emergency Service (SES) in North Coast Region was held over three weekends in Murgon, Gayndah and Rainbow Beach.

The course gave participants the initial skills to become an operational SES member, including rescue operations, storm and water damage operations, task management and more. Participants also completed all units of competency for a Certificate II in Public Safety (SES).

Paddy the Platypus joined in on the fun and got a well-earned promotion, finally becoming an active SES community member after far too long as a probationary member



Prepping for the season ahead

Fire season preparation and readiness, seasonal outlooks, Fire Danger Ratings, air operations and fire ban processes were just some of the things on the agenda for the North Coast Region Pre-Fire Season Workshop.

The workshop was attended by a range of partner organisations including Queensland Police Service, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Department of Resources, HQ Plantations, Department of Transport and Main Roads and local government representatives, with each agency providing an update and finding opportunities to work together.

Workshops like these play a vital role in our preparation and preparedness for the season ahead.



SES honour the HMAS Maryborough II

On 3 September, the Maryborough State Emergency Service performed barricade duty for the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS Maryborough II for the Freedom of Entry Parade.

Freedom of Entry to the City is a right granted to military units by a local government, authorising that unit to march through the streets of the city on a ceremonial occasion with their swords drawn, bayonets fixed, drums beating, bands playing and colours flying.



Wings and Wheels

Among the engine roar and shiny metal of classic aircraft, cars and bikes at the Fraser Coast Wings and Wheels festival was a full complement of QFES services.

The community were treated to car extraction demonstrations from our Fire and Rescue Service crew, tried their hand at spraying a firehose with the Rural Fire Service and learnt how to get prepared with the State Emergency Service.

It was a busy day for our QFES team with more than 3,500 people through the gates and a sea of Blazer, Bushy and Paddy stickers.



Inspiring the next generation

Permanent and auxiliary Fire and Rescue Service crews have been busy at career expos in local high schools and TAFEs across the region.

Crews have shared insights into what it takes to wear the uniform and serve the community with pride each and every day.

Young people love hearing from our firefighters and we hope to see some of these young people wearing the uniform in the future.

The tradition dates to medieval times when citizens of walled cities refused to allow entry to armed groups, including troops, unless they were sure those arms would not be used against them. In modern times, a Freedom of Entry parade is a symbolic honour often granted to mark an anniversary or significant milestone.

The Royal Australian Navy was granted Freedom of Entry to the City of Maryborough before the decommissioning of the HMAS Maryborough II.



BRISBANE REGION

Korean firefighters visit Brisbane

Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station hosted nine firefighters from the Republic of Korea 119 Wild Fire Special Response Team.

The firefighters were intrigued to learn about QFES' urban firefighting methods and equipment.

They then headed to Rural Fire Service South Eastern Region, where they learnt about bushfire fighting techniques and mitigation strategies.



Heavy rescue training

Forty-eight firefighters and station officers from Brisbane Region recently completed Heavy Road Crash Rescue training at Bracken Ridge Fire and Rescue Station.

The two-day course gave the crews specialist skills for operating heavy rescue equipment on the region's Emergency Tender (Kilo) and Technical Rescue (Lima) appliances.

After familiarising themselves with the equipment, the firefighters participated in a series of heavy vehicle entrapment scenarios, including pedestrians and vehicles trapped under trucks and buses.

They also learnt how to operate the Thermic Lance and Plasma Cutter metal-cutting tools.

Finally, the firefighters practised incident command techniques for heavy vehicle entrapments, including appliance resourcing, wordback to Firecom, communication plans, and incident management teams and sectorisation.



Hazmat at the museum

The Emergency Services Coordinator for Arts Queensland recently contacted QFES for help analysing their Emergency Response Plan for the Queensland Museum.

QFES worked collaboratively with them to provide a more effective plan and test it by conducting a Hazmat scenario at the museum.

Crews from Roma Street and Windsor Fire and Rescue Stations participated, along with Senior Firefighter (SFF) candidates. The BA Hazmat team provided Level 3B training suits to make the scenario more realistic and ambulance officers from Roma Street were happy to be involved.

