

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE FEBRUARY 2024



Wild weather events
Crews deploy across the state

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SES members were flown by helicopter from Cairns to Mossman to assist with the clean-up and recovery after Ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper caused widespread flooding.

RESPONSE is a bi-monthly magazine produced by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Contributions and feedback are welcome. The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions for brevity and clarity.

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

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Help us shape the future of *Response*



Ahead of the transition to Queensland Fire Department, we're seeking your feedback to help us shape the future of *Response*! Let us know how, when and where you prefer to read *Response* and what kinds of stories you'd like to see more of.

Scan the QR code or visit <https://forms.office.com/r/RtvdBtMHsS>.

FOREWORDS



STEVE SMITH AFSM
Acting Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Firstly, I would like to thank everyone across Queensland who responded to multiple severe weather events in December and January. Many of you have sacrificed time away from your loved ones during the holiday season and worked in intense and challenging conditions to help those in need. Whether in support roles or on the front lines, your continued dedication is what inspires me each day. I also warmly thank the support received from our colleagues from various interstate agencies.

Working in these challenging conditions can take a physical and emotional toll on you and your loved ones. Many QFES families have been directly impacted by the recent weather, with homes damaged or disrupted due to these events. If you need any financial or other assistance visit the disaster recovery support page on the Queensland Government website.

If you or your family need emotional support there is a range of support services through Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN). Consider talking to your family about the FESSN services so they know how to access support too. We appreciate the contributions that you and your family make to support the community. Please remember that we are here to support you too.

Our new Chief Human Resources Officer Katrina McGill joined the team on 15 January. With significant strategic HR experience Katrina, alongside the newly titled People and Culture Directorate, will oversee a renewed focus on the development of our people, culture and diversity. Katrina will be a great asset to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), particularly as we continue to fill key senior leadership roles throughout this year. I am also pleased to welcome Ben Millington to the role of Chief Officer, Rural Fire Service, backfilling Mike Wassing for the next 12 months. Ben is another great addition to the ELT and brings a wealth of rural fire service experience and learnings. He is due to commence on 12 February. Please join me in warmly welcoming both Katrina and Ben to QFES.

With pride we recognise the meaningful effort of people who go above and beyond to uphold the QFES values. Upcoming and recent awards include Women in Fire and Emergency Services Awards, Peer Support Officer Awards and the Australia Day Awards. We will be showcasing the recipients of the AFSM and ESM in the April edition of Response.

As I am writing this foreword, Tropical Cyclone Kirrily recently crossed the coast, bringing heavy rain and power outages to northern Queensland. South-east Queensland has also been impacted, again, by storms and flooding. The severe weather season isn't over yet, but I know we will rise to the occasion and support our communities to the very best of our abilities.



KEVIN WALSH
Acting Deputy Commissioner

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

As we all know, the weather doesn't take holidays. Our work ramped up in late 2023 with bushfires across the state, through to Ex Tropical Cyclone Jasper in Far Northern Region in mid-December, then closely followed by the south-east Queensland severe weather event which heavily impacted the Gold Coast, Logan and Scenic Rim from Christmas Eve through to New Years Day.

I want to take a moment and sincerely thank the people from all services and corporate roles who worked through these events without respite and continue to help with the recovery efforts. Your commitment to Queensland communities during this period, when you would normally be relaxing with loved ones, is incredibly admirable. Experiences like this demonstrate how working together toward common goals can enhance our capabilities to benefit the community.

QFES is committed to ensuring the safety of our staff, particularly those on the front lines. Following the tragic death of Izabella (Izzy) Nash, we formed the Operational Advisory Group (OAG) to identify key areas for continuous operational improvement. The OAG includes representatives from the United Firefighters Union Queensland, the Senior Officers Union and QFES personnel.

Late last year the group released a report *Structural Firefighting; High Level Assessment*, which identified several areas to direct organisational focus, including operations strategy, structure and culture, incident command and control, building construction, fire behaviour and suppression, breathing apparatus safety team operations, breathing apparatus operations, breathing apparatus team/firefighter self-rescue, fireground radio communications, incident debriefing and lessons management.

As a result, the OAG met in January to develop an action plan based on their observations from the report and progress further work to improve safety for our firefighters undertaking structural firefighting.

This year will continue to be a period of change with the reform to the new Queensland Fire Department (QFD). Change can be tiring but it's important that we collectively focus on opportunities the reform may bring and how they will enable the new QFD. In particular, the reform has provided us with the opportunity to focus on areas of improvement that we have not been able to achieve in the past, and to maintain momentum for improving our community services. Read more about this on pages 14-15.



A roundabout at Holloways Beach is inundated by floodwater.

Record rainfall brings widespread flooding to far north Queensland

Ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper brought widespread rain and flooding in December and QFES personnel played a variety of crucial roles in the response and recovery.

Tropical Cyclone (TC) Jasper formed in the Coral Sea on 5 December and crept towards Queensland's north coast.

This was the first time a tropical cyclone had formed in Queensland waters in December during a declared El Niño.

QFES crews were prepared and ready to respond before TC Jasper made landfall. More than 140 QFES staff and volunteers were deployed to far north Queensland including State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers, Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) members, Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) swiftwater rescue technicians, incident management specialists and technical support officers.

TC Jasper made landfall as a Category 2 system on Wednesday 13 December near Wujal Wujal, just north of Cape Tribulation.

As it moved across the Cape York Peninsula it was downgraded to a tropical low and over several days brought widespread, heavy and sustained rainfall.

On 19 December, Premier Stephen Miles said the devastating weather event was unprecedented.

"It was anticipated that the rainfall would track the cyclone across the Cape – that's not what we've seen," the Premier said.

"There's a lot about this weather event that is unusual and has never been seen before."

During this time many sites across northern Queensland recorded their highest daily December rainfall on record.

Black Mountain, Bairds and Whyanbeel Creek all received more than two metres of rainfall.

In total the SES coordinated more than 2700 jobs in response to the event, assisted by the Rural Fire Service (RFS). This includes 333 washouts, 286 evacuation requests, 285 re-supply tasks, 764 tree jobs and 1184 jobs relating to roof and window repairs. They used 85,000 sandbags to minimise the damage from the floods.



150 people evacuated from Holloways Beach

Cairns SES Unit Local Controller Reece Booij said two days after the cyclone crossed the coast his team had finished almost all their cyclone-related tasks and the incident management team was stood down. However, the rain didn't stop.

"I had this bad feeling. On Sunday morning around 5am I had a gut feeling something didn't seem right," Reece said.

"I got dressed and went to our headquarters to start prepping flood boats. The requests started coming in. We were a three-person team and we did a few local jobs around Cairns.

"Then we got an urgent call to go to Redlynch. We arrived and water was pumping across the road. There was too much flow and it was too shallow for the boat but too deep for a vehicle.

"We had swiftwater rescue kits with us, so we walked into the caravan park and there were six people stuck there so we had to work out how to get them out."

After rescuing this group, Reece and the team had another urgent call to head to Holloways and Machans beaches.

"We launched a flood boat off the Barron River bridge and that's when it was go time," Reece said.

"We found a way into Holloways beach, we had to take a fence down, there was a lot of fast flowing water.

"Luckily I had another flood boat team with me. We were in the smaller boat, which is more agile, so I was able to get in and out of places easier.

"We decided to use the bigger boat as the main transfer boat to get people out of Holloways Beach to Barron River bridge and used the smaller boat to get people from their houses.

"We created a staging point on a roof which we used to evacuate around 150 people.

"My boat would go through the streets and I would swim up to some houses and get residents out to the boat, then load them on

and take them back to the staging point. They would climb up the ladder and sit on the roof until the main rescue boat came to pick them up.

"At one stage we had 42 people and their pets sitting on one roof waiting for the bigger boat.

"We did that back and forward for hours.

"There was one family we were trying to rescue. They were standing on their car roof yelling for help. We tried to get to them but the conditions were too dangerous. We radioed Firecom to tell them we needed the swiftwater rescue inflatable and we told the family help will come.

