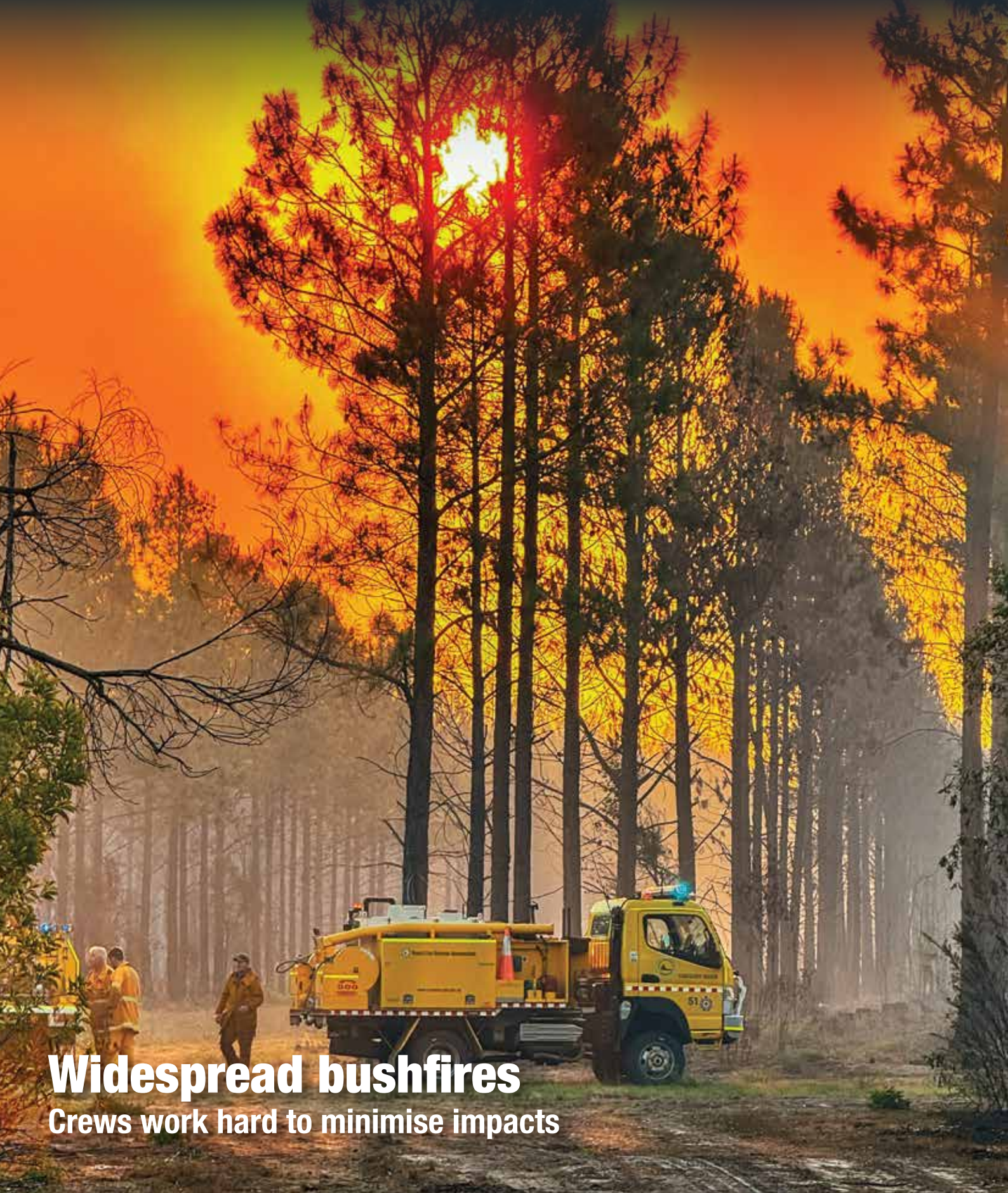


# RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE DECEMBER 2023



**Widespread bushfires**  
Crews work hard to minimise impacts

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Gregory River Rural Fire Brigade battle an intense bushfire at Goodwood. Photo by Peter Carlsen.

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

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# FOREWORDS



**STEVE SMITH AFSM**  
**Acting Commissioner**

## QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

I am incredibly humbled and pleased to have assumed the role of Acting Commissioner following the departure of Commissioner Leach. Mr Leach made significant contributions to QFES and I thank him for his service and wish him well in his new role as CEO at Victoria SES.

While the recruitment process for the new Commissioner is progressed, our mission is to continue to deliver seamless and responsive services to Queensland, and progress the important work of establishing the new Queensland Fire Department. This is an exciting time for us as a department and as a sector.

In reflecting on the year, I am proud of our achievements, whether it is our day-to-day operations, through to international deployments, large-scale training exercises and new public safety campaigns – we have achieved a lot. Read more on some of our achievements on pages 12 and 13.

Persistent and widespread bushfires have kept personnel busy recently and as always, the commitment and teamwork displayed by all parts of the department has been exceptional. Very gratefully we have received support from Victorian, ACT, New South Wales and New Zealand colleagues who have deployed into multiple regions across the state – providing additional capacity and much needed relief to assist in managing fatigue.

It has been impressive to see each region adapt to the challenges and working so closely and effectively with our partners to best manage these fires and reduce their impact on communities. Read more on pages 4 to 9. Thank you all for your extraordinary efforts serving your communities and continuing to work hard for the people of Queensland.

The tragic loss of three people in a plane crash near Cloncurry was devastating. The three private citizens were contracted by QFES to assist with the aviation response to these bushfires and had close ties to many in the firefighting community not just in Queensland, but across the country. While they were engaged as contactors, they were a critical part of our team, and their loss is felt deeply. Our thoughts are with their family, friends and those who worked alongside them.

On a different note, I am pleased that a new Frontline Women's Network for the Rural Fire Service (RFS) has been established, now sitting alongside the existing network for women in the Fire and Rescue Service. This network will help support women in the RFS to feel empowered, engage with each other and develop their leadership skills.

Queensland's summer volatility has not disappointed, with recent severe storm activity occurring alongside continuing bushfires. As always, we must be ready to respond and adapt. I hope many of you will have a chance to rest, recover and spend time with loved ones over the holiday break, and for those who must continue working and volunteering over this time, thank you for your commitment and dedication. Look after each other and take care.



**ADAM STEVENSON**  
**Chief Operating Officer**

## STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

As we farewell 2023 I want to thank you all for your incredible support through what has been another challenging year. With the departure of former Commissioner Greg Leach and testing bushfires in many regions, the QFES spirit continues to grow.

I relish the opportunity to work as our department's Chief Operating Officer under the new leadership team to drive forward changes with the Reform Implementation Taskforce. I have worked closely with Acting Commissioner Steve Smith through the early stages of the reform process and we remain committed to a transparent approach to developments and will share information as a priority.

There are a number of key pieces of work progressing in the Strategy and Corporate Services Division. The department's forward plan for land and buildings is currently valued at \$90 million. The current projects aim to:

- acquire multiple land parcels for future Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and Rural Fire Service (RFS) stations
- construct seven new FRS stations at Airlie Beach, Caloundra South, Drayton, Greater Springfield, Gympie South, Moreton Bay Central and Mt Cotton Road
- construct six new RFS stations at Maryborough West, Moore Linville, Millaroo, Mount Alford, Whetstone and Bamaga
- upgrade and refurbish multiple other RFS and FRS stations around the state.

We are in the final stages of recruitment for the new Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO). This role will play a critical part in the progression of recruitment, staff retention and workplace health and safety, in addition to our commitments under the Certified Agreement. I look forward to finalising recruitment and sharing the update with you soon.

We continue to work with industry to source and acquire fit-for-purpose new and replacement appliances for the FRS and RFS. This includes ordering appliances across multiple years in line with QFES' forward fleet program.

Forward ordering enables increased market participation, increased value for money and, importantly, opportunity for suppliers to plan for and respond to supply chain and labour challenges affecting the automotive industry.

We are at various stages sourcing a range of appliances. Recent milestones include awarding contracts for RFS light attack chassis for delivery from 2024-25 and for FRS iZone light chassis.

As we approach the Reform deadline, I have no doubts that together we can shape a comprehensive Queensland Fire Department. It's a complex process and I encourage everyone to be mindful of fatigue and practise empathy towards each other while we work through this together.



# Bushfires impact communities across the state

QFES personnel have been battling a widespread onslaught of bushfires this season.

Five lives have been lost and more than 1.36 million hectares of burnt land was mapped by the QFES' GIS team between 1 August and 14 November. This only includes bushfires attended by QFES and data is unavailable for some bushfires. The real figure is likely to be significantly higher.

There were more than 1000 vegetation fires burning across all corners of the state in the 2.5 week period between late October and early November, reaching a peak on 28 October when more than 150 new vegetation fires were reported.

More than 180 structures were destroyed, including 74 homes. Countless more were saved due to the relentless efforts of crews.

On 4 November three people contracted by QFES to support the bushfire response were tragically killed in a plane crash while travelling from Toowoomba to Mount Isa. The crew members had close ties to Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian fire services and the tragedy has deeply affected the fire and aviation community.

Acting Commissioner Steve Smith said it had been a tough season so far, with many QFES staff and volunteers heavily impacted.

"To have lost life, as well as so many homes and structures, we know this will be a tough time for many communities," Mr Smith said.

"Not only have our crews been working tirelessly battling these blazes, they are also supporting their communities through these difficult times. In some cases, they have lost or had homes damaged themselves, or been close to it.

"Bushfires have certainly shown their full fury already this season and we have seen many examples of our people doing extraordinary work to protect and serve their communities.

"I want to thank everyone for their immense and valuable efforts in what has been very trying conditions."

Director of Rural Fire Service (RFS) Tony Johnstone said there were widespread, significant fires in every region.

"Each of the fires were managed and resourced differently," Tony said.

"The fire at Tara required a lot of aircraft supported by ground crew because it developed so quickly over vast areas of land.

"In Beerburrum a significant fire was threatening a valuable pine plantation so standard firefighting appliances played a large role for asset protection.

"In Mount Isa we partnered with the mines and local government and used a 30,000 litre water truck from the mine.

"In a variety of conditions and situations, our crews have done an amazing job minimising the impact of these bushfires with the resources available to them."

## South Western Region hard hit

South Western Region (SWR) has been particularly hard hit.

Manager of Bushfire Mitigation for SWR, Inspector Michael Welsh, said the region had experienced almost continuous significant bushfires since early August, including bushfires at Tara, Moonie, Wallangarra, Dalveen, Kumbarilla, Carnarvon Complex, Inglewood and Millmerran.