Firefighters Luke Carmont and Matthew Perry volunteered to control the incident as part of their SFF development, while Station Officers Brendan Streets and Jason Burnham from the Brisbane Region training team ran the scenario.

A big thank you to Inspector Geoff Townsley and Acting Assistant Commissioner Matthew Bulow for attending as observers, and to Inspector Brett Finnis, Duty Manager Operations, for providing the resources.

The opportunity to work with an external stakeholder and practise their Emergency Response Plan was an absolute win-win.

Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station also has a technical rescue training scenario scheduled at the Lyric Theatre, QPAC.



Sports stars join QFES ranks

Among QFES' new recruits are two sporting icons from the Gold Coast: rugby league footballer Lauren Brown and Ironman Zane Holmes.

From football to firefighting

Lauren has a glittering career in soccer and rugby league, having played for Brisbane Roar, Newcastle Jets, Brisbane Broncos and Burleigh Bears. She started on shift at Surfers Paradise Fire and Rescue Station in June.

Lauren said her love of sport came from her parents and sisters.

"Growing up, being the youngest of three girls encouraged me to try all the sports my sisters were doing," she said. "So naturally I followed them until I was at an age where it was all self-driven.

"Our parents were so supportive of any sport we wanted to pursue and were there every step of the way."

As a kid Lauren played rugby league, but she left it aside for several years to focus on soccer, touch football and surf lifesaving.



Lauren fulfilled a childhood dream when she played in the 2020 State of Origin.

In 2020, she started playing rugby league again and made her State of Origin debut for Queensland, playing centre and kicking four goals.

"It was honestly a dream come true," Lauren said. "Growing up, some of my favourite nights were at home with the family with our eyes glued to the TV watching the State of Origin games.

"At that time I didn't know it was even a possibility for me to pull on a Queensland jersey. Running out for my first State of Origin was an unreal moment I will never forget – especially because we won!"

In the same year she also played in the Brisbane Broncos' grand final victory over the Sydney Roosters.

"Another highlight for me was representing Australia and winning the 2022 Rugby League World Cup with the Jillaroos," Lauren said.

"The future of women's sport is looking very bright. There are so many more opportunities for young girls to participate in sport.

"There are pathways from grassroots directly to the elite level for most sports now, which means the quality of women's sport is going to continue to improve."

Lauren said she'd wanted to be a firefighter since she was about 19.

"My dad was a police officer for 42 years so I knew I wanted a career helping the community but at the time I was too young and needed more life experience," she said.

"The more research I did into QFES made me realise how much I aligned with the role and responsibilities of a firefighter, so I applied in 2021.

"There are so many similarities between being a firefighter and an athlete. I've played team sports my whole life, so I love working with other people to achieve a goal.

"That's exactly what working on shift is – you have a team of fellow firefighters you work with every day to serve the community in the best possible way.

"As an athlete you're constantly training to keep your body fit and strong, practising skills with certain equipment, which is the same as a firefighter. The job is very physically demanding so you need to be at your physical peak."

Lauren said she encouraged other young women to join QFES.

"Give it a go! It's such an amazing job and career path. I couldn't recommend it enough."



An Ironman legend

After starting out in surf life saving at 17, Zane became the first person to win all major Ironman races including the World Championship, Australian Championship, Queensland Championship, Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Series and Coolangatta Gold.

He retired from competition in 2012 at the age of 31 due to a back injury and the birth of his twin daughters.

His father John and his older sisters Kirsty and Denby were also surf life saving champions, and Kirsty has been a firefighter for 20 years.

"From when I was born I was down the surf club and when I was five I joined the nippers," Zane said.

"For me the most rewarding aspect was being able to forge a career from it and achieve my goals throughout the 15 years I was a professional Ironman.

"My Coolangatta Gold win was one of my career highlights as I was always a sprint distance athlete, so to win over the endurance distance was a huge achievement."