"It's one of the worst feelings I've had, having to leave a family with children who were yelling for help, but you can't no matter how hard you try. Thankfully, the swiftwater crew was able to rescue the family."

This is Reece's third time responding to major floods with the SES. In 2019 he responded to the Townsville floods and in 2022 he deployed to the Brisbane floods which took place in February and March.

"I was lucky that I had a lot of experience in floodwater," Reece said.

When *Response* spoke to Reece in late December, the Cairns SES Unit was continuing to help with local recovery efforts by providing supplies to isolated communities.

Reece said it would be a long road to recovery.

"In the next few weeks there will be a lot of heartbreak. Kids who are thinking 'Why didn't Santa come?' When you drive through the beaches everything people own is piled up on their front lawns destroyed, covered in mud.

"You can't fight a flood, you can't do anything. The worst bit is it destroys everything but leaves it there for you to see and people have to go back and pick up wedding photos, and children's toys and throw them in the bin."



The departure point for Holloways Beach residents to be evacuated to Barron River bridge. Photo credit: Nicole Bradley.



Casuarina Street in Holloways Beach gave way and around 100 residents were evacuated by SES and FRS.



Community spirit shines in Wujal Wujal

Senior Firefighter Ben Carrigg was deployed to Far Northern Region from Brisbane and spent two days helping to evacuate residents from Wujal Wujal on 19 and 20 December.

“We had to take a four-hour boat trip from Cooktown because it was so cut-off. Originally we were going to stay on the Queensland Police Service Water Police craft but I made a decision that it would be better for us to remain in the field, specifically within the township,” Ben said.

“We travelled up the river on a smaller police tender. When I saw the destruction, I was glad we had decided to stay there, it was unbelievable.

“The level of the water and the condition of what used to be structures – it looked like a giant had crushed up some foil.

“From the river level you’d be looking up a 15-metre tree and three quarters of the way up there would be a tinny stuck up there.

“It had brought powerlines down into the river. This all happened on the way in there and I thought ‘If this is what the mouth of the river is like, what’s it going to be like in Wujal Wujal?’.

“Not to mention crocodiles. I saw one as we pulled up in the boat and landed on the bank. The day we turned up a dog had been taken by a crocodile and one of the locals had been attacked.

“When we arrived in Wujal Wujal everyone was quiet. We were trying to take in what we were seeing. We had been in Wujal Wujal four days earlier to do damage assessments after the cyclone passed through.

“It was surreal that we had been there four days earlier and the town was unscathed and then to see what had happened and the state of the place was quite remarkable.

“It took us about 20 to 30 minutes to walk through the middle of town because in some parts the mud was up to your waist.”

Ben and his team consisted of two other QFES DART personnel and a Queensland Ambulance Service member.

He said they were tasked with coordinating the evacuation on the ground as well as damage assessments. The Australian Defence Force’s Chinook helicopters were used to evacuate residents.



Taskforce Bravo out the front of the church at Wujal Wujal.

“There was around 150 to 200 people who needed evacuation. They were staged at a shed on the side of a hill under a tree,” Ben said.

“We began engaging in conversations with residents to ask about their needs. Rather than attempting to assume control and impose our presence, our aim was to foster trust, work collaboratively and empower residents to organise the event, while providing them with the necessary support.

“It looked like a massive landslide had gone through the town. One side of the road was washed away and needed a 4WD to get through it. We spent the day ferrying people back and forth to where the chinooks were stationed.

“At the same time that was occurring we were doing damage assessments.

“Most of the main infrastructure and the vast majority of houses were moderately damaged to destroyed.”

Ben and his team also helped with a difficult search for a missing man.



QFES helped QPS with a difficult search for a missing man.



The team who deployed to Wujal Wujal: Mark Zimmermann (QAS), Brendon Jensen, Luke Carmont and Ben Carrigg.



“That was quite eye-opening to go and do that and see the devastation where he had lived. The only thing left of his house was a concrete slab,” Ben said.

Ben said it was his first deployment since the change from Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) to DART and he enjoyed providing humanitarian assistance.

“It was challenging but at the same time really rewarding,” Ben said.

“The community resilience was phenomenal. I left there in absolute admiration of their resilience and sense of community.

“They all banded together and did what needed to be done. Everyone was super patient. We had great conversations with people. It was a really warm experience regardless of the circumstances.”

Ben said there was one person in particular whose character stood out to him.

“There was a really old lady, she was close to 90 I think, a small, Aboriginal lady,” Ben said.

“She was walking over really undulating terrain and looked like she needed help but she gave me this look to say ‘No I’m right’. She was so independent.

“As I’m walking beside her, one of the younger ladies yelled ‘Help her out’, then all of a sudden, she holds out her elbow and says, ‘You’re in a bit of a tight spot, so you better help me.’ It was a lovely moment. I was meant to be helping her but she was helping me.

“When we were leaving there were about 70 or 80 people left to be evacuated and the damage assessments had all been done in the immediate area.

“We got the majority of people to Cooktown, all the damage assessments were done and we also did a thorough search for the gentleman who went missing, which wasn’t an easy job. When we left I felt like, as a small group, we achieved a lot.”



Jeff Hudson and David Bullock were part of Taskforce Bravo who were based in Cooktown for their deployment.

RFS members play a crucial role

Rural Fire Service (RFS) members have also played a crucial role, deploying to assist alongside the SES and FRS.

Acting Brigade Training and Support Officer Ray Mitchell led Taskforce Bravo; a team of 19 members from RFS, SES and FRS based in Cooktown who assisted communities in Wujal Wujal, Degarra and Bloomfield.

“We were cleaning out houses from the Lions Den down to Degarra,” Ray said.

“There was a lot of damage up there. It’s hard to describe, the water levels were unbelievable.

“We washed out one couple’s house where they spent six hours on their roof in waist-deep water waiting to be rescued.

“They had been working on their house for a week and a half before we got there and they got to a point where they just couldn’t do anymore – they’d hit a wall.

“Their house was covered in mud about 300 millimetres thick. They were very appreciative and couldn’t thank us enough.

“Another house we saw had four to five hundred millimetres of mud through it.

“There was no power in the areas we were working. All the powerlines had been pulled out of the ground or snapped off.

“You get pretty emotional when you’re helping people out in those conditions.

“The damage was pretty severe. You’d be driving along and you’d see a fridge just lying in a bush. Then there’d be a rainwater tank stuck in a tree. The damage to roads was unbelievable. A lot of the places we needed to clean up weren’t accessible.”



Taskforce crew hear a briefing from their Taskforce Leader Ryan Drury at Bloomfield.



Ray said the taskforce worked well together and was well received by the communities they worked within.

“We did as much as we could to help people out,” Ray said.

“The place that supplied our lunches gave us an extra 10 lunches so we could sit down with the people whose homes we were cleaning out and have lunch and a chat with them.

“That was the first time I’ve been involved in a flood or cyclone clean up. It won’t be my last. If there’s one again, I’ll be putting my hand up.

“When you see the devastation – people need help. It was definitely a worthwhile exercise.”

DART team help throughout the region

Cameron Herbert was the Taskforce Leader who led the QFES DART Team deployment from 12 to 21 December.

Cameron said the DART team members were located around the region prior to TC Jasper making landfall, with teams of four in Cairns, Tully, Innisfail, Port Douglas, Cooktown and later on, Atherton Tablelands.

“In the two days after the cyclone crossed the coast, the team were out in the field assessing local areas for damage or assistance needed by the community,” Cameron said.

“When the rain started getting heavier it went from damage assessments to evacuations and rescues.

“That ended up being a very busy 48-hour period where teams were out non-stop for 24-hour shifts on rotation.

“The calls for assistance through our comms centre were very intense, the Firecom radio didn’t stop.

“Firecom operators did a fantastic job. Trying to triage those calls was challenging – to work out what was a priority – you only have so many resources on the ground to get to these different locations.

“We had a liaison officer from technical rescue in there to assist with triage.



Brisbane Region SES members deploy to assist with the clean-up after Cyclone Jasper.