This comes after a tough start to the year when bushfires in the Tara, Myall Park and Montrose area destroyed 17 homes.

Michael said the recent fire at Tara, which was first reported on 15 October and started to threaten homes on 23 October, was created by the perfect storm of vegetation type, fuel and dryness.

"The fire behaviour was extreme and in some cases it created and was driven by its own weather, taking it in all directions, so it was very hard to plan for," Michael said.

"It was extreme conditions. The flames were up to 20 metres above the canopy of the trees. It was incredibly fast, spotting incredible distances, jumping across 100 metre breaks.

"With the weather and the number of houses affected, we just couldn't save every one of them. But we saved a hell of a lot of them."

One hundred and thirty structures were lost in Western Downs, Southern Downs and Toowoomba regional council areas. Six of the homes belonged to State Emergency Service (SES) and RFS members.



“It’s been a very tough year,” Michael said.

The region experienced some relief from the extreme weather conditions in early November, as well as through reinforcements from interstate and New Zealand.

“Crews were all putting in long hours for multiple days in a row. They were bone tired,” Michael said.

“It was a huge relief when the inter-region, Victorian and New Zealand deployments arrived.

“We are experiencing some reprieve at the moment, we had a little bit of rain on the weekend (4 and 5 November) on the eastern side of the region.

“We’re just catching our breath to be ready again for the weeks ahead. The ground is so dry we’d need a significant amount of rainfall to make a difference.”

The Tara fire was contained by the end of October with 20,500 hectares burnt in total.

It was during the Tara fire that two lives were lost. On 24 October a man died while trying to protect his property and a woman died the following day after suffering a medical episode while attempting to evacuate.

Before reinforcements arrived and while the Tara fire was close to being contained, another fire broke out in Wallangarra on 31 October.

QFES sent an emergency warning to the town’s residents to leave immediately at around 2pm. About 15 minutes later residents were told to seek shelter inside their homes.

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk thanked the NSW Government for a waterbombing aircraft that helped save the town.



South Eastern Region’s Fire and Rescue Service Strike Team Delta assisting at the fires at Tara.

The Premier reported to the media that the outstanding work of firefighters from both states had shielded Wallangarra from the worst.

“The fire is now going around the town, so the town has been saved,” Palaszczuk said.

### A close call for North Coast Region Incident Controller

Acting RFS Regional Manager for North Coast Region (NCR) Craig Magick said the region had experienced a number of significant fires, ranging in size, fuel load and the number of resources required to bring them under control.

“The fire at Goodwood was one of the more significant ones. It was burning coastal heath, had very heavy fuel loading and was fanned by the high winds,” Craig said.

“It was very fast-moving and a number of properties were under threat.

“The fuel type and the speed of the fire meant it was very unpredictable, dangerous and hard to contain.

“The Goodwood fire had the potential to have a catastrophic effect on the township of Goodwood, Woodgate and surrounding areas.”

Craig said all fires have been fought by crews within NCR, with many deploying to assist in other regions.

“Our RFS and FRS crews across this region are very committed to protecting their communities and assisting other communities in their time of need. Many have come forward to help, we’ve got a very engaged volunteer team,” Craig said.

One of the properties that was under threat during the Goodwood bushfire belonged to Gregory River Rural Fire Service First Officer Rachael Loveland.



Mudgeeraba Rural Fire Brigade on deployment in South Western Region.



SES crews support the bushfire efforts at Stanthorpe Aerodrome. Photo courtesy of Sandra McEwan.



Rachael was Incident Controller at the time and was directing crews and aircraft at the bushfire staging area about nine kilometres from her house.

“The fire had originally started in the national park and over the next few days we thought it was contained,” Rachael said.

“Then two spot-overs took off and there was no stopping them.”

The fast-moving embers travelled a number of kilometres, bringing the fire close to her home.

Things escalated quickly. Rachael and her crew members were trying to reach her husband and members from another brigade to tell them conditions had deteriorated and they needed to leave.

However, it was too late and the road was blocked by the fire.

After twenty long minutes of waiting, Rachael finally received news that her husband and her house were okay.

“These fires have been so intense,” Rachael said.

“We’ve seen things this season you don’t normally see. There’s so much fuel from the last couple of years of rain, it really is dry.”

### Central Region fuel loads high

RFS Regional Manager for Central Region Chris Spencer said two years of above average rainfall across large parts of the region had created an abundant and elevated fuel load, which significantly heightened the bushfire risk.

“Western parts of central Queensland that have been in drought for over a decade now have the real risk of fast running grassfires,” Chris said.

“This is something our communities and brigades have not had to encounter in such a long time.

“Fuel loads have dried out and cured and it’s not uncommon for fires to be ignited in places not long after they have received rainfall.

“We’re seeing fires take off quickly even though we have low to moderate conditions.”

The region has been working hard with landholders and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) for more than a month to contain a large and remote bushfire at Carnarvon National Park and adjoining freehold land. The fire has burnt about 360,000 hectares with a fire perimeter of 840 kilometres.

“It’s very difficult terrain up hilly and steep countryside,” Chris said.

“Different strategies and tactics need to be applied other than conventional firefighting techniques.

“We engage a range of earthmoving equipment to create strategic fire breaks. We also use controlled ignition and aerial firefighting capabilities.

“Because of the size of the fire, it’s very resource intensive to traverse that area. Aircraft and multiple ground crews need to patrol and make sure the ground has blackened out for several days to stop re-ignition.

Chris said State Air Operations and local pilots had been busy this season providing assistance for days on end at the Lowmead, Deepwater and Carnarvon fires.

“They are a welcome resource to ensure the head of the fire is knocked down and allow ground crews to move in and mop up, or allow time for fire control lines to be established,” Chris said.

“It’s crucial we use the knowledge of local landholders and brigades, married with QFES resources, such as fire behaviour analysts and predictive services units.”

Thankfully there were no reports of large losses of livestock in the region.

“The loss of vast amounts of grazing tenure is almost as bad if we don’t get relief from rain soon. Cattle will need to be moved to other properties or sold as a result,” Chris said.



Bushfires blacken the ground at Carnarvon National Park.



The region has received assistance from Victorian strike and incident management teams over the past few weeks, providing an opportunity to share knowledge, upskill and create linkages for the future.

Chris said the SES had been a huge help providing assistance to crews in the field and also in incident management roles.

“Our volunteer workforce and the services they provide to their communities is always awe-inspiring to see,” Chris said.

“I’ve also been amazed by our local staff, as well as those deployed from elsewhere in SWR and other regions, who have worked so hard to ensure positive outcomes are reached.”

### Increased air support for Far Northern Region

Director Regional Operations Chief Superintendent Adam Gwin said Far Northern Region (FNR) had needed increased air support this season, a sign of how things were changing.

“At the bushfire in Herberton we had support from four aircraft, whereas normally it might be two,” Adam said.

“At Silver Valley we had the Helitak, a heavy water bombing aircraft. That’s the first time we’ve had that style of aircraft with that capacity in Far Northern Region.

“The resources that have been committed to these events are demonstrations of how our seasons are no longer a set period. We need to keep evolving to remain proactive in our capability to respond.”

Adam said the region had experienced an unusually wet winter, which had delayed mitigation activities.

“There was a turn in the weather and we went straight into bushfire mode,” Adam said.

“The season commenced in October with bushfires around Cooktown and Lakeland which progressively headed south.”

Adam said some of the fires had needed complex operational responses, such as the Herberton and Silver Valley bushfires.

“In some parts of the region there isn’t the same connectivity as in urban areas, which creates issues with messaging and alerts,” Adam said.

“There may not be phone and internet so face to face interaction is important.

“A person’s home may not necessarily be the standard criteria that would be recognised as a house, but it’s just as important to the people living there, so that changes how we approach asset protection. There are also some important and valuable cultural and agricultural assets that need protection.

“Some people would prefer to lose their tractors than lose a paddock of feed so it’s about navigating those complexities and keeping in touch with the locals.”

Adam said bushfires in the Torres Strait also presented complexities for crews.

“We had a significant fire on Thursday Island and crews worked very hard in conjunction with Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Health as there were structures in the line of fire, including a nursing home.

“It’s challenging being in an island environment as you are

restricted as to where you can move people, but we managed to bring that fire into line.

“We’ve sent a substitute team in there to give crews a reprieve as many of them are locals and also critical government workers.”

Adam said there had been some unusual stories emerging from the bushfires around the region.

“There was one person who was told to leave their property however they made a decision to stay,” Adam said.

“When crews arrived back at the property the house was destroyed and crews feared the worst.”

“They were surprised and relieved to see the person walk onto the scene barefoot, and covered in ash, but otherwise fine.”

FNR has also received assistance from Victorian Strike teams and Incident Management Teams.

### Partnerships key in Northern Region

Northern Region (NR) has experienced a number of large fires in remote country.

RFS Regional Manager NR Superintendent Tony Hazell said there were several fires along the coast in August and September before they started to move inland into very remote countryside.

“One of the bigger ones was at West Leichardt which impacted the town of Mount Isa,” Tony said.

“The fire started on Heywood Station in the Selwyn Ranges which is very rugged terrain. The fire eventually pushed over the ranges and moved closer to Mount Isa.

“A wind change pushed the fire in a north-west direction and the fire took a run up to Lake Moondarra causing the evacuation of campers.

“The flanking fire continued to approach Mount Isa, however, crews were able to control it so it didn’t impact the community.”

Tony said the mining community provided equipment to help including Moxy water tankers that can carry up to 30,000 litres of water.

“On mine sites these trucks, in combination with graders, maintain the haul roads,” Tony said.

“They had to be escorted through town by QPS as they take up two lanes on the road. They made a significant contribution in helping to extinguish the fire.



Aerial footage shows crop damage at an avocado farm in Far Northern Region.



“We also had dozers and graders from the council and mines involved in establishing fire breaks.”

This was the first time Mount Isa had assistance from water bombing aircraft, including an amphibious air tractor, which used water from Lake Moondarra on the fire.

Tony said it was common and necessary to work with the local community and partners to fight fires in this part of the region.

“Mount Isa is about 10 hours from Townsville. We don’t have a lot of resources that are QFES-owned so we need to work closely with partners to fight these fires.

“We work in collaboration with landowners, brigades, QPWS and others to limit the impact of fires on community. We provide advice on the ground as well as technical advice, such as the location of fires through satellite technology, line scans and aerial assets.”

Tony thanked the partners who worked closely with QFES to contain the West Leichardt fires including Glencore, QPS, SES, Mount Isa City Council, local graziers and the FRS crews.