The Coolangatta Gold is a 46-kilometre race and at the time it was from Surfers Paradise to Coolangatta and back.

"For most of the race I was in third or fourth. I didn't hit the lead until I made a move in the last five kilometres," Zane said. "I paced myself well, so I had enough in the tank to get it done in the final stages.

"I was exhausted at the end. I had to push myself beyond where I was comfortable, but it was an exhilarating win and I'll always remember it."

Another dramatic moment was his first Australian Ironman title at Kurrawa Beach in 2004. He had to fight hard through the shallows to claim first place, and he dedicated the title to his father, who had died of a heart attack while paddling from Marcoola to Kawana the year before.

Zane used to train for 20 to 25 hours a week.

"You have to be supremely fit and dedicated. Every morning I swam six kilometres and ran on the track. In the afternoon I'd get in the ocean on a board or surf-ski.

"I'd do a big session on Saturday mornings where I combined all the different exercises into an Ironman challenge. Over many years that takes its toll on the body."

Zane said he'd always wanted to be a firefighter and applied seven years ago but was unsuccessful.

"I was very grateful to be accepted this time around, especially on the Gold Coast where I grew up. I've seen what a great career it's been for my sister, and she was a sounding board through the whole application process.

"Learning new skills and getting to know the other recruits was great. Physically I didn't find it that difficult – the hardest aspect was the long days and the length of the course."

Zane recently graduated from his recruit course and has worked at Robina, Nerang and Pimpama Fire and Rescue Stations.

"The discipline required to be a successful athlete is very similar to the discipline required to be a good firefighter," he said.

Zane's close relationship with surf lifesaving continues with the Medibank Wave Warriors Junior Challenge, an annual competition he created to encourage junior lifesavers. Athletes aged nine to fifteen from Australia and New Zealand compete in events across all surf sports disciplines.

"There weren't many good-quality events for kids, so I wanted to start one," Zane said. "We got it to a stage where we had events in nearly every state with a few thousand kids competing."

Nowadays, Zane still enjoys surfing on the weekend with his kids.

"My daughters and son are in nippers, so we're keeping the tradition going."



Zane (back row, centre) celebrated his recruit graduation with his family.



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Checking in on each other

This R U OK? Day, Director of Operations Support Lyn Richards spoke at a morning tea at Kedron about the importance of checking in on others and ourselves.

Lyn shared a story about a colleague who'd recently told her they weren't tracking ok.

"They'd been asked by others if they were ok," Lyn said. "They'd responded no and received mixed results.

"If you ask someone R U OK? and they say no, take the time to explore what's going on. The person obviously felt some level of safety with you to be honest about their feelings. At the very least acknowledge the other person and their response.

"Check in to ensure they're able to wait for a conversation or help them with other avenues in the immediate to short term. Make a time for a catch up and keep that commitment.

"There have been times in my 30-year public sector career where I have checked in on others and been checked in on.

"It can be tough, when someone says they're worried about you, to admit, 'Yes I'm a bit worried about me as well.'"

Lyn said people often worried they'd say the wrong thing or if asking people directly about topics such as suicide would put those thoughts in their heads.

"Beyond Blue and research tells us this is not the case and often the person will feel relieved someone is there to listen and offer support," she said.

"I've never regretted asking someone R U OK. For me, if I sense I need to do or say something and don't, that's a conscious decision. Inaction never sits well with me."

Lyn said emergency services personnel had higher rates of mental health illnesses than the general population.

"Regardless of rank, uniform or service stream, we are all still human," she said. "When you check in on someone and have a conversation, it's as two connected human beings where all those material or structural things disappear.

"When I started this role five-and-a-half years ago, I had a personal space the size of Suncorp Stadium, but now I will happily sit with someone and give them a hug if that's what they need.

"I've seen and heard of operational personnel hosting barbeques, mowing lawns, taking their mates to treatment and checking in on family. It's a wonderful camaraderie.

"With wisdom comes the knowledge that most, but not all challenges you face are temporary.