Cameron said the team went from door to door, assisting residents to evacuate and transport them to a safe area.

“This was done through the night and the intensity of the rain really heightened activity. We found it hard to get into those isolated communities and didn’t have any air assets at first because they were unable to fly in the conditions,” Cameron said.

Up to 36 communities were isolated by floods and DART team members deployed in teams of four to isolated communities to assist including Cape Tribulation, Daintree Village, Kimberley, Cow Bay and Cooktown.

“DART team members have multiple skillsets. All DART team members carry their swiftwater rescue equipment and in this case they were also equipped with chainsaws so they could clear properties to assist people who were trapped.

“DART team members perform both rescue and recovery. Rescues are a priority so once that’s done then it moves to recovery and doing damage assessments.

“The variety of tasks the DART team did really assisted the community. Our crews in Cooktown assisted SES in filling sandbags, they really got embedded in the local community. We worked closely with the SES throughout the deployment.”

At the end of December DART members had conducted damage assessments on more than 5400 structures. Eighteen were completely destroyed, 167 were severely damaged, 640 had moderate damage and 849 received minor damage.



Residents wait at the staging point to be evacuated from Holloways Beach.



New training model leads to boost in volunteer numbers

Twelve proud SES volunteers from St Paul's Group, a community on a remote island in the Torres Strait, graduated from SES recruit class in November last year.

It was the first recruit course to be held on a Torres Strait Island thanks to a new service delivery model implemented in February 2023 by SES Far Northern Region.

The model centralises recruit training for the region, rather than being organised at a Group level, with regional staff delivering five-day courses for those living in remote communities as well as weekend courses in Cairns.

The membership of SES Moa Island has now increased to 12 members, and a similar increase has occurred in other SES groups throughout the region.

Senior Operational Capability Officer Joanne Thomson said the new process had allowed 160 people to join in 2023, 60 per cent more than 2022.

"We changed the way the training was scheduled, conducted and delivered for new volunteers," Joanne said.

"With the old model the recruit training was delivered by SES groups. For smaller groups, they might not have trainers available so it can take a couple of years to get all the courses under your belt to become fully operational.

"By delivering this training at a regional level, this reduced the pressure on the individual SES groups to provide onboarding training to applicants.

"We were able to do this because of the SES uplift program. We knew this was a problem, it's something we've wanted to change but never had the funding or staff to do it.

"It's also improved retention as we had people dropping out because they couldn't do the training they needed to progress through the organisation."

The team now deliver a recruit course from Cairns with new recruits living along the coast and tablelands, from Cooktown to Mount Garnet, travelling to Cairns and completing the training over three weekends in a one-month period.

For those living more remotely, the training travels to them. Courses were delivered last year in Croydon, Aurukun, the Northern Peninsula Area, and Mapoon.

Joanne said this required strong partnerships with local Elders, councils and employers.

"In Croydon a lot of the recruits were employed by the local council and the Department of Transport and Main Roads, so we negotiated with them so they could attend," Joanne said.

"In Indigenous communities it's important to have Elders involved as well.

"On Moa Island the recruit course graduation was held after church, allowing the whole community to attend and celebrate.

"This made us all appreciate how connected the community is and how big an impact the local SES team has in their community.

"The trainers Arama Samuel and Chris Watts felt extremely welcomed in the community and performed a traditional dance post-graduation."

The team behind the new recruitment process were recognised for their achievements with a Capable Communities award in the Commissioner's Awards for Excellence held in December last year.



Storms and flooding bring widespread damage to the south-east

South-east Queensland was battered by severe weather in December and January, causing significant, widespread damage and destruction.

On Christmas Day 2023, severe storms hit the Gold Coast, Logan and Scenic Rim, with the Bureau of Meteorology later confirming a tornado had passed through bringing winds of up to 160 kilometres an hour.

Before residents had a chance to recover, the region was again heavily impacted by severe storms and flash flooding on New Year's Day.

The aftermath of both events was widespread and devastating.

Around 130,000 people lost power, some for almost two weeks.

The City of Gold Coast reported there were 75,000 truckloads of storm and flood related waste to clean up across the Gold Coast.

QFES conducted almost 4000 damage assessments, reporting 14 structures were destroyed, 156 had severe damage, 419 moderate and 450 with minor damage.

From 25 December to 7 January the State Emergency Service (SES) completed 3746 tasks, including more than 1600 structural and 900 tree down tasks. The Rural Fire Service (RFS) also played a significant role in the clean-up efforts.

New SES member caught in the middle

SES Regional Community Engagement and Recruitment Officer Travis Green was caught in the middle of the storm on Christmas evening at his Tamborine Mountain home.

"I had a look outside and could hear a roaring in the distance that I've never heard in a weather event before," Travis said.

"When the wind hit our home the door mat raced across the floor, pushed by the gust of air coming under the door. This was followed by rain gushing under the door and as we raced to block it with a towel, we could hear loud thumps on the roof from the rapidly escalating wind.

"Moments later we heard a crash next door and decided to head to our smallest and strongest room for shelter, knowing the neighbour has several mature Tallowwood trees over 20 metres high.

"From our ensuite bathroom we peered out the small window, watching the wind twist and tear away the canopies of trees across the road while our roof whistled loudly."



Travis Green's neighbourhood on Tamborine Mountain suffered extensive damage.



Travis said the wind began to fade after a few minutes however the rain continued.

“We became aware of the sound of running water coming from our lounge room. Water was pouring in around our windows and we rushed to move furniture and capture the flow with buckets and towels,” Travis said.

“As the storm backed off, we ventured outside and were shocked by what we saw. We had a hole punched through our tiles from a large branch and some minor damage to the house; but our immediate neighbour had a large Tallowood tree right through the middle of his home.

“Another neighbour’s carport had collapsed and a tree was speared through the back of their house. Cars had been crushed by falling branches, powerlines were down and there was debris everywhere.

“Our neighbours slowly filtered out from their homes and stood in the dark of the street. We were in disbelief at the destruction. We got lucky. People were much worse affected than us.

“We were just thankful that no one in our immediate community was hurt.”

Travis was one of 130,000 residents who lost power during the storms and because he is on tank water that also meant no running water.

He and his family soon realised that due to the extent of the damage, they were going to be without power for a while. He set about cleaning up and adjusting their lifestyle to accommodate the lack of power and water.

“We went out and bought buckets, a camp shower. We used our electric car as a battery bank and ran lighting and the camp fridge out of that. We also shared a generator between four neighbours,” Travis said.

“You get all these systems up and running. We reframed it as a camping trip.

“Some of the most basic tasks stretched out for so long like doing dishes or having a shower. We had to boil hot water and turn on the generator to get the pump working.”



Tamborine Rural Fire Brigade helped with the storm clean-up.

Travis was deployed as a Public Information Officer (PIO) at the Regional Operations Centre (ROC) at Beenleigh for seven days from 31 December.

He was doing 10-hour shifts at the ROC and then returning home to continue the clean-up and help his community.

He said after having joined QFES three months earlier, he didn’t expect his first deployment to be in his own backyard.

“I expected that I would be learning a lot about disasters and their management; but I had no idea that I would find myself in the middle of one,” Travis said.

“As part of my role as PIO I had to monitor and disseminate a lot of information through social media and other channels. It was really interesting to see just how well SES is viewed by the community.”

Travis said it would be a long road to recovery.

“The basic clean-up is done but for people who have homes to rebuild it’s going to be a long journey for them,” Travis said.

“The storm has changed the northern end of the mountain. The damage to the vegetation was so incredible. It won’t be the same for 10 or 20 years.

Travis said there were some silver linings to his experience.

“The thing I got from it is gratitude – technology makes our lives so much easier,” Travis said,

“Our lives were so busy and we had so much going on before this. It was challenging but the slowdown and lack of social media and tv was nice. Once we had cleaned up, we had an opportunity to enjoy the simple parts of life on the mountain; like watching the sunset over a barbeque dinner.