**South Eastern and Brisbane regions support the state**

South Eastern Region (SER) has battled a number of large blazes including fires at the Undullah complex, Oakey Creek, Dundas and Redbank Creek complex.

RFS Regional Manager SER Kaye Healing said the region had also been regularly deploying around the state since the start of the season.

“We’ve had staff and firefighting assets deployed from Mareeba through to Roma and Dalby,” Kaye said.

Brisbane Region deployed more than 70 personnel to assist operations in South Western and Far Northern Region.

**Fires from the air**

From 1 September to 15 November, 67 aircraft had flown more than 6370 hours, with 2542 hours in South Western Region and

1488 in Central Region. The aircraft, which included 23 fixed wing, 40 rotary wing and the Large Air Tanker, were dispatched 1413 times and dropped more than 34 million litres of suppressant on fires around the state.

Air Operations Officer Brett Mcilwane was deployed as Air Attack Supervisor at the Beerwah and Mundoolan bushfires in September.

Brett said Air Attack Supervisors coordinate all bombing aircraft that are operating on the fire, making sure everyone is safe and separated.

“Ground crew will give you the incident action plan on the ground and we have to implement that in the air,” he said.

“It gets pretty full on, it can be exhausting being up in the air all day.”

“You’re looking at the risk on the ground and making a judgement call on where to bomb with the goal of protecting life and property.



Crews work to contain a bushfire at Undullah. Photo courtesy of Annie Webster.



Northern Region were assisted by many local partners including the mines who provided large water tankers to help fight fires.



South Eastern Region’s Fire and Rescue Service Strike Team Delta assisting at the fires at Tara.





“It can be challenging when you’ve got ten properties under threat at one time with limited resources, it’s high pressure.

“In Mundoolan we were water bombing right alongside houses.”

Remotely-Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) have also played an important role in battling fires around the state.

RPAS have been used for almost 40 hours of operations, assisting with damage assessments, situational awareness, safety overwatch, livestreams to incident control centres and regional operations centres, mapping and night operations.

State Air Operations has been supporting SWR with a two-pilot RPAS deployment team including vehicle and equipment, with RPAS pilots from South Eastern, Brisbane and North Coast regions assisting.



Crews battle a blaze at Beerwah in October. Photo courtesy of Bli Bli Rural Fire Brigade.



Carnarvon Gorge. Photo courtesy of Central Queensland Nature Tours

## A team effort

Behind the scenes, QFES teams have been supporting the bushfire response effort in a variety of ways.

The Intelligence Services Unit (ISU) analyse operational situations across the state and provide timely insight through high-level and broad intelligence reports and briefings that include community resilience ratings, social media sentiment and media reports. These are provided to state and regional operations centres, as well as the QFES Senior Executive and the Queensland Disaster Management Committee.

The Predictive Services Unit, who focus on fire behaviour and prediction, stood up Fire Behaviour Analysts (FBANs) in every region. Since the start of September FBANs have carried out work, including predictions, on more than 130 separate fires across the state.

Between 10 October and 10 November, Warnings Officers from state and the regions produced more than 1000 warnings, which is about half the year’s total of more than 2000 warnings. About 360 of these were in SWR.

FireCom officers and managers around the state worked extended and extra shifts to ensure the community and crews on the ground received the coordination and support they needed.

At the height of activity, the Media Team facilitated daily press conferences and more than 180 media interviews.

Acting Commissioner Steve Smith said staff from all parts of the department had made enormous contributions to the bushfire effort.

“Whether on the fire ground or behind the scenes, everyone is pulling together and working as a team to support the community before, during and after these events,” Mr Smith said.

## Support for those affected

Mental health supports are available to QFES staff, volunteers and family members. Call the free 24-hour counselling service on 1800 805 980 or visit the FESSN website.

To donate to those affected by the bushfires in Queensland visit [www.qld.gov.au/about/bushfires](http://www.qld.gov.au/about/bushfires).



Victorian and New Zealand firefighters provided welcome relief to multiple regions. Photos by Sandra McEwan.

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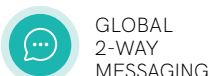
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# Another busy year helping the community

Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Mark Ryan reflects on another busy year that saw QFES personnel continuing to be there for the community when they were needed most.

I start by remembering First Class Firefighter Izabella Nash.

Izzy made the ultimate sacrifice while protecting her community.

I was honoured and humbled to attend the official appliance dedication to Izzy at Acacia Ridge Fire and Rescue Station in October.

It was obvious to see she was a cherished and highly valued member of the Acacia Ridge crew and broader community.

There was also the terribly sad loss of three air crew whose plane went down as they worked to protect Queenslanders and their property from the bushfires.

These three outstanding people were doing everything they could as part of our aerial firefighting capability to keep Queenslanders safe.

I know there are family, friends and colleagues of that crew who are still hurting.

We are thinking of them.

Once again Queenslanders lived up to their reputation as among our nation's most disaster resilient and experienced citizens.

From floods in the north of the state at the start of the year, to a challenging bushfire season that saw loss of life and dozens of properties destroyed, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) personnel, all of you, have gone above and beyond helping communities prepare, respond and recover when emergencies and extreme weather strikes.

I would like to extend a huge and sincere thank you to all officers, staff and volunteers who have provided crucial services to communities during these times.

From those on the frontline to those working behind the scenes, you have worked tirelessly in trying and difficult conditions to keep people and property safe.

No matter what role you play, you have been there for Queensland communities during the toughest times, helping to support communities before, during and after disasters and emergencies.

Recognising the critical work of officers, staff and volunteers, the Palaszczuk Government has provided QFES with a record \$1.04 billion budget in 2023/24, including funding for new and upgraded facilities and equipment.

This year we continued to progress reforms for the establishment of the Queensland Fire Department (QFD).

Our marine rescue colleagues transitioned across to the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in April, disaster management personnel followed at the end of October and next year our State Emergency Service (SES) colleagues will do the same.

A considerable amount of work has occurred to bring about these significant changes and will continue into next year leading up to the final transition on 30 June, 2024.

Once again, thank you for continuing to work tirelessly to support your communities while adapting to and accommodating the reform program.

Change is not easy but I know we are all focused on providing the best services to Queenslanders.

I am always amazed and inspired to meet the people who perform such critical services for our communities.

This year I had the pleasure of meeting many of you at different events and celebrations.

I travelled up to north Queensland and was pleased to meet SES volunteers at the

handover of flood boats to Clare and Home Hill SES Units.

I was proud to see QFES personnel working closely with partners from around the country during Exercise Ignis in Brisbane in preparation for this year's bushfire season.

It was great to meet Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers at Mt Nebo during Rural Fire Service Week and an honour to celebrate and recognise SES volunteers at the State Awards Ceremony in Brisbane during SES Week.

Congratulations to all new firefighter and Firecom recruits this year, a number of whom I was able to congratulate in person at several graduation ceremonies.

I feel confident the future of the Queensland Fire Department is in good hands.

I also got to meet and celebrate future generations of emergency services personnel at the PCYC Emergency Services Cadets Program 10-year celebration in Brisbane in October.

I would also like to thank former Commissioner Greg Leach for his time leading QFES.

Greg oversaw the emergency services response to some significant Queensland events, including the 2022 floods and the K'gari bushfire.

I wish Greg the very best for his future endeavours as he moves back to Victoria to lead their SES and spend more time with his family.





# Looking back on 2023

**Extreme weather events, major organisational reform and multiple international deployments: *Response* revisits some of the major events, celebrations and milestones from 2023.**

## Floods and fires to start the year

The first few weeks of 2023 brought concurrent significant weather events to Queensland, with bushfires in the south and heavy rainfall and flooding in north Queensland.

The Gulf of Carpentaria experienced major rainfall which isolated communities for several weeks, as well as inundating farms and disrupting food supplies.

As the heavy rainfall extended into February and March, remote communities in Cape York and the Gulf relied on aerial food supply drops. The region's Emergency Management Coordinators planned, coordinated and provided leadership and support to deliver 5500 kilograms of fresh, frozen and chilled foods to the Coen community.

Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) swiftwater technicians, State Emergency Service (SES) personnel, Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the Whitsunday Regional Council joined forces on a tip truck to rescue 19 people and three dogs stranded south of Proserpine on the Bruce Highway.

A disaster declaration remained in place for northern and central Queensland in March, when floodwaters finally began to recede.

In February around 200 FRS, Rural Fire Service (RFS) and SES personnel from South Western Region battled against significant bushfires, with 19 homes and several sheds lost to fires. In March, increased rainfall brought some firegrounds under control allowing bushfire recovery operations to get underway.

## Deployments

In February 25 QFES personnel from AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) were deployed to New Zealand to assist with Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle. They were based in one of the hardest hit areas, Hawke's Bay, from 17 to 25 February. It was the deadliest system to hit the country since Cyclone Giselle in 1968 and only the third time New Zealand has declared a national state of emergency. The cyclone claimed 11 lives, including two New

Zealand firefighters who died after being caught in a landslide in Muriwai.

In the same month two DART personnel went to Türkiye to assist after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake devastated vast areas in the southern part of the country, impacting an estimated 15.73 million people in Syria and Türkiye. Alongside 72 DART personnel from NSW and two from ACT, they spent a week sorting through rubble in Antakya.

Later in the year hot and dry conditions in Canada led to wildfires across the country. In July four Canadian firefighters and a pilot were tragically killed in the line of duty. More than 1000 fires were burning and 120,000 people were evacuated from their homes. Firefighting resources were stretched thin and Canada put out a call for international firefighters from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States, 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. This was the first time Queensland sent a volunteer RFS team overseas. Crews faced difficult conditions where the ground was wet yet still burnt and the team had to keep an eye out for animals such as bison, moose and black bears.

## Reform implementation

In March members of the Reform Implementation Taskforce (RIT) visited regions for the first round of consultation and engagement and since then more than a dozen town halls have been held to keep staff informed about progress on the Reform. In addition, the five Reference Groups have been meeting regularly, providing subject matter expertise to inform the Reform's program of work.

Marine Rescue Queensland transferred to QPS in April, followed by Disaster Management staff in October, while everything is on track for the SES to transition by the end of this financial year.

Other milestones this year include approval for the RFS' new organisational structure from the RIT Steering Committee, with



*Specialist firefighters were confronted with devastating scenes during their deployment to Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.*



*The tragic loss of First Class Firefighter Izabella Nash in May devastated QFES members and the community.*



work currently underway to support the implementation of this new structure.

There was also agreement to transition Fire and Rescue stations in Emerald, Highfields, Kingaroy, Coolumb and Port Douglas to a seven-day service delivery with 12-hour shifts.