"The length of this temporary challenge may not be known at the time and it might seem all consuming. But no matter what the challenge is, your family and friends are always better off with you in this world.

Never be afraid to ask, R U OK?"

Lyn also announced the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) team was growing.

"We'll soon have a Manager of Mental Health Services in each region. These managers will deliver overarching regional mental health programs, along with short-term counselling and training."

You can find out more about how to have these conversations at ruok.org.au or beyondblue.org.au.

FESSN counsellors can provide advice on topics such as parenting, career guidance, organisational change, pain management, work demands, substance use and addictions.

Counselling is available at qfes.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people or call 1800 805 980. You can also call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636.

4 steps of an R U OK? conversation



R U OK?TM
A conversation could change a life



Lyn Richards spoke about some of her own experiences having conversations about mental health.



Congratulations to the Woodford Knights and Highfields Eagles, our two Queensland teams, on competing at the Australian Fire Cadet Championships in Douglas Park, NSW.



State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers across the state will receive \$250,000 in vital equipment thanks to Energy Queensland, Energex, Ergon Energy and Powerlink Queensland as part of the Energising Queensland SES Partnership.



The Operational Communications Unit used a Cell on Wheels (COW) communication unit at a vegetation burn at Sandy Creek. The COW is a movable base station that provides temporary radio coverage for crews.



Rural Fire Service crews and Kilcoy auxiliary firefighters joined forces for Operation Icebreaker, building skills and trying out different trucks and equipment.



Congratulations to the Intelligence Services Unit, jointly awarded the Australian Institute of Professional Intelligence Officers Innovation Award, along with Protegas Australia. Helen McGarry was nominated on behalf of her team for developing a training program, delivered by Protegas, to enhance QFES senior leadership's understanding and application of intelligence.



QFES was proud to continue our support of Brisbane's Pride Festival this September.



Fire and Rescue Service technical rescue firefighters rescued a hiker stranded on Mount Beerwah.



The Research and Scientific Branch tested new gas flares that can more safely and efficiently burn off gas from damaged, leaking or abandoned LPG cylinders.



Firefighters responded to a house fire in Woolloongabba and saved neighbouring houses from the flames.



Longreach emergency services attended the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.



A teacher and an innovator

State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer Cayla Jones has been excelling as Deputy Group Leader for SES Metro Group in Brisbane and was recently a Queensland Youth Volunteer of the Year Award finalist.

It's not the first time Cayla has been recognised. In 2022, she received both an Assistant Commissioner's Certificate of Appreciation and an Australia Day Award, and in 2019 she won an SES Week Award.

Cayla joined the SES in 2016, when she was just 17 years old.

"I was finishing school and getting ready to leave home, but I was nervous about what was going to happen next in life," Cayla said.

"Being at university gave me flexibility to do something new, so I decided to do something to help the community around me.

"My dad had been an SES member for a few years, and after reading through his Field Information Guide, I thought it would be a nice balance of working with my community while learning some basic life skills for myself."

Her current portfolio is Innovation and Process Improvement, where she and her team review common practices across

the group, improve documentation and streamline processes.

She used her skills as a data scientist to develop a dashboard for tracking skills competencies within her group.

"The dashboard allows our members to quickly find out when their skills competencies maintenance is due, so they can work together on common skills that need to be refreshed. This ensures they're operationally capable at all times.

"It also gives a clear view at the executive level so we can forecast how our operational capability will change over time, and incorporate refreshers into our general weekly training."

Cayla said the Brisbane 2022 floods were a prime example of the remarkable spirit of volunteering.

"Despite facing disruptions to their training due to COVID lockdowns, many of our reservists and members activated to assist," she said.

"Our newer members, while still acquiring the full range of skills, showed unwavering commitment. Day after day, they volunteered their time and contributed in various capacities, from sandbagging to aiding in evacuations, working as part of our Incident Management Team and providing logistical support.

"I feel a deep sense of pride knowing I am part of a group of people that genuinely cares about the wellbeing of the community we serve."