SES crews performed thousands of tasks helping people whose homes were damaged in the storms, like this home in Wongawallan.



“It’s times like these when communities really shine. They came together and supported those most in need in the face of so much destruction. We also had people travelling in from surrounding areas to donate generators, food, water and provide assistance in cleaning up.”

1200 SES volunteers pitch in

SES Area Controller for South Eastern Region Anthony Cooper was the SES liaison at the Gold Coast Local Disaster Coordination Centre, supporting the volunteer-led Incident Management Team.

He helped set up the emergency operations centre which coordinated the 1200 SES volunteers who assisted with the recovery efforts. Volunteers deployed from New South Wales, Victoria and all over Queensland.

Anthony said it was challenging to have two compounding events.

“There was a lot of damage from the Christmas day storms – trees down and damage to roofs, that sort of thing,” Anthony said.

“We thought we had it beaten. We got it down to about 280 jobs left from the storm. Then the rain event happened on New Year’s Eve and that really exacerbated things.”

Anthony said the hardest part was the scale of the event.

“It affected a much larger area than we would usually see. Storms tend to be a lot more centralised but the damage from this was really spread out,” Anthony said.

“Just getting to some of the properties was challenging. The flooding made it difficult to access some areas. We had a lot of work to do clearing roads from trees and fallen powerlines so we could then go in and do assessments and repairs.”

Anthony said the volunteers did an amazing job.

“The volunteers are a tremendously resilient bunch of people,” Anthony said.

“I can’t stress enough what a fantastic job they did. Some of those teams were getting through 100 jobs a day. They would just keep going out over and over again.

“There were local teams from the Gold Coast and we wanted to switch their roles to radio and communications just to manage the fatigue side of things. After a week of it you do get drained physically and emotionally, seeing the scale of damage in your community.

“But a lot of the local teams still wanted to go out and do the work in their communities because that’s why they joined the SES in the first place.”

Anthony lives in Cedarvale, which was heavily impacted by the storms. He said he experienced firsthand the spirit of SES volunteers.

“I had massive trees down and high-tension powerlines in my driveway. I left my wife and disabled son behind with all that mess,” Anthony said.

“When my Logan SES team got through all their jobs, they came out on the Saturday with their wives and families to my house and cut up all trees and cleaned up all the debris and gave me the freedom to not have to worry about my family.

“That’s what SES is – it’s family. That sense of community and involvement – that’s why people turn up and keep doing this sort of thing, you help mates.”

From the far north to the south east

Pimpama SES Unit Acting Deputy Group Leader Jennah Joyce deployed to far north Queensland in mid-December before returning home to the Christmas night storms, volunteering for around 220 hours over a three-week period.

“Pimpama became the staging area so all deployments came through us for resupply, welfare, briefings and debriefings,” Jennah said.

“It was incredibly draining. There was a lot of responsibility but so many people stepped up and did an incredible job to make sure that those teams were happy, healthy, supplied and welcomed.”

When Jennah deployed to help with the Cyclone Jasper response she was doing chainsaw tasks and washouts with the RFS. They had no reception and no running water which meant no toilets or showers.



The SES shed at Pimpama became the staging point for deployment teams.



Fire and Rescue Service swiftwater technicians, assisted by Numinbah Valley Rural Fire Brigade, rescued 44 campers stranded by floodwaters in Numinbah Valley.



Swiftwater crews were busy responding to many requests due to flash flooding.

“We learned very quickly to write everything down, the second we got network coverage we’d write down our next jobs and update completed jobs.

“That experience helped when we were back in our region because we had no mobile phone services and the Government Wireless Network only worked in very small areas. My team automatically started writing everything on paper.

“There were days when we had up to 30 teams running out of Pimpama, so our organisation had to be well and truly up there to support them and get those teams out to get jobs done.

“I learned a lot because we’ve never done anything to this scale on the Gold Coast.

“Trying to think of what we were trying to do in advance with more storms and flooding coming. It meant we had to forecast what we needed for the coming days but we also had to take it day by day, minute by minute, as things changed quickly.”

Jannah said the support and morale was astounding.

“The SES members were so resilient. Their ability to pivot and stay fluid while still being able to smile and make the best of every situation – that’s what makes deployment special.”

Swiftwater teams busy on New Year’s Day

Station Officer Raymond Ware was the Incident Controller for a swiftwater rescue at Numinbah Valley where 44 campers were transported to safety after being cut-off by floodwaters.

“There were a lot of incidents around Numinbah Valley. The rain made its way down the mountain and access to the campground was covered by water,” Raymond said.

“Queensland Ambulance Service and the Numinbah Rural Fire Brigade were there too with their own 4WDs.

“The water was flowing too strong where the road used to be, so together we went to another part of the property to find a suitable place to cross the river.

“We put two of our guys over to the other side on an inflatable water platform. We then made contact with the campers on the other side, there was about 60 of them, and asked who wanted to be taken back to the other side of the river.

“We set up a tension diagonal system with a rope between trees and connected our boat to that line so we could pull it from one side to the other. We then started shuttling people across with safety gear on three at a time.

“I got in contact with Firecom who liaised with Queensland Police Service and the council to organise a bus to transfer those people out of there. We had to use the 4WDs to get them up to the main road first. They were relocated to a community hall at Nerang where they were fed and picked up.”

The job took around five hours in total with crews returning to their station around 10.30pm.

“It worked out really well,” Raymond said.

“The head paramedic said we did a magnificent job in treacherous conditions, so that was nice to hear.”

Support for QFES personnel and their families

Many QFES families have been directly impacted by the recent weather.

If you need any financial or practical assistance please visit the disaster recovery support page online at www.qld.gov.au/community/disasters-emergencies/disasters.

If you or your family need emotional support, there are a range of support services through Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN). Visit www.qfes.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people to find out more.

FESSN counselling services are available for you and your immediate family. FESSN covers the cost of at least four counselling sessions each year and the services are professional and confidential. You can find your local counsellor via the FESSN website.

For 24/7 support, you can contact the FESSN telephone counselling call-back service on **1800 805 980**. This a 24-hour FREECALL service where you leave your details with a paging service for the on-call FESSN counsellor to phone back within two hours.



Help shape the future Queensland Fire Department

This year will see QFES become the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) as part of the broad ranging emergency service reforms. *Response* spoke to senior leaders about what this means and the opportunities ahead.

Acting Commissioner Steve Smith said there was still a huge opportunity to help shape and inform the future QFD and how it functions. He encouraged people to be proactive in their involvement.



“There has been a lot of consultation and engagement since the reforms were announced in late 2022,” Mr Smith said.

“Informed by that, a lot of decisions have been made on how at a department level we will operate and the direction we are headed.

“There are still a lot of decisions to be made on the more granular issues such as how teams will operate, workflows, that kind of thing.

“We’ve never had as significant an uplift as this before, in terms of people and resources. This is a remarkable opportunity to shape what QFD is and does and how it operates and sits in the broader public safety sector.

“The decisions and actions we take now and in the coming months are going to shape what the QFD will look and feel like and set the tone for a very long time.

“I encourage you to be active, reach out and understand how you can have a say and influence in that space. Proactively talk with your supervisor, manager, your leadership team, in order to keep informed and know where opportunities are.

“We’re much better off if everyone feels they can share their knowledge and expertise and improve the system rather than thinking the managers and leaders

have all the answers – it’s a much bigger thing than that.”

“Have input into what that operating environment is and step into challenges as they come up.”

Mr Smith said it was also a chance to develop QFD’s identity and values.

“We can step back and look at our identity and who we are and what we aspire to be,” Mr Smith said.

“We’ve got clear values that are relevant to us as a department but it’s timely as we move to QFD to talk to our staff and volunteers about our values and what we stand for. What standards do we expect in our professional conduct both in a technical and behavioural sense?”

When having input, Mr Smith said it was important to be pragmatic and realistic.



“There’s literally thousands of views about what and how things should be in the new department,” Mr Smith said.

“It’s important to be pragmatic about what’s possible and when it’s possible.