### Vale Izabella Nash

The tragic loss of First Class Firefighter Izabella (Izzy) Nash, who was fatally injured at a factory fire in Slacks Creek in May, devastated QFES members and the community. A memorial service was held on Monday 22 May at Nissan Arena, attended by Izzy's family, QFES members and families, the Premier, members of Parliament, partner agencies and members of the public to pay their respects and honour Izzy. In October, friends, family and fellow firefighters gathered at Acacia Ridge Station to dedicate an appliance 510A in Izzy's honour.

Her crewmate Lia Drew was also seriously injured and the QFES community was pleased to hear Lia was able to return home from hospital in June to continue her recovery.

### Warnings and Fire Danger Ratings

QFES led the roll-out of the new Australian Warnings System (AWS) with full implementation completed in November. Previously, different warning systems were used for different hazard types across Australia. There are five hazards the AWS now apply to: bushfire, flood, severe weather, cyclone and extreme heat. Queenslanders will already be familiar with AWS bushfire warnings, which have been used across the state since May 2021.

Fire Danger Rating signs also changed to use the new national design. Work is continuing to place the signage with more than 90 of the 130 identified locations installed as of early November. The signs are automatic, digital and updated daily with the Bureau of Meteorology's fire danger data in each forecast district.

### Awards and milestones

On Queensland Day, 6 June, the RFS was recognised as a Queensland Great. It is one of only 19 institutions to be given that honour.

Also in June, 37 FRS swiftwater technicians were presented with the Higgins and Langley Memorial Award for technical expertise and successful completion of challenging swiftwater rescues during the 2022 floods. This award is presented for preparedness and teamwork.

In August Response magazine celebrated its 50th edition of sharing news and stories of QFES and its members.

### SES Uplift

The SES Uplift project, which identified and filled the gaps in SES service delivery, concluded in July. The program reviewed and enhanced training delivery, community and stakeholder engagement, doctrine, equipment and systems enhancements.

Almost \$7 million was spent on purchasing more than 1200 items of new equipment and 45 additional staff were recruited.

### National and international collaboration

On 27 July, QFES coordinated a multi-agency bushfire exercise, Exercise Ignis, in Brisbane. The exercise involved local, state, interstate and Commonwealth Government representatives,

including QPS, Queensland Ambulance Service, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Defence Force and New South Wales SES.

The exercise was an opportunity to strengthen relationships within the disaster management sector and was an important part of enhancing QFES' preparedness.

QFES was pleased to host the 2023 AFAC conference in Brisbane, with the theme 'Creating a sustainable future: the challenges and opportunities'. It brought together local, interstate and international delegates from across the industry including emergency services, all levels of government, research and academia as well as equipment and service businesses that support the sector.

Another highlight of the conference was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between QFES and the Papua New Guinea Fire Service. This MOU builds on and continues the long-standing partnership between the two fire services, improving community safety and emergency response in Papua New Guinea.

Also in August, Brisbane hosted the 2023 Asia Pacific Earthquake Response Exercise as part of Australia's commitments as a member of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group. QFES and Fire and Rescue New South Wales partnered with other national agencies to run the sophisticated four-day earthquake exercise in Brisbane, with almost 300 participants from more than 30 countries.

### Bushfire season

QFES worked with the community to get prepared for bushfire season as part of Operation Sesbania, which is now a year-round effort.

With an El Niño declared in September predicting hot, dry and windy conditions, QFES was prepared for a busy season. In September there were already significant grass and bushfires occurring across many of the regions.

QFES bolstered its aerial fleet with three more aircraft, including a specialised intelligence-gathering aircraft and two waterbombers. The Large Air Tanker touched down in early September, and a UH-60 Black Hawk also joined the fleet for the first time since the 2019 season. Both were used within a week of their arrival.

Read more about recent bushfire operations on pages 4-9.

### RLIB campaign

More than 450 fires in Australia have been linked to Rechargeable Lithium-Ion Batteries (RLIBs) over the past 18 months.

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

While not every RLIB is dangerous, unintentional misuse can have severe consequences. In October QFES launched a public safety advertising campaign — the first of its kind in Australia — to highlight the risks of RLIBs and how to charge them safely.

### Farewell Commissioner Leach

Former Commissioner Greg Leach farewelled QFES in October to take up the role of Chief Executive Officer at SES Victoria. After four years leading QFES through many changes and significant events, Mr Leach was thanked and recognised for his dedication and focus on QFES and its people.

Stephen Smith has been appointed as Acting Commissioner while recruitment for a new Commissioner progresses.



# Young volunteers shine

Three QFES volunteers, all of them under 20-years-old, have been recognised for their exceptional commitment and dedication as finalists in the QBANK Everyday Heroes Awards. The Awards recognise the dedication and hard work of people who protect, serve and heal communities.

## Ethyn Vit, Ipswich City SES Unit, Dedication Category Finalist

Nineteen-year-old Ethyn Vit joined the Ipswich City SES Unit three years ago during the middle of COVID-19.

“Everyone was feeling helpless. I wanted to help out. I saw the SES popping up on searches and thought this was the kind of team I’d like to join and I jumped right in,” he said.

Ethyn is a law and international relations student and hopes to one day work in the area of legal policy. He is also planning to join the Queensland Police Service in the near future.

Having clocked more than 545 hours with the SES, he dedicated nine days straight to helping people across south-east Queensland during the 2022 floods.

His nomination also highlighted his dedicated efforts outside the SES. It explained how Ethyn had helped an injured person on the side of the road using a first aid kit from his car, put out a fire on the highway with a fire extinguisher also stored in his car and helped a homeless person secure accommodation.

Ethyn said being in the SES provided experiences most other people his age would not normally be exposed to.

“Much of the work you do in orange is unlike anything you will do in any other aspect of your life,” he said.

“From multi-agency search and rescue jobs to community support requests, every task offers something new.”

He said the most rewarding part of the job was seeing the Ipswich community come together in times of need.

“After every job, and especially during major events, it is extremely rewarding to see the number of completed jobs,” Ethyn said.

“Behind every one is a thankful family who can sleep easy knowing their leaky ceiling will stay up during the night, or stressed parents who can relax knowing their child was found.”



## Jonesy Cairncross, Beenleigh SES Unit, Young Hero Category Finalist

When Jonesy Cairncross joined the SES at just 16-years-old, he was in for a big surprise.

“At first I joined because I was looking for something to do in my free time to get out of the house but I started to really enjoy it and got more involved,” he said.

“It was a steep learning curve. I didn’t have a lot of life experience so a lot of the areas they were teaching us in, like community engagement, were all totally new concepts.

“When I started the course Working Safely at Heights, I had no idea what a roof looked like.

Now eighteen-year-old Jonesy has completed 684 hours of training and operations.

“The part which interests me the most is search and rescue,” Jonesy said.

“Doing search and rescue we go to a lot of people’s homes in lots of different communities around the Gold Coast, Ipswich and Brisbane. It’s interesting to meet people and see how different people live their lives.

“It’s a unique field. It’s a good mix between thinking outside the box, having a good level of fitness and also a good way to connect with the community.”

Jonesy hopes to make a career out of search and rescue and has applied to join the Queensland Police Service.

One of his more memorable searches took place at Binna Burra in the Gold Coast hinterland.

“We went out on Saturday at 8pm and didn’t come back until Sunday at 2pm,” he said.

“We found the hiker and successfully pushed her for about 12 hours on a stretcher without stopping. We were all very sore and tired. When we finally got her to safety it felt so awesome to know we were done.

Jonesy said there was a great sense of community in the SES.

“I’ve made some of my best mates through the SES.”

Jonesy was the runner-up for Young Queenslanders of the Year last year, and the winner of the South Eastern Region SES Week Award for Young Member of the Year.





### Georgia Glentworth – Closeburn Rural Fire Brigade, Young Hero Category Finalist

Eighteen-year-old Georgia joined the Closeburn Rural Fire Brigade in 2022 after spending six years in the Australian Army Cadets.

“After leaving my role as the training officer for my unit, much of my week that was usually devoted to running the training for the unit became empty, and for the first time in a long while, I felt without a purpose,” Georgia said.

“After a very rough start to the year, members of the brigade provided me with a lot of personal support to ensure my wellbeing, so joining the brigade was a natural step.

“Along with the active preparation and prevention for fire season, I also regularly turn out to wildfire, road traffic crashes, hazard reduction burns and creek rescues.”



Georgia is currently in Year 12 and will be attending QUT to do a dual degree in economics and physics next year.

This year she has taken part in fundraising activities like Starlight Super Swim, Run Army and World’s Greatest Shave.

Georgia said she enjoyed assisting the community, as well as the mateship in the RFS.

“The connections made are invaluable,” she said.

“I don’t think anyone should go into volunteer work with an expectation of anything other than personal satisfaction in knowing you’re making a contribution to the community.

“Knowing that I am actively contributing to the safety of my house, my family, my friends and my pets is by far the most rewarding part of the job.

“Beyond family, there is nothing more important to me than bettering my community and ensuring I contribute what I have to offer.

“I am overjoyed that my work has made a positive impact on the community.”



Ethyn Vit, Georgia Glentworth and Jonesy Cairncross were awarded for their dedication and commitment as finalists in the QBANK Everyday Hero Awards.



# Together it's more super

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# Responsible use of AI could reap rewards for QFES community

QFES Principal Program Officer Matt Dyer has been trialling Generative AI for the past year to assess the potential risks and benefits.

Generative AI is a type of artificial intelligence that can create new content, such as text, images, music, audio, and videos, using generative models. Examples include ChatGPT and Bing Chat.

Matt, who works in the Planning, Risk, Research and Innovation Unit, was approved to trial Generative AI in several controlled use cases. He said there is potential for AI to help QFES members in their roles.

“It’s all about the problem you are trying to solve and being a responsible user,” he said.

Generative AI works by referencing a large training dataset of text and language processing technology to understand the context of user inputs. When a user query has been analysed it uses rules – or algorithms – to offer a human-like response.

It can respond to questions and compose written content, including articles, social media posts, essays, code and emails.

Matt used Generative AI to analyse more than 50,000 words from around 15 transcripts. He said the results showed a huge productivity gain with the tool able to complete the task around ten times faster than the average person.

“These are very powerful tools. Although there are potential benefits to be gained, there are also significant risks to consider when using AI,” he said.

“Always be a responsible user of AI and remember to be transparent when presenting outputs that were generated by AI tools.

“For those curious to explore these tools Microsoft Bing Chat Enterprise is a good place to start.”