Cayla is passionate about training. She previously served as the group's Training Coordinator, running weekly training nights and implementing a yearly training schedule that led to a 24 per cent increase in member attendance.

"I have a passion for teaching others. It brings me great satisfaction to know our members can step up and use their skills to assist the community when the need arises.

"What truly delights me is witnessing the dedicated effort to embrace diversity among our members. We are actively encouraging people from various age groups, ethnic backgrounds and genders to join our ranks, bringing with them a wealth of skills and innovative ideas from many different walks of life.

"The dedication and sense of responsibility exhibited by volunteers is truly inspiring. The SES brings together an exceptional group of people who are entrusted with great responsibilities."





US Abrams tank in fiery crash

When a United States' Abrams tank was involved in a crash on the Bruce Highway, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) established an exclusion zone and firefighters sprang into action.

The incident was near Bajool in central Queensland and involved three cars, two semi-trailers, another truck, a 4WD and three towed caravans. One of the semi-trailers was carrying an M1 Abrams tank.

Six people were transported to Gladstone and Rockhampton hospitals with burns and spinal injuries.

The tank was being transported to Townsville for the Talisman Sabre war games, a biennial training exercise with Australian and United States (US) soldiers.

M1 Abrams tanks have been in service since 1980 and were used in the Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

Superintendent John Pappas said the crash appeared to be caused when a car failed to stop for the semi-trailer's escort vehicle. This set off a domino effect where cars in the northbound lane entered the southbound lane.

"The incident was about 30 kilometres south of Rockhampton," John said. "There was a lot of black smoke evident from Rockhampton and on arrival, Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) crews found the incident spread out over a few hundred metres, with two semi-trailers, the tank and a car on fire.

"When I realised US Department of Defence (DOD) assets were involved, I knew this wouldn't be a run-of-the-mill incident. My immediate concerns were for firefighter safety, potential impacts to the community and national political interest.

"QPS established an exclusion zone and invoked the Public Safety Preservation Act until they understood the risks associated with the tank."

Abrams tanks are equipped with a 120mm tank gun, three machine guns and two six-barrelled smoke grenade launchers.

Luckily the tank wasn't carrying ordnance, which is transported separately. However, it was filled with highly flammable aviation fuel – its fuel capacity is 1,909 litres – which firefighters were able to extinguish with foam.

Appreciating that the incident wasn't just about the fire, John left firefighting operations to Station Officer John Blanchfield and focused on overall strategic management.

"While it's common for QFES to work alongside QPS and Queensland Ambulance Service, an additional level of liaison was necessary with DOD, QFES Media, Royal Australian Corps of Military Police, Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR)," John said.

The scale of the incident saw additional resources respond from Rockhampton and Gladstone FRS, with support from Rural Fire Service (RFS).

"The tank was on fire inside and out. Firefighters had to wait for representatives from DOD to provide technical advice and gain access so we could confirm extinguishment."

The crash also started a grass fire that spread hundreds of metres along the highway and rail corridor.

"The incident shut down transport of coal from the Emerald mines to Gladstone."

Water supply at regional incidents is always a challenge. RFS crews were able to cart water to the incident from the local explosives plant, highlighting the importance of local knowledge and local action plans.

"By completing area familiarisation, crews knew the water point inside the Bajool explosives plant would be the most appropriate water source.

"John Blanchfield sectorised the fire and allocated crews to suppress it, with FRS crews focusing on the trucks and tanks, and RFS crews on the grass fire."

The highway was closed for about 20 hours in both directions, with significant traffic diversions through Biloela and Mount Morgan.

"Contractors had to remove the tank with cranes before they could recover the semi-trailer. The heat had melted the bitumen, which TMR repaired overnight with FRS crews on fire watch.

"I've never had an incident with a tank before and it was remarkable that everyone survived. It was a collaborative effort from QFES, emergency responders and everyone attending to get the job done."



At 62 tonnes, the M1 Abrams is one of the heaviest tanks in the world and can cost more than US\$10 million.

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