“After all it is a system – we need to create a system that’s robust, relevant, and sustainable – but it will never be perfect.”

With major changes on the cards, Mr Smith said it was understandable some people would find this uncomfortable.

“I think it’s important people focus on why we’re here. For most people, they work at QFES because they want to add something more, to give back to the community – it’s more than just a job.

“We are here to provide services and support to communities when incidents and events unfold. To help prevent, prepare and plan for, respond to and recover from incidents and events.

“In terms of change itself, it’s only scary and uncomfortable until you understand it, so stepping into it is really important.

“Moving to QFD is not an end state – we will continue to evolve. The intention is to be a continual learning organisation that evolves and improves as things change in the environment.”

Mr Smith said there had been a lot of positivity so far.

“A lot of people are engaged and wanting to be informed and sharing ideas,” Mr Smith said.

“Whether joining town halls in person or online or attending the road shows, putting their hands up to be on reference groups, keeping themselves informed, having conversations with their peers and leaders – there are a lot of people actively working to support the changes.”

Change is a constant

Acting Deputy Commissioner Fire and Rescue Service Kevin Walsh said QFES had undergone many changes in the past 20 to 30 years.



“We are in an ever-changing department and an ever-changing world and that’s the way government agencies must operate.

“It’s really important as we go through this change we continue to work as a team and support each other.

“As an organisation of emergency services, whether it be RFS, FRS or corporate staff, every single day we come to work and we should lean on, talk to and support our colleagues.

“Change is really about people and we must never lose focus on that.

“We want to bring people along on this journey and ensure everyone understands the reasons behind this change and the benefits that will be realised in the long term.”

Mr Walsh agreed it was an exciting time with many opportunities ahead.

“I sincerely think we’ve got some great opportunities going forward,” Mr Walsh said.

“QFD will have a clear focus on fire prevention, response and control. We’ve now got the responsibility and opportunity to strengthen capability across those areas and not be so stretched.

“We can focus on things we’ve never been able to focus on before. That will build capability and capacity, and at the end of the day, it will provide better outcomes for the community.”

Corporate services a backbone to frontline personnel

Chief Operating Officer Adam

Stevenson said to support continual learning, QFES had invested in a range of platforms.

“With the arrival of our Chief Human Resources Officer, Katrina McGill, we seek to establish an end-to-end roadmap for staff and leadership development to support people across the new QFD,” Mr Stevenson said.

“This will support the service-led operational development of our staff and I look forward to Katrina working with the service leads on this continuous journey.”

Mr Stevenson said corporate services formed a crucial backbone to frontline staff, volunteers and services.



“The span of work across the six corporate directorates is enormous but necessary,” Mr Stevenson said.

“There is the very visible work of procuring appliances, stations and uniforms through to the less visible work of ensuring fiducial compliance and whole of government reporting.”

“My intent is to further showcase the work of many of these units and the dedication of the people within these areas to assist the frontline personnel however we can and to the best of our ability.

“Getting the job done and being surprisingly helpful, while looking after ourselves and each other, will be features of corporate services in the new QFD moving forward.

“This change is a chance for renewal – to try new things and examine past ways and accept that some things could be improved. Then we can celebrate and keep the things that were done right.

“This will enable the QFD to focus and ensure the basics are absolutely in place.”

Help us shape the future of *Response*



Ahead of the transition to Queensland Fire Department, we’re seeking your feedback to help us shape the future of *Response*! Let us know how, when and where you prefer to read *Response* and what kinds of stories you’d like to see more of.

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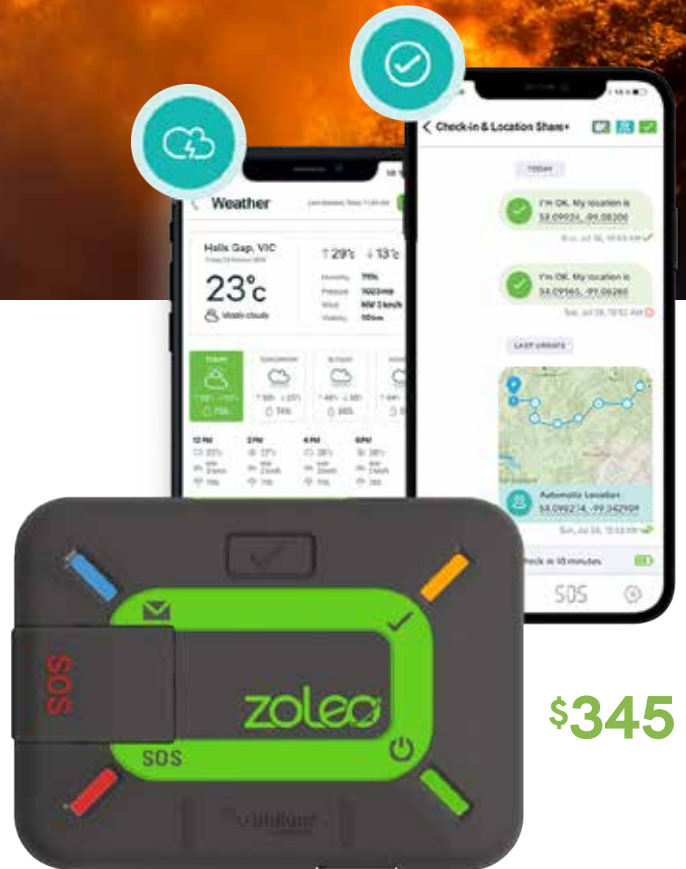
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Teen helps rescue trapped driver

When two cars collided in front of his home, 14-year-old Eddie Gore leapt into action and helped one of the drivers escape. QFES held a special event to acknowledge his bravery.

Last November, Eddie was playing basketball at his house in Camp Hill when he heard a loud bang.

“I ran back to the door originally because I wasn’t sure what the noise was,” he said.

“Then I came out and looked what happened and it was a car on its side and another one had been hit from the front.

“I came over and I saw the person inside the car trying to get out. He managed to get the top door open a bit but I had to hold it while he climbed out the side and jumped out.

“It was nerve-wracking. I didn’t think about it too much at the time, but looking back on it after is pretty scary.”

When Station Officer Mick Everingham arrived at the scene, he was surprised everyone was out of the cars.

“We turned into the street and saw one car on its side. There were lots of residents around and both drivers were sitting on the footpath.

“At that sort of incident, it’s often difficult for us to get the patient out of the vehicle. We often have to take the windscreen out. Getting in the doors is never easy. But Eddie managed to somehow get up on top and help the guy climb out.

“The fact he just jumped in there without concern for his own safety and help someone he didn’t know was really impressive. He was really humble. He didn’t think he’d done anything too special, but we realised that he had.”

To thank Eddie, the crew invited him to the Camp Hill Fire and Rescue Station and presented him with an Assistant Commissioner’s Certificate of Appreciation.

“It was really nice to meet Eddie again and have him and his family here at the station,” Mick said. “I think it was a really good acknowledgement of the work he did out there on the day.”

Director of Regional Operations Matt Bulow presented the certificate.

“Eddie demonstrated great bravery when he helped extricate the person,” Matt said. “A future firefighter in the making.”





RFS coordinates dozens of landowners for large-scale burn

It took collaboration, detective work and a lot of patience and persistence for South Eastern Region's Bushfire Mitigation Unit to achieve a 2000 hectare mitigation burn on Mount Misery last August.

Mount Misery is a 500-metre peak just west of Canungra in south-east Queensland, made up of dozens of different properties.

Bushfire Safety Officers Peter Gurney and Jessica Eadie coordinated the burn and said it was a challenging and slow process.

"A planned burn at this scale is complicated because of the number of property owners involved," Jess said.

"Some of the blocks are vacant or owned by a trust and it's hard to find information on who owns them.

"We had to do a lot of digging, researching and knocking on people's doors."

Jess said they worked closely with Canungra and Biddaddaba Rural Fire Service brigades to formulate a plan for the burn.

"Over the course of 12 months we really started getting the plan nussed out," Jess said.