Bing Chat is available for use within QFES by opening the Microsoft Edge web browser and entering “Bing Chat” in the search field. Bing Chat doesn’t store data and after the browser is closed the data is discarded.

The Queensland Government Enterprise Architecture (QGEA) is currently developing guidance on the considerations and issues when experimenting with or using Generative AI technologies in a Queensland Government context.

“For example, official government information and sensitive, protected information and personal information must not be shared with ChatGPT,” Matt said.

“Queensland Government is also developing an internal Generative AI capability similar to ChatGPT. This capability will allow public servants to use Generative AI in a safe, secure and managed way.”

To learn more about the importance of data and information security, visit the Information Management Unit Gateway page.

If you have any questions about using AI, please contact the ICT Engagement and Partnerships Unit  
[ICT.Engagement&Partnerships@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:ICT.Engagement&Partnerships@qfes.qld.gov.au).

## Risks to consider when using AI

- Legal and intellectual property risks – There are ongoing questions as to the legal ownership of generated content produced by Generative AI models.
- Privacy and data protection – Commoditised and readily available Generative AI tools have privacy policies and data protection statements that may not be aligned with existing legislation and policies applicable to the Queensland Government.
- Security and safety – Generative AI can be used to create enormous amounts of content quickly, including content that is designed to harm, deceive and damage, and other illegal or unethical behaviour.
- Lack of knowledge for data and events after 2021 – Many existing Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) technologies have a finite window of reference material and therefore this may affect outputs of the technology.
- Privacy issues – GPT technologies rely on text input by the user. This means it could potentially reveal sensitive information if personal information is provided. The technology can also track and profile individuals by collecting information and associating it with the user’s phone number and email. The information is then stored indefinitely.
- Cybersecurity risk - Irresponsible use of AI can put employers at risk due to greater risk of accidental data breaches.
- Lack of maturity - The technology generally **lacks maturity and therefore cannot be fully relied upon at this time.**
- AI decision-making – Decision making performed by a computer (not a human) has led to poor content generation and/or poor decision making.

## Before using AI, complete the Fast 5 Assessment to decide if it’s suitable.

- Q1: Is it clear and well defined what you want AI to do for you?
- Q2: Have applicable legislation and policies been identified and considered?
- Q3: Do you have a clear understanding of the AI technology/ methods in use?
- Q4: Does the owner of the data agree to the proposed use?
- Q5: Would the use of AI be considered reasonable by relevant stakeholders?

**If yes to all 5 questions, then AI and/or ChatGPT would be viable and lower risk. One or more no means further consideration of the risks is required.**



# Hairy mo-ments for a good cause

Throughout November QFES members grew their mo's, got active and gathered with their community to raise funds and awareness for Movember, a charity focused on improving men's health.

On average, men die 4.5 years earlier than women. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men over 45 years of age. Testicular cancer is the most common cancer among young men. Globally, one man dies by suicide every minute of every day, with males accounting for 69 per cent of all suicides. Movember aims to tackle these issues through education, research, training, advocacy, collaboration and more.

Acting Assistant Commissioner for South Western Region Jason Lawler is the QFES Ambassador for Movember and has been a long-time supporter of the movement.

Mr Lawler said he was passionate about improving men's health.

"It's great to see people across the state supporting Movember in lots of fun, active and imaginative ways," Mr Lawler said.

The Kingaroy Postie Bike Run completed their annual Movember fundraiser riding more than 1000 kilometres over three days around the North Coast Region.

This is the fifth year the event has been running, with the team raising more than \$50,000 in total.

A number of North Coast and Central Region auxiliaries, firefighters and retired auxiliaries took part, including Cookie Jeffrey from Wondai Station, the team's top fundraiser.

Maryborough Fire and Rescue Station crew held an event at Anzac Park which brought together people from across the Maryborough community.

Seventy-five walkers collectively walked 225 kilometres around the park and heard presentations from local organisations about mental health and prostate and testicular cancers.

Senior Firefighter Sharnte Butler, who started the event two years ago, said the community spirit was unbelievable.

"To see so many groups coming together for one particular reason is very powerful," she said.

Sharnte is passionate about supporting the cause, particularly as she works alongside men who she describes as "brothers and uncles".

"I've experienced the loss of family and friends from both suicide and cancer," she said.

"The Maryborough crew has been affected by suicide, so this is an important issue for us and it's great to come together and support this cause."

Manager of Tactical Training Unit Inspector Richard Gorey is another passionate advocate for men's health.

Richard knows too well about the importance of looking after body and mind. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer six years ago, with his prostate later removed, and has had multiple pre-cancerous polyps removed from his bowel.

He said it was important to take care of yourself and get the recommended tests done.

"I had no symptoms at all. I've never smoked, exercise regularly and have a healthy diet," he said.

"It doesn't matter how healthy you are or whether you have any symptoms, go and get the recommended tests.

"If anyone is feeling nervous about getting any of these tests done, they can reach out to me."

Richard, who is also a Peer Support Officer, said he believed balance was key to positive mental health.

"Especially when you are going through a big life change like a promotion or retirement. Big changes can mean we have to look at life differently," he said.

"Throughout all of life's stages it's important to keep a balance between family, socialising, work, looking after your health, and other things that are important to you.

"I think for some of us in QFES our whole life can be our badge, but it's really important to keep things balanced."

More information on mental health, prostate and testicular cancer can be found at [www.movember.com](http://www.movember.com).



The annual Kingaroy Postie Bike Run crew about to set off on their 1000 kilometre fundraising adventure.



Maryborough Fire and Rescue Service and the Rural Fire Service collectively walked 225 kilometres alongside other community groups to raise funds for Movember.



# One foot forward for mental health

Throughout October Tom Mogridge from Brisbane SES Unit pounded the pavement, walking 100 kilometres to raise funds and awareness for mental health and suicide prevention.

Tom took part in the fundraising event One Foot Forward organised by the Black Dog Institute, who aim to create a mentally healthier world through research, education programs, digital tools and apps, clinical services and public resources.

It's an issue that's very close to home for Tom.

"I have battled with depression and anxiety for most of my adult life," he said.

"I lost my father when I was 20 and was studying, working full-time and looking after my younger siblings."

Rather than seeking help, Tom used alcohol and medication to treat his mental health challenges.

"This continued for years without really being noticed. I was good at hiding my feelings because I feared being labelled as weak," he said.

"I was always told to get on with things and not show emotion."

After hitting a particularly low point, Tom ended up in hospital for more than a month and it was then he decided that enough was enough.

"I won't ever forget my son's face when he visited me in hospital," he said.

"I felt I had let the most important person on this planet down. He could have grown up without his father. That moment was enough. I had to change. I had to stop being selfish and scared and put my hand up and say, 'Can someone please help me?'"

"I have also lost many loved ones to suicide. Whenever it happens I always question how I didn't notice anything was wrong. I might have spoken to them recently and they seemed ok.

"By taking part in this walk I want to highlight how serious this silent killer is and that we can all play a part in improving mental health.

"Even if one person walks past me, suffering or not, and notices my shirt it may prompt them to ask a family member, friend, loved one, colleague, anybody, how they actually are."

Money raised through the event will go towards providing resources to people living with anxiety and depression, education programs and research.

Tom said he enjoyed taking part in the walk, not just to support the cause but also for the mental health benefits that come with walking.

"I walked mostly by myself and took time to reflect on past experiences I've had with mental health, both my own and others around me," he said.

"Walking helps me to manage stress and anxiety. It helps clear brain fog. It boosts my ability to solve problems without any outside distraction hindering my thoughts. I find I sleep a lot more comfortably. I wake up feeling positive and rejuvenated."

Tom said he also looks after his mental health by taking care of his physical health, meditation, trying new things, setting realistic goals and managing stress.

"I think it's important to value yourself, treat yourself with kindness and respect and avoid self-criticism and also to surround yourself with good people who care about you and can provide support and encouragement," he said.

Tom acknowledged his Brisbane SES Unit Group Leader Jigdre Tenzin who supported him in his efforts to take part in the event and accompanied him on some of the longer walks.

For anyone seeking help, counselling services are available through the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network. Counsellors can provide advice on topics such as parenting, career guidance, organisational change, pain

management, work demands, substance use and addictions. See [qfes.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people](http://qfes.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people) or call 1800 805 980 for free and confidential contact with an expert counsellor. You can also call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636. For more information on how to have conversations with people about mental health visit [ruok.org.au](http://ruok.org.au) or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au).

*One in five people will experience a mental illness in any given year. In Australia that's around 5 million people. Roughly 60 per cent of these people won't seek help. Nine people in Australia die by suicide every day. Suicide is the leading cause of death among people aged 15-44.*



Tom Mogridge stops off at Kedron Emergency Services Complex to meet with former Commissioner Greg Leach during his 100 kilometre walk for One Foot Forward.



# BRISBANE REGION



## Iron Traks visit North Straddie

On 24 October, more than 20 girls from Bremer State High School's Girls Rugby League team visited North Stradbroke Island as part of the Iron Traks program, accompanied by QPS Police Liaison Officers and Australian Defence Force personnel.

The program aims to provide mentorship, motivation and support to encourage the transformation of young people's lives.

They visited Dunwich Fire and Rescue Station, where Station Officer Simon Johnstone provided a tour of the facilities, spoke about life as an Auxiliary Firefighter and provided the opportunity for the students to try on the turn-out gear and use the fire hoses.

This was followed by a trip to the Amity Rural Fire Service, where rural Firefighter Ann Farrell showed them the facilities and vehicles.

The group then travelled to Point Lookout to meet Surf Life Saver Wayne Cole, who, with more than 50 years' experience, was able to educate the students on swell, currents and how to spot a rip.

The day concluded with a visit to Brown Lake, where a traditional owner gave a poignant Welcome to Country and explained the history of Brown Lake and the significance it has to women.

The visit highlighted the importance of volunteering and being a valuable part of the community, as well as the multitude of roles available at QFES for those keen to apply themselves.



## Appliance dedication to Izzy Nash

Acacia Ridge Fire and Rescue Station has dedicated an Appliance 510A in memory of First Class Firefighter Izabella (Izzy) Nash.

Izzy lost her life due to injuries sustained while fighting a fire at Slacks Creek on 2 May, 2023.

Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Mark Ryan, former Commissioner Greg Leach, Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing, Acting Assistant Commissioner Matthew Bulow and Izzy's partner and family attended the official appliance dedication ceremony on October 23. A framed memorial tribute to Izzy now also takes pride of place at the station.

## Brisbane pays tribute

On 10 October Queenslanders paid tribute to the 60 firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty for Firefighter's Remembrance Day.

Brisbane Region hosted a commemorative ceremony at St Brigid's Church in Red Hill and as an extra addition to this year's remembrance, the Brisbane City Hall and Victoria Bridge were lit up in red to remember our fallen heroes.





# SOUTH EASTERN REGION

## Commissioner's Unit Citation

Gold Coast Command Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) crews were recognised for their skill, determination and professionalism while responding to an emergency in January this year. Two helicopters collided mid-air and crashed onto a sand bar on the Gold Coast Broadwater.

FRS crews worked with Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Coast Guard and Volunteer Marine Rescue to undertake rescues, recover casualties and render the scene safe.

The strong working relationships and interoperability between all emergency responders proved extremely beneficial in managing the extraordinary event. The awards ceremony was held on October 25 at Southport Fire and Rescue Station.

Congratulations to Commissioner's Unit Citation award recipients:

- Greg Tomlinson, A/Chief Superintendent,
- Paul Gray, A/Station Officer
- Karl Nihot, Station Officer
- Paul Dunn, Station Officer
- Rikki Jackson, Station Officer

- Matthew Camps, Senior Firefighter
- Jordan Hurley, Senior Firefighter
- Greig Harris, Senior Firefighter
- Benjamin Lee, Senior Firefighter
- Richard Slack, Senior Firefighter
- Joshua Gapper, Senior Firefighter
- Steven Hughes, Senior Firefighter
- Jacqueline Brown, Senior Firefighter
- Lucy Parsons, Firefighter
- Levi Von Nida, Firefighter

Further congratulations to the Commissioner's Certificate of Appreciation recipients:

- David Richards, Station Officer
- Cameron Spalding, Fire Communications Supervisor
- Meghan Brearley, Fire Communications Officer
- Natalie Emmert, Fire Communications Officer
- Carolyn Mair, Fire Communications Officer
- Andrea Freeman, Fire Communications Officer
- Belinda Morier, Regional Peer Support Coordinator
- Frank White, Chaplain



## Ipswich Learner Drive Nights

Ipswich Command FRS crews along with Queensland Ambulance Service, Department of Transport and Main Roads and Driver Safety Australia have been working with Queensland Police Service to deliver a series of Learner Drive Night events in partnership with Queensland Raceway, Willowbank.

Learner drivers and their supervisors are briefed before heading out on to the circuit for on-road simulations, including flashing lights and sirens, a Random Breath Test and interactions with emergency services personnel. The hands-on road safety initiative allows participants to become more confident and familiar with emergency services.

Three Learner Drive Nights have been held this year with two more scheduled for December. The hands-on road safety initiative has been well received and has had a positive impact on participants.



## Lowood flood boat handover

The Lowood State Emergency Service (SES) Group experienced the tragic loss of their fellow volunteer Merryll Dray while responding to a call for help during the height of the 2022 Queensland floods. As a result of the damage, the flood boat was decommissioned. On October 28 a new vessel was officially handed over to the Lowood SES Group. The delivery of the new flood boat (Lowood 251) has been highly anticipated by the Groups' volunteers and leaders.



# SOUTH WESTERN REGION

## First RPAS used at hazardous incident

Since the inception of Remotely-Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) in the South Western Region (SWR), there has been increasing demand for the service through a range of incident types. These include search and rescue using overhead light capabilities, fire ground mapping, damage assessment following bushfires, and overhead observation where larger aircraft may not be available or suitable.

One of the most significant incidents was on 28 September, when a trailer loaded with Ammonium Nitrate stored at elevated temperature rolled west of Tara.

In consultation with QFES Research and Scientific team, the exclusion zone for this incident was deemed as one kilometre, so the decision was made to use an RPAS to limit exposure of crews.

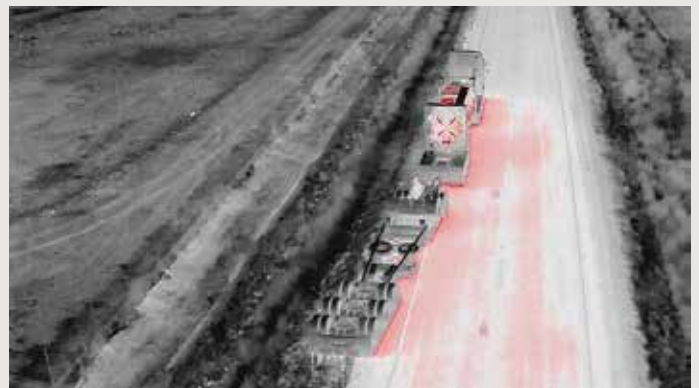
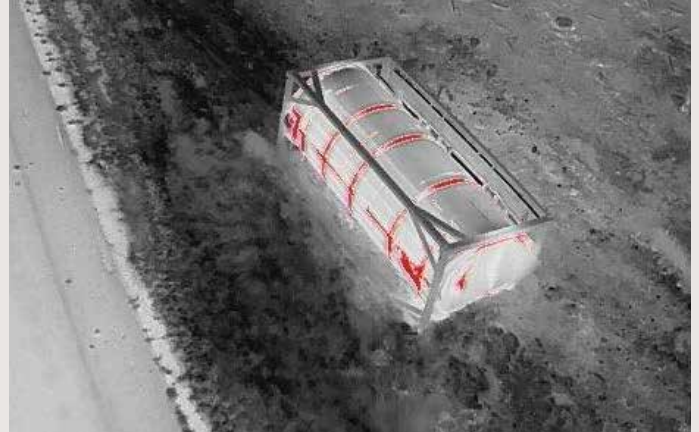
RPAS can provide immediate information to the Officer in Charge so appropriate decisions can be made, eliminating the need to send operational staff into potentially volatile and dangerous situations.

RPAS can quickly read critical information such as vehicle registrations, UN Numbers, for identifying dangerous or hazardous goods, and specialist emergency contact information. These capabilities were integral to achieving a safe and successful outcome at the Tara incident.

The thermal capability of the RPAS was also able to assess whether there was any leakage or breach of the transportation container, due to the liquid inside the trailer being stored at an elevated temperature.

The SWR RPAS pilots are also trained for night flight, which was crucial to this operation.

This incident was the first recorded hazardous materials incident utilising RPAS to gather information within Queensland and it is envisaged that the RPAS capability and capacity will continue to grow, both within the South Western Region and the state as a whole.



## National rally comes to Dalby

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) brought their national rally to Dalby for the first time in October.

There were more than 600 campervans at the Dalby Showgrounds and QFES gave presentations to attendants on smoke alarms, bushfire preparedness, caravan safety, home fire escape planning, bushfire warnings and fire danger ratings, with around 60 people attending each presentation.

The crews also did a car cut up demonstration presentation, which was well received by rally-goers.

## Community learns about bushfire preparedness

Three community pop-up events were held recently near Toowoomba focusing on bushfire preparedness.

Both Rural Fire Service (RFS) staff from the bushfire mitigation team and one of the local Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) crews attended as well as Toowoomba Regional Council Disaster Management staff.

Around 35 people attended each event to hear about how they can be better prepared for the bushfire season. Residents asked questions about hazard reduction burns, evacuation plans and clearing around properties.





# FAR NORTHERN REGION



## Thursday Island multi-agency exercise

In a display of coordination and preparedness, Thursday Island recently witnessed a multi-agency emergency response exercise.

Situated in the Torres Strait, this remote location presents unique challenges for emergency services. The exercise brought together QFES, Queensland Health, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the Retrieval Service Queensland (RSQ) to address a multi-casualty incident, showcasing the importance of effective collaboration in remote settings.

One of the primary takeaways from the exercise was the significance of the challenges for rapid response in isolated



areas. Locations like Thursday Island lack immediate access to extensive medical facilities, making the need for well-coordinated multi-agency responses paramount. The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) worked seamlessly with Queensland Health, QAS, QPS, and RSQ to provide real-time care to those affected by the simulated incident.

Limited infrastructure, long transport distances, adverse weather conditions and firefighter availability can hinder response times. Station Officer Luke Smith said the exercise underlined the need for specialised training, equipment and inter-agency relationships to overcome these obstacles efficiently.

The multi-agency exercise exemplified the commitment of Queensland's emergency services to ensuring the safety of all residents, even in the most remote and challenging environments.

The collaboration and expertise displayed during the exercise served as a testament to the resilience and preparedness of these agencies.

## Cooktown recruit earns helmet after gruelling hike

As Cooktown's firefighters brace for the bushfire season and recover from recent call-outs, including a Cameron Creek Road blaze which threatened homes last month, they continue to ensure a speedy response during emergencies.

Cooktown auxiliaries recently challenged the team to complete a gruelling 6-kilometre round hike up rugged Mt Cook in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and breathing apparatus.

Auxiliary Firefighter Katie Hooker said a good level of fitness was needed to attend emergency events.

"We always work together and individually to maintain our physical and mental fitness," Katie said.

"It might not be so challenging to walk up Mt Cook in exercise gear, but carrying the extra 25 kilograms really gets your heart and lungs working."

Katie said exercising in PPE also helped the team prepare for the scorching conditions they faced during incidents when decked out in full turn-out gear.

Recruit John James was rewarded with more than the view on completion of the hike with the presentation of his firefighting helmet.





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# NORTHERN REGION

## Deaf and hard of hearing workshop

In partnership with Townsville City Council and Deaf Connect, Townsville's State Emergency Service (SES) kicked off Get Ready Week with a tailored workshop for people who are deaf and hard of hearing at Reid Park on 8 October. The workshop was well received by participants.



## Information session on electric vehicles

Woodlands 'A' Shift recently attended Toyota Townsville for an information session with their workshop supervisor on new car technology. The crew learnt about ways to safely isolate power to electric and hybrid vehicles and discussed technologies.



## Get Ready Townsville

FRS, RFS and SES personnel attended the annual Get Ready Townsville community day held on 5 November at Jezzine Barracks. Northern Region personnel also delivered a series of presentations on the main stage covering a range of topics including lithium-ion batteries and the Australian Warnings System.

The community were encouraged to come down and learn how to prepare, plan and act before, during and after high-risk weather events in north Queensland.

## JCU Townsville Fire

While Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and Rural Fire Service (RFS) crews are working hard fighting fires, there's another team getting ready for their own fire season. The JCU Townsville Fire hosted their annual Community Membership Day on October 28 at the Fire Pit. QFES is one of the team's sponsors and it was a great opportunity for the community to meet the Fire team and sponsors before the first home game on November 11.





# CENTRAL REGION

## Get Ready Week brings timely activities

Central Region and local partners joined with the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to ask our communities to Get Ready in early October. This was great timing, with the region standing up incident command centres the following week to manage bushfires burning in the Baffle Creek, Lowmead and Carnarvon areas.