"We invited all landowners to come to the Canungra Show to have a conversation about what they would like to see happen and when would be a good time to do the burn.

"Then all the other work started happening – door knocking, letter box drops, it was quite a big process.

"We consulted with landowners from the get-go on everything – how to prepare properties, what will happen on the day and whether they wanted to be involved."

Peter said it was also important to educate the landholders about how fire can be good for vegetation and country.

"Generally speaking, the response was really positive, there was the odd person that didn't want fire on their land.

"People have this vision of a raging bushfire, that's certainly not the case for this type of fire.

"Some people didn't want their trees to be damaged. They didn't know that some trees, like grass trees, like fire."

The burn took place over three days in August and saw 2000 hectares burnt.

Peter said the burn was initiated using aerial incendiary, with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's (QPWS) aerial assets dropping incendiary devices on the mountain that combust after they've hit the ground.



“We started at the top of the mountain, allowing the fire to peel down both sides of the ridgeline,” Peter said.

“That way it’s low intensity and promotes healthy country.”

Jess and Peter observed the fire from the air, organising the aerial assets, mapping the fire and providing situational awareness for the incident management team and ground crews.

“It was a really good burn, everything went well,” Jess said.

“There was a lot of people involved. We had firefighters from 15 different brigades.

“Some landowners were also involved putting in dozer tracks.

“From the air you could see the migrations of animals who were able to get away safely, like kangaroos and rock wallabies, which was great to see.”

Peter and Jess thanked all the people they collaborated with, including landholders, local brigades and QPWS.

“Without everyone coming together we couldn’t have achieved what we did,” Peter said.

“It was a great outcome for everyone involved, especially the community.”

South Eastern Region’s Bushfire Mitigation Unit was recognised for their efforts with a Commissioner’s Award for Excellence in

the Capable Communities category last November.

Manager Bushfire Mitigation Adam Moss said it was a fantastic result due to the size and scale of the burn, as well as how the Mitigation Team supported and empowered everyone involved.

“This is an excellent example of Operation Sesbania in action,” he said.

“The relationships and collaboration between our mitigation team, landowners,

local rural fire brigades, fire wardens, QPWS and the community has been exceptional and without everyone’s mutual support and hard work it wouldn’t have been possible.”

Jess said they are hoping to replicate the process at other sites across the region.

“We recently had meetings with other landholders within the South Eastern Region and we’re planning to do more broad area burning this year that will likely be using the aerial incendiary program,” Jess said.



Peter Gurney (right) and Jessica Eadie (third from left) worked with many partners to coordinate the mitigation burn.



Bushfire Safety Officer Jessica Eadie observed the mitigation burn from the air.



South Eastern Region Bushfire Mitigation Team received a Commissioner’s Award for Excellence for the mitigation burn at Mount Misery.



NORTH COAST REGION



Noosa Council Get Ready events

Rural Fire Service (RFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers from across the Noosa Local Government Area teamed up with Noosa Council to deliver the annual Get Ready in School's Project.

Volunteers visited 10 schools and spoke to more than 1400 students about disaster preparedness and resilience. The program focused on the four main risks in the region: flood, storms, fires and heatwaves.

Bundaberg Pageant of Lights

The popular Pageant of Lights was back in Bundaberg, bringing all the magic of Christmas to the community. The Pageant of Lights celebrates the official turning on of the Christmas lights and features a parade of more than 60 Christmas floats.

This year crews from Branyan, Burnett Heads and Calavos Rural Fire Brigades, the SES and Fire and Rescue Service participated with floats featuring decorated vehicles and the signature red and blue lights.



Recognising outstanding service

Medal ceremonies were held in Bundaberg, Maryborough and Maroochydore in December to celebrate the achievements of QFES personnel across the region. There were 271 medals and awards presented including:

- National Medal and Clasps
- QFES Medal and Clasps
- Diligent and Ethical Services Medal and Clasps
- Australian Capital Territory Medal
- National Emergency Service Medal and Clasps
- Commissioner's Commendation for Notable Action
- Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery
- Assistant Commissioner's Commendation
- Higgins and Langley Award

Congratulations and thank you to all award recipients across the region for their bravery, dedication and outstanding service above and beyond what is expected of them in their roles.



Bunya Mountains Community Resilience Day

Local community members and visitors were given the opportunity to meet with emergency services and disaster management members at the annual Bunya Mountains Community Resilience Day.

QFES personnel from the SES, RFS and FRS participated, providing residents with information and advice on bushfire and severe weather safety, the Australian Warning System, home fire safety and more. Thank you to South Burnett Council for having QFES at the event.





BRISBANE REGION

Farewell to an exceptional leader

Brisbane Region staff celebrated the retirement of Executive Manager Community Safety David Cumner in January. David has served his community with passion and dedication as a Firefighter, Station Officer and corporate leader for more than 30 years.

At his retirement event staff paid tribute to David's exceptional leadership, support, encouragement and guidance to his peers throughout his decorated career. He was thanked for always acting with respect, integrity, courage, loyalty and trust.

Dave takes with him a vast amount of experience and knowledge and definitely some lifelong friends. Brisbane Region wishes him all the best in these well-deserved years of retirement from QFES.



SES members support new year's celebrations

Around 70 members from Brisbane SES Unit, with support from Redlands and Moreton Bay, were out in force on New Year's Eve.

The SES supported the Queensland Police Service (QPS) at key positions along the Brisbane River, utilising two flood boats and the Brisbane SES Unit bike team. It was hot, sticky and wet, but a fun affair.

It was great to see a lot of recent recruits stepping up and taking on leadership positions. The decision to embed the SES Field Commander in the QPS command centre proved to be successful and will be continued in future public safety events in the CBD.



Brisbane Region test RPAS capability

QFES conducted a capability exercise recently at Enoggera Reservoir, with Brisbane Region and State Air Operations testing the development of their Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) capacity.

This demonstrated how the drones can be used for HAZMAT, scene size-up, situational awareness, missing hiker searches, or payload drops to people in hard-to-reach positions.



SES deploy to Far Northern Region

In response to Cyclone Jasper, 108 Brisbane Region SES members from Moreton Bay, Redland and Brisbane Units deployed to Far Northern Region as part of Strike Teams Bravo, Echo and Delta.

This was the first time Brisbane Region members had been exposed to Storm pods, a slip-on unit with specialised storm equipment that can easily be transported by hire vehicles during deployments.

Some members were transported by helicopter to isolated areas, offering much needed relief to local SES members. Brisbane members coordinated and completed numerous tasks while on deployment, successfully supporting many community members while in the region.



SOUTH EASTERN REGION

High-rise firefighting awareness training on the Gold Coast

The City of Gold Coast has one of the largest concentrations of residential high-rise buildings in the country. In October and November 2023, Acting Inspector Scott Morgan (pictured) conducted high-rise firefighting awareness training sessions for Gold Coast Zone crews.

There have been numerous fires in high-rise buildings across the Gold Coast recently. The training reinforced the importance of following established procedures and highlighted the pivotal role of the first three arriving crews in setting up a solid foundation for the incident.

The full-day awareness sessions included a theoretical component covering construction, sprinklers, installed systems, air movement, fire dynamics and fire service lift procedures. Importantly, the sessions focused on doctrine and the high-rise procedures.

The afternoon session included a walk-through of Crown Towers, a 40-storey residential high-rise in Surfers Paradise constructed in 1997 with some complex and interesting features. To generate discussion and reinforce learnings from the morning session, discussion boards were positioned throughout the high-rise, including the:

- entrance; to discuss turnout, enroute and arrival procedures
- booster and sprinkler systems
- Fire Control Room; to discuss the features, arrival and intelligence gathering for Officers-in-Charge and establishment of an Incident Control Point
- lift lobby area for fire service lift control procedures
- Forward Command Point and Fire Sector Command
- fire floor.

Upon completion, the manager of Crown Towers was presented with an Assistant Commissioner's Certificate of Appreciation. The training sessions were well received by crews and greatly enhanced high-rise firefighting capabilities on the Gold Coast.



Delayed NAIDOC event a huge success

Fire and Rescue Service crews brought their expertise and community engagement efforts to the annual Gold Coast Titans NAIDOC event, held at Firth Park, Mudgeeraba on 15 December. Originally planned for NAIDOC Week in July, the event had been postponed due to wet weather.

Crews took the opportunity to emphasise home fire safety, sharing valuable tips on preventing fires at home, the importance of smoke alarms and safely charging rechargeable lithium-ion batteries. They also discussed recruitment opportunities within QFES and provided timely information on preparing for severe weather events.

Despite the delay, the event turned out to be a resounding success, with attendees enjoying a day filled with community spirit and cultural celebrations.





SOUTH WESTERN REGION

Beebo fire

A number of bushfires have affected small communities in the Western Downs and Goondiwindi areas over the past 14 months. Periods of significant dry, followed by rainfall in 2022, contributed to good bodies of grass across the region and this presented challenges in being able to contain and control bushfires. Often in the forested areas, this impacts local timber industries and freehold properties with grazing interests.

Working in these areas presents several challenges on the fireground and with logistical support. With limited accommodation available in the region, the region investigated several models to meet deployment needs.

The Beebo incident teams recently hired mining-camp-style caravans where RFS members and staff stayed across several deployment tours. The trailers have four individual rooms with king single beds, fridges and individual aircon units and can be deployed quickly for short-duration incidents.

With support from Goondiwindi Regional Council the units were established at the Macintyre Centre to enable access to kitchen and bathroom facilities. South Western Region would like to extend their thanks to crews who deployed into the region over the extended season.



Supporting our orange family

On 27 December volunteers from Goombungee, Toowoomba, Wallangarra and Warwick joined staff travelling to Cairns to support communities in far north Queensland. As they returned, volunteers from Forest Hill joined the region's staff in supporting the severe weather response across the south-east.

Throughout these deployments members gained valuable experience operating in diverse and dynamic environments. They were exposed to new ways of approaching their traditional roles, leading to fresh ideas and connections with fellow orange family members across Australia. As a result, they returned to their communities with enhanced skills and knowledge.



New auxiliary recruits ready to respond

The final Auxiliary Recruit Training and Education (ARTEP) course for 2023 was held in late November and ended another big year across the region.

Congratulations to the region's newest Auxiliary Firefighters that completed the first 10-day recruit course at Charlton. This was also the third ARTEP course run under the new format, with Operate Pumps, Electrical Hazards and Objective Focused Operational Training modules included as part of the training.

On completion recruits were awarded their Certificate II in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations). Previously, the course was held over eight days, with recruits able to complete the remaining modules over 12 months to gain their Certificate II. The recruits will be responding to incidents within their communities of Surat, Cecil Plains and Taroom.



Swiftwater crew deploy for dry flood event

On 11 January a swiftwater crew comprising Senior Firefighter Noah Little, Firefighter Sam Pike, Firefighter Mark Henning, Firefighter Chelsea Potter and Pilot Mitch Ballanty travelled to Charleville to assist regional communities that were at risk due to potential flooding.

While the predicted weather was not as bad as first thought, the crew took the opportunity to conduct exercises loading the helicopter. They also did a 350-kilometre trip to Eulo as it was being cut off by slow-rising floodwaters. It was considered a dry flood event as there was no rain in the region and flooding occurred as the rainwater made its way downstream.



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FAR NORTHERN REGION

Thursday Island's firefighters battle colossal blaze

In December 2023, the tight-knit community of Thursday Island (Waibene) faced an extraordinary threat as towering flames from one of the largest vegetation fires in the island's history loomed over their homes. The auxiliary firefighters of Thursday Island confronted the inferno which was fuelled by dry conditions, steep inclines and coastal winds.

The blaze not only threatened the residential areas but also posed a direct threat to the island's vital radar tower. The situation intensified when the flames breached the local car dump, triggering multiple explosions that added an extra layer of complexity to the firefighting efforts.

Firefighters exhibited remarkable skill, spirit and teamwork and through their coordinated efforts and strategic planning, they prevented any residential losses during this intense event, showcasing their commitment to the safety of the Waibene community.

The crew worked tirelessly for long hours in challenging conditions to successfully contain and extinguish the blaze. Auxiliaries from Cairns and Mareeba were deployed to Thursday Island, offering much-needed reprieve and support for the local crew after the event.

The local community expressed immense gratitude for the firefighters' efforts.



The response to the fires which affected the whole region during October and November showed the resilience of Far Northern Region's firefighters, staff and volunteers.

The Thursday Island auxiliaries and the relieving crew concluded their deployment with a visit to Waybeni Buway Ngurpay Mudh – Thursday Island Primary School. The school visit focused on educating young minds about home fire safety, fire prevention and emergency escape plans.

They used cultural language and theatrics in the lessons and among the demonstrations was the art of crawling on the ground like a koedal (crocodile) to safely escape smoke in a house and the difference between a good and bad mui (fire).

Through these lessons and conversations the firefighters instilled essential safety knowledge in the Waibene students. The students also instilled in the visiting firefighters the importance of using local cultural language in storytelling sessions so a connection is established between firefighters, students and the safety message.



Tropical Cyclone Jasper packs a punch

Rural Fire Service (RFS) deployment taskforces, in collaboration with State Emergency Service (SES) and Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) crews, have played a critical role in the clean up after Tropical Cyclone (TC) Jasper caused flooding in the region.

The township of Cooktown has embraced the taskforces, greeting the crews with warm welcomes as they convoy to their work locations each day. Local businesses worked alongside RFS staff to book the accommodation and meals for the teams of 20 to 30.

Deployment teams have worked tirelessly in the hot weather. Crews were briefed at Mareeba Fire and Rescue Station before getting on the road to help the local brigades and community members who have worked weeks on end from sunup till sundown in sweltering conditions. Afternoon briefings were conducted on the lawn of the accommodation overlooking the ocean.

The Wharf Kitchen restaurant owner Meg, who provided catering, said the teams were delightful.

"They have made the staff very happy with lots of laughs and are generally great people and larrikins," Meg said.

"They come in tired from a huge day but somehow still always have the energy to make us laugh and smile."





NORTHERN REGION

Training with Australian Army's 3rd Brigade

Fire and Rescue Service personnel joined the Australian Army's 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment at Lavarack Barracks to take part in the Combat Rescue Operator Course.

The course includes Aviation Crash Response, Road Crash Rescue and Confined Space Rescue.



FRS Christmas visit to Townsville Hospital Paediatric Ward

Fire and Rescue Service firefighters and Firecom officers volunteered their time to make a special visit to the Townsville University Hospital Paediatric Ward, Women and Children's Unit and Paediatric Emergency Department.

Brighter Lives CEO Tanya Busoli said it meant the world to children facing difficult times during their hospital stay, especially at this time of year.

"This experience brings immense joy to patients and staff," Tanya said.

"Unfortunately, over 200 kids a year are brought to Townsville University Hospital to be treated for burns. We are currently fundraising for a new laser to treat kids who have experienced burns, but prevention is always much better than treatment."

As well as being able to hand out activity books and stickers, the visits allowed staff to promote and discuss QFES campaigns. The team were impressed when one young lady told them she knew to get down low and go go go.



SES support Meals on Wheels

SES volunteers answered the call to help deliver much needed meals when the Hinchinbrook Shire experienced flooding late last year.

Ingham Meals on Wheels asked for help when flooding threatened their ability to make important deliveries and SES volunteers were happy to support.



Charters Towers auxiliaries awarded for long service

Inspector Corrie Benson presented the National Medal and QFES Medal and Clasps to Charters Towers colleagues on 7 December, recognising more than 80 years of combined service. Congratulations to the following recipients:

- Firefighter Tony Critchley – National Medal and QFES Medal
- Firefighter Robert Wallis – QFES Medal
- Lieutenant Rhoda Smith – National Medal First Clasp and QFES Medal First Clasp
- Captain Gordon McColl – National Medal First Clasp and QFES Medal First, Second and Third Clasp.