Get Ready Week saw engagement activities taking place all over the region from talking with tradies at Bunnings to encouraging shoppers at IGA to pack an evacuation kit.

St Joseph's Catholic School Wandal in Rockhampton was the lucky school drawn as the winner in this year's Get Ready Queensland School Competition, scoring a visit from ambassador Johnathan Thurston. More than 560 students from 19 schools across Queensland took part in the competition. This was also a great opportunity to promote our bushfire messaging at the event.



## Auxiliary awarded for 36 years of service

Noel Lenton joined the Winton Fire Brigade as an Auxiliary Lieutenant on 1 July 1977 just before his 19th birthday on 14 July. Noel continued in this role and served his community and surrounds for the next 31 years until resigning in 2008.

Eleven years later in 2019 Noel decided to re-join the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and was once again committed to serving his community. This year, on his 65th birthday, Noel officially resigned from the FRS due to mandatory age requirements.

This brings his service as a firefighter in Winton to an astounding 36 years. Noel has been an asset to Winton FRS due to his extensive local knowledge and capabilities.

Congratulations Noel and thank you again for your service to the community. A special mention to Noel's family and friends for their support of Noel to enable him to pursue a passion for firefighting and serve his community to such a high standard. Noel was awarded and thanked at a ceremony in September, where Dave Schurmann reflected on Noel's attendance at the Central Hotel Fire in Winton in 1982, a significant memory for Noel.



## Evacuation Centre training

QFES members attended training sessions held by Whitsunday Regional Council on how to manage evacuation centres. The training was delivered by Alison Langevad from Red Cross in Proserpine.

Attendees found the training informative, professional and relevant and helped increase understanding of the complex processes involved in managing evacuation centres.



# NORTH COAST REGION

## Captain Ron retires after 38 years

On October 1, Captain Ron Michell officially retired as the Captain at Gayndah Station after 38 years of service.

Throughout Ron's career he received the Diligent and Ethical Service Medal, with 1st and 2nd Clasp, the National Medal with 1st and 2nd Clasp, an Australia Day Achievement Award in 2014, the 2010-2011 Queensland Flood and Cyclone Citation and the National Emergency Medal with TC Debbie 2017 clasp. North Coast Region wish Rob well in his retirement, he will be missed by the local community.



## Bushfire safety – K'gari style

People travelling to K'gari during the September holidays were surprised to be greeted by Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers who were stationed at barge landing points at Riverheads and Inskip point, engaging with vehicles as they waited to board. Over three weekends, more than 2000 information packs about bushfire awareness and safety, campfire safety, travelling in Queensland, driving on K'gari beaches and dingo awareness were handed out along with some goodies for the kids. This was the first trial of this type of engagement and meant volunteers could engage with visitors without interfering with their holiday time. The community feedback was invaluable. Well done to all brigades and volunteers involved.

## Getting a groove on to support Get Ready

There were plenty of flashing lights, community education and live music as Get Ready returned to Hervey Bay and Maryborough's Food n Groove Fridays in October. Locals and visitors alike were encouraged to get to know emergency services vehicles and personnel to discover how to prepare for natural disasters.

All QFES services attended both events, which attracted around 7000 people. The State Emergency Service (SES) crew received a community engagement shield after being voted by the community as the most engaging display at both events. These events get bigger each year and North Coast Region looks forward to supporting the community again in 2024.



## Emergency service expo bonanza

On October 14, Gympie and Pomona on the Sunshine Coast held emergency services expos. Pomona's event was buzzing with questions from locals seeking advice about preparing their homes and families for the storm and bushfire season ahead while others enjoyed learning about the many vehicles and equipment being exhibited.

In Gympie, crowds were treated to road crash rescue car cut demonstrations, kitchen and home fire safety demonstrations, an SES skills obstacle course, big and small fire trucks, a sausage sizzle from the RFS and the opportunity to have all their questions answered about storm and bushfire season.





# Report update helps disaster stakeholders reduce risk

Queensland is Australia's most disaster-prone state and understanding the disaster risks facing communities is the first step in reducing risk and building resilience.

The 2023 State Disaster Risk Report (SDRR) has been released, providing new information and revised hazard priorities for disaster managers in Queensland.

The report provides information on 10 key hazards that could affect Queensland, as well as information on critical infrastructure failure and mass casualty incidents. It also contains information on Queensland's future climate.

Director of Community Resilience and Risk Mitigation Peter Readman said the report can help to inform local and district risk

assessments and disaster management plans.

"These assessments and plans can guide decision making before, during and after an event to help reduce impacts of disasters on communities, infrastructure and the environment," he said.

"The update to the report was driven by a range of factors, including the 2022 South East Queensland Flood event, the completed implementation of the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System, and the undertaking of a state-wide risk

assessment of select critical infrastructure with key industry stakeholders.

"We encourage all disaster management stakeholders to consider the valuable information in this report to help them better understand and manage the disaster risks applicable in their regions."

Mr Readman said there had been a re-assessment of the hazard priorities at the state and regional plan level.

"While there were no changes made to the state hazard prioritisation, there were two changes made to the regional prioritisations," he said.

"In Far North Queensland and Wide Bay Burnett, bushfire is now a higher priority than severe thunderstorm, meaning bushfire is now ranked within the top 3 priorities across all regions.

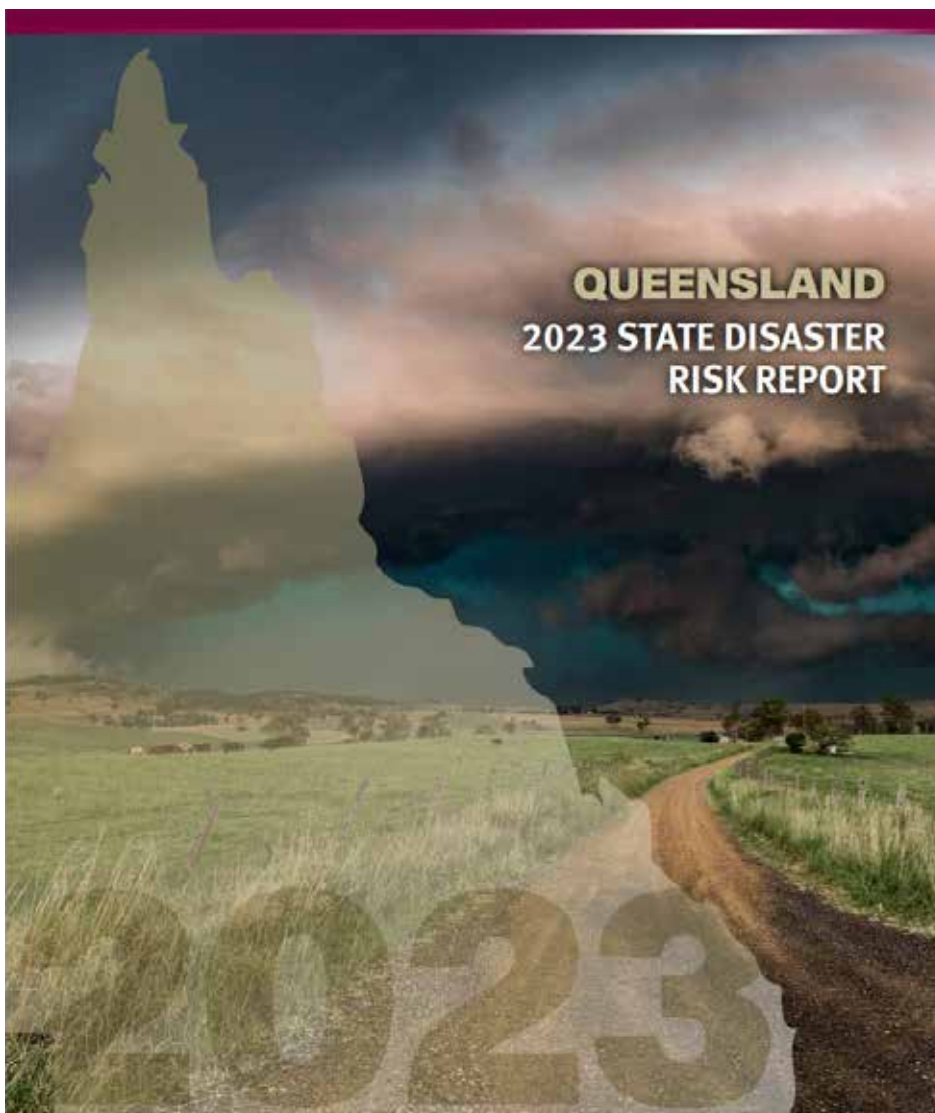
"Flooding remains the highest priority hazard for the state, and the updates to this chapter assess the risk from all types of flooding, rather than just riverine flooding which was assessed in the 2021/22 SDRR.

"As experienced during the 2022 south-east Queensland floods, flash flooding and flooding from smaller tributaries such as creeks, resulted in significant impacts across the region."

Some of the key changes in the 2023 SDRR include:

- a re-evaluation of the risks from all types of flooding
- updates to the bushfire chapter, driven by advances in bushfire systems and data
- updates to the critical infrastructure chapter driven by extensive engagement during 2022 and 2023 with the energy, water, transport and telecommunications sectors to develop a state-wide assessment of disaster risk to critical infrastructure.

The 2023 State Disaster Risk report can be found online [www.disaster.qld.gov.au](http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au).





## SES response awarded after prolonged search

Ipswich City SES Unit was awarded Operational Response of the Year at the 2023 SES Week Awards for their outstanding efforts during a challenging, two-week search for a missing person.

Ipswich City SES Unit was activated in late December 2022 in search of a lost tourist.

The search lasted longer than expected and members searched an area spanning seven kilometres by nine kilometres covering multiple suburbs, lasting 14 days in total.

Ipswich City SES Unit Local Controller Kristie-Lee Kolbee said their initial focus was door knocking in the area of the missing person's last known location.

"At no time in those early days did we ever anticipate that we would still be searching for 14 days," Kristie-Lee said.

As the search widened into neighbouring bushland, volunteers battled challenging conditions.

"The terrain was quite dense, and there was a very large area that required searching," Kristie-Lee said.

"It took place over the Christmas and New Year period, so members were on holidays, or spending time with family. It was also quite warm and we faced the challenges of nightly storms, which the Ipswich City SES Unit also responded to."

Despite these challenges, the members covered the ground however they could: by foot, boat, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and mountain bikes.

"We used as many resources as we could get. Queensland Police Service (QPS) requested a boat to search a local dam, ATVs to search further along tracks and mountain bikes which can get through some of the narrower tracks," Kristie-Lee said.

"We also requested volunteers from Brisbane Region, South Western Region and North Coast Region. Members travelled from as far as Noosa and Goombungee to provide support, land search members and ATVs.

"QPS and SES covered as much area as possible, and this could not have been done without the support of our neighbouring units and regions.

"QFES also provided support with Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems operators, who have the ability to cover areas that our search teams may not be able to get in to. The feeds from the drones were streamed back to the Emergency Operations Centre for QPS to monitor closely.

"The members who supported this search were amazing. Obviously we cannot continue for such an extended period of time without the support of our families and loved ones, who allow us all to continue day after day."



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# Workforce survey provides valuable feedback

Each year the QFES workforce is invited to provide feedback through the Working for Queensland and Volunteering for Queensland surveys to inform and guide continuous improvement.

More than 2400 people completed the survey between 21 August and 17 September, including 1209 staff and 1204 volunteers.

Assistant Commissioner for QFES People David Hermann said the results highlighted a number of areas that are working well for QFES staff and volunteers and some areas that need improvement.

“It was great to see that engagement is high, with 69 per cent of staff and 86 per cent of volunteers feeling positive about their connection to the organisation,” Mr Hermann said.

“For staff, this is 11 per cent higher than the overall result for the public sector, which is a fantastic result.”

Ninety-two per cent of staff and 90 per cent of volunteers believe QFES has a positive impact, and 86 per cent of staff and 92 per cent of volunteers believe their work has a positive impact on the people of Queensland.

“Similar to last year, the most positive results related to social support in teams and workgroups,” Mr Hermann said.

“These include sharing workload, discussing work challenges, sharing lessons learned, treating each other with respect, being comfortable to speak up and share different views and welcoming diverse ideas and thoughts.

“We had between 75 per cent and 85 per cent of people who agreed or strongly agreed that these behaviours were demonstrated in their work or volunteer team, which is very pleasing to hear.”

The most positive change from last year’s results was around fair and equitable treatment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, Australian South Sea Islander people, and those from diverse cultural backgrounds.

There was a four per cent increase in people who reported feeling positive about change management, opportunities to provide feedback and being consulted about change.

Performance and development remain areas for improvement with 33 per cent of staff (32 per cent in 2022) and 57 per cent of volunteers (55 per cent in 2022) reporting that their manager or leader provides them with constructive feedback to help improve their performance.

Twenty-one per cent of staff (same in 2022) and 51 per cent of volunteers (49 per cent in 2022) discussed professional development with their leader or manager.

There have been improvements in women’s perceptions of gender equity at QFES with 67 per cent of volunteers (60 per cent in 2022) and 64 per cent of staff (55 per cent in 2022) believing the Executive Leadership Team is committed to gender equity and

68 per cent of staff (59 per cent in 2022) believing they have the same opportunity for promotion as their male counterparts.

Seventy-nine per cent of volunteers (72 per cent in 2022) and 70 per cent of staff (64 per cent in 2022) believe they have the same access to development opportunities as their male colleagues.

Mr Hermann thanked everyone who completed the survey.

“This is a really important part of our continuous improvement process and these results will help shape the future of our department,” he said.

## Social Support: My Workgroup Effectiveness



- In my workgroup, we share learning



- I discuss my work challenges with the people in my workgroup



- In my workgroup, we work together to manager workload



## Social Support: Workgroup Respect and Psychological Safety



- In my workgroup we treat each other respectfully



- In my workgroup, I am comfortable speaking up to share a different view to my colleagues



## Social Support: Workgroup Respect and Psychological Safety



- In my team, we treat each other respectfully



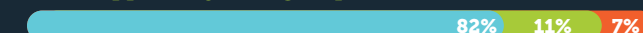
- In my workgroup, I am comfortable speaking up to share a different view to my colleagues



- In my team, we welcome diverse ideas and thoughts



## Social Support: My Workgroup Effectiveness



- In my team, we share learnings





Rural Fire Service crews greet residents with a smile at the Gympie emergency services expo.



Thousands of people packed into Brennan Park at Bribie Island on October 7 for the Emergency Services Expo 2023. The expo brought together emergency services personnel from across south-east Queensland, including QFES, QPS, QAS, the Royal Australian Navy, Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service, the Department of Transport and Main Roads and Marine Rescue Queensland.



In September North Coast Regional Headquarters held a Mutli-Stream Incident Management X course, working to strengthen the region's incident management capability. Participants were upskilled across four streams: Incident Control, Logistics, Planning and Operations. The course ran for four days, with the final day consisting of a simulated Incident Management Team exercise.



To wrap up Get Ready Week, an emergency services expo was held at Victoria Park, Brisbane on October 14. More than 14,000 people attended and learnt how to best prepare for natural disasters.



Far Northern Region took part in park run to support the Bowen State High School in their Lift the Load Challenge; raising funds and awareness for men's mental health.





Remembrance Day in Cairns was well attended, with more than 150 people attending. QFES was represented by ex-service personnel alongside QPS and QAS.



To commemorate Firefighter's Remembrance Day on October 10, commemorative services were held around the state. North Coast Region held their service at the Saint Peter's Catholic Church in Coolumb Beach which was attended by Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM Governor of Queensland.



A Movember SpeakEasy workshop was held at Kedron Emergency Services Complex, designed to normalise open conversations about everyday challenges and adversities.



Get Ready Week launched with a bang at Suncorp Stadium on October 9. SES crews rappelled from the top of the stadium and the event was broadcast on the TODAY show.



# First QFES internationally Certified Fire Investigator

Inspector Daren Mallouk is the first QFES member to become a Certified Fire Investigator through the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI).

Achieving certification through the independent body is a rigorous process requiring evidence of sufficient training, education and experience, as well as a closed-book, supervised exam.

Daren, Manager of the State Fire Investigation Unit (FIU), is the first QFES person to achieve IAAI certification, and only the tenth person in Australia.

"It's an honour to join a small cohort of fire investigators around Australia who have been through this process," Daren said.

"The application process is extensive and quite involved and took a fair bit of time to pull all the evidence together."

Daren first completed his fire investigation training 10 years ago as a Station Officer and has been a QFES member since 2001.

"As a firefighter you see the end result when you put fires out," he said.

"I was always curious about how they actually started and what factors led to them starting, be it accidental or deliberate.

"It's like a puzzle, you have to try and piece that puzzle together. Every fire scene you go to you learn something new and see something different, there's always something to look further into."

Daren is part of a team of 60 fire investigators based across the state. The State FIU has three investigators who investigate fires throughout the greater Brisbane area and, at times, across the state. They also facilitate fire investigation training for QFES and assist other agencies, such as QPS, with complex and demanding investigations which involve fire.

One recent investigation saw QFES fire investigators looking into the cause of a fire in a large-scale battery farm just outside of Rockhampton.

"Two QFES fire investigators attended the site along with several other government agency representatives and stakeholders," Daren said.

"After extensive information gathering at the scene and due to the complexity of equipment involved, it was deemed necessary for the module to be transported to Tesla's Melbourne facility where it could undergo further forensic examinations.

"The things that we might find through our investigations can tell you about the cause and origin of the fire, but also can be the catalyst to initiate a product recall or be fed back into the lessons learnt process and help inform decision-making."

Daren said an important part of being a fire investigator was continuous professional development.

"You can't rest on your laurels," he said.

"Professional development is really important, not just maintaining knowledge but continually updating it."

This is particularly important when fire investigators are required to act as an expert witness in court trials, a requirement of the IAAI certification.

Daren said the first time he provided testimony as an expert witness it was a bit daunting but he was able to draw on the mock court scenario training all fire investigators complete as part of the training course.

"After you complete an investigation you write up a report based on your knowledge, experience and skills on how the fire started," he said.

"That then is open to scrutiny from other people, so if you're in court you're there to defend your findings. It can be pretty brutal when they are attacking your findings and you have to have enough evidence and knowledge to defend what you've discovered in your investigation."



Acting Superintendent Michael Forbes (right) from Fire and Rescue NSW Fire Investigation and Research Unit congratulates Daren on achieving IAAI certification.



# Northern Region upskill in road crash rescue

**Thanks to exceptional teamwork and collaboration, as well as some complex logistical problem-solving, Northern Region recently completed an eighteen-month training program in Road Crash Rescue (RCR) that saw more than 300 staff receive 595 hours of training.**

Instructors travelled more than 6000 kilometres, hauling large RCR equipment items to deliver the training across the region.

RCR training coordinator Dean Jones said the training program was designed to update the region's knowledge and skills in RCR using the latest tools and technologies.

"Operational crews are proactive in their approach to RCR training, however we identified that everyone could benefit from upskilling under RCR instructor supervision," Dean said.

"Townsville has around 200,000 people and is home to a busy port, a thriving industrial sector and Australia's largest Army base, so there's a significant volume of heavy vehicle traffic north and south on the Bruce Highway and west out to Mt Isa and the Northern Territory border.

"Incidents can be complicated due to numerous factors such as distance, vehicle type, collision type, complexity of extrication and more recently, vehicle propulsion type, for example electric vehicles."

The program started off as a one-day training session for fire crews in the Townsville area. The training team consulted with state and Brisbane RCR coordinators to develop the practical content.

With feedback and lessons learned from the Townsville sessions, Northern Region's Professional Development Command devised a plan to provide all other stations in the region with a similar opportunity.

However, with the region covering an area of 600,000 square kilometres, this presented some logistical challenges as instructors needed to travel and deliver the training on site, bringing a cache of RCR equipment and even a forklift truck with them.

The next task for the instructor team was to develop and deliver recruit RCR training in the new Northern Region Emergency Services Complex in Townsville, as well as Heavy RCR training, which involves setting up and moving trucks and other large vehicles inside the building.

"Our plan was ambitious to say the least; deliver a two-day course to all on-shift crews from nine permanent and composite stations, and train up new instructors at the same time, at the beginning of a grass fire season," Dean said.

"Over 28 days we trained 140 personnel in the use of 50 tonne jacks, powershores and low-pressure lifting bags. We used plasma cutters and burned through 158 thermic lances to cut through ten metres of railway line.

"We lifted the prime mover 15 times, rolled our bus 15 times, and lifted the 40-foot trailer and a rigid truck 30 times."

Dean said the team's combined efforts resulted in improved capacity and capability in crews across the region.

"This has built confidence and competence in our instructors and forged new professional relationships," he said.

"Many people helped make this a success from instructors to Area Commanders, the Regional Leadership Team, the Rosters team, Northern Region Business team, finance, OMS Support, Professional Development Command, operational crews and of course our indispensable admin staff."



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