CENTRAL REGION

Supporting our people

Last year Peer Support Officer (PSO) Robert Coghlan was seconded from Bundaberg to Gladstone as the Brigade Training Support Officer for the Rural Fire Service.

Robert was instrumental in following up with all the rural crews around Deepwater and Lowmead areas following the massive fires in October and November.

Robert undertook a debrief session with brigades and volunteers and checked in on their wellbeing.

Huge thanks go to Robert from all the Gladstone crews for his support and assistance.



Sarina Station Christmas lolly drop

Lieutenant Shannon Gardner, Captain Peter Carroll and Sarina Auxiliary Station staff organised an annual Christmas lolly drop for Sarina and surrounding communities.

The lollies were donated by Community Business Australia and delivered by a procession of Fire and Rescue Service, State Emergency Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Police Service vehicles throughout the community on Christmas Eve.

QFES Chaplain Rod Ballard said the event catered for all age groups.

“There is a 92-year-old who lives with her daughter and hubby and she was so excited that the family carried her lounge out onto the footpath so she could get involved. She settled in early and ended up having 40 winks before the action started,” Rod said.

QFES members were also pleased to hear a child say, “Wow, this is unbelievable. This is the best day of my life.”

Rally heads north for charity

Capella Auxiliary Captain Steve Campbell participated in the 2023 Great Endeavour Rally helping to raise \$761,000 for people living with a disability.

The rally saw 52 cars, supported by Komatsu and the Australian Army, leave Cairns on 1 September bound for Cape York.

Participants stayed overnight at two cattle stations on the way to Bramwell Tourist Park, then travelled on to Loyalty Beach for two nights. The crew also got to venture to the tip of Cape York and stand on the most northern point of Australia.

Participants then headed back down south staying at Moreton Telegraph Station, Musgrave Roadhouse and Cape Tribulation, arriving back in Cairns on 1 September. The rally visited Weipa, Fruit Bat Falls, Captain Billy's Landing, Chilli Beach, Lockhart River, Cooktown and the Lion's Den Hotel.

Steve and his best mate have been participating in the Great Endeavour Rally since 2018. Congratulations to Steve and all rally participants.





Isaac SES Local Controller Brandon Goode with Queensland Ambulance Service members on a tour of a coal mine in Moranbah.

QFES members head underground

State Emergency Service (SES) and Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) personnel swapped their PPE for overalls and headlamps to head underground at a coal mine in Moranbah.

Local QFES members, alongside other emergency services, were taken on a tour of the mine to discuss potential emergencies that may impact the site.

Isaac SES Unit Local Controller Brandon Goode said going deep under the surface of the earth was a very daunting experience.

“At the same time, it was also very exciting and eye opening,” he said.

“The underground environment of the mine is very different to the sweltering summer heat above. The temperatures are low and there is a lot of moisture in the air.

“The ventilation systems aboveground push air from the surface deep underground.”

“The active mining longwall and the sole entry and exit point are the only areas that have overhead lighting. The rest of the mine relies on the heavy vehicle lighting and the personal issue headlamp you are given before heading down.

“The mine varies in depth, ranging from 100 to 500 metres, depending on the specific coal seam and the mine’s operational objectives.

“The average coal seam stands four to six metres in height and can snake its way under the Queensland landscape for many kilometres under rail lines, rivers, roads and other infrastructure.

“Specialised underground rescue teams are equipped for underground firefighting and prompt evacuation procedures in the event of an incident.”

The group were shown the underground fire suppression units, which house essential firefighting equipment such as hoses and fire suppression foam, as well as a manual roof drill used to drill support rods into the roof or wall of a work area to minimise the risk of a collapse.

“These units also carry advanced medical equipment to support the medical crews to handle any emergency deep underground,” Brandon said.

“We visited a continuous miner, a piece of heavy equipment designed to bore through rock and coal to make underground roads for the expansion of the mine.

“This is supported by a shuttle car – a dump truck that takes material from the continuous miner and dumps it onto a conveyer to be taken to the surface for processing.”

Central Region Assistant Commissioner Steve Smith said this was a good example of QFES people forging strong partnerships and improving their knowledge and interoperability.

“We work with so many partners and that work starts long before an emergency situation breaks out,” Mr Smith said.

“Taking part in this kind of partnership training events helps our people to be ready to respond and assist to any situation when needed.”

Mine operators Angelo American started the working group which includes emergency services, the local Local Disaster Management Group, and the District Disaster Management Office.

QFES takes out coveted risk management award

QFES has seen a significant decline in frequency and severity of vehicle incidents since implementing new strategies to manage fleet risk.

These achievements were recognised at a national insurance industry awards ceremony recently, the RM Advancer Awards, where QFES was acknowledged for outstanding performance and exceptional fleet risk management.

The QFES Fleet Strategy team leads and manages the QFES fleet insurance portfolio and focuses on implementing processes that lower the frequency of claims, improve safety culture and keep vehicles on the road.

Executive Manager Marie Page said early reporting, driver accountability and senior management oversight of claims were some of the initiatives which helped improve QFES' claim performance.

"We have made improvements to how we manage fleet risk following a fact-finding project to understand the strengths and challenge areas of each service and region," Marie said.

"The feedback and data collected enabled us to form an in-depth risk profile of the current fleet risk practices and culture across QFES."

The project, supported by JLT Risk Solutions and fleet insurer Vero, provided a number of recommendations to address key areas of risk and saw work commence on several initiatives:

- mandatory accident assessments, which allow regions to gather data around the human and environmental factors which directly or indirectly influence accidents
- improvements to the Fleet Gateway page so QFES staff and volunteers can access fleet related information in one place
- regular insurance and risk reports presented to the Executive Leadership Team, Regional Managers, Assistant Commissioners and all regional fleet contacts to ensure awareness of claims

management across all levels of the department. This was in response to many survey participants reporting they were unaware of senior management involvement in the review of fleet incidents.

"We have seen improvements in the severity of incidents with the claim cost reducing by an average of \$2,877 per claim in the current insurance period compared to the previous insurance period," Marie said.

"This can be accredited to QFES increasing the focus on driver at-fault claims and increasing driver training opportunities for our staff.

"As an organisation, this claim type has always been a challenge for us given the types of vehicles deployed across the fleet, so we have been pleased to achieve a frequency reduction.

"We have also seen significant improvement in the average time that it takes QFES to report an incident to our insurance provider.

"We could not be prouder of what has been achieved so far in our fleet risk management journey, but we also recognise that there are always new learnings to be discovered and new improvements to be implemented."





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Helping all creatures great and small

Rescuing trapped or injured people can be a dangerous and arduous task. But it does come with its perks when the patient happens to be an adorable animal.

Cooper, a part-mastiff, was rescued from a 25-metre cliff ledge on Mt Ngungun in the Sunshine Coast's Glasshouse Mountains in late November.

The dog became frightened during a storm and got stuck about halfway up the mountain.

The following morning, QFES personnel were called and arrived at the base of the mountain.

Maroochydore Station Officer Scott Daly was one of the rescuers.

"I'd say with the wet conditions and the slipperiness of the rocks he fell down the mountain into a little gully about 25 metres off the ground," Scott said.

"The dog had been on the ledge for about seven hours and was pretty weak as he had been through a storm without food or water."



The team climbed up the mountain and a crew member was lowered on to the ledge where they secured Cooper in a harness made specifically for dogs.

They then lowered themselves to the ground.

"He was very pleased to see us. Once we got hold of him, he perked up significantly," Scott said.

"When he got into the arms of his owners at the bottom, he looked fresh as a daisy."

Scott said the owners were very grateful to be reunited with their pet.

He said the team performed about one dog rescue a year, usually from the side of mountains.

Also in November, the crew from Torquay Fire and Rescue Station rescued four bat pups at Apex Park, with the help of Bat Conservation & Rescue QLD. The pups were each given a dummy and swaddle to imitate their mother's presence.

In the same month a baby curlew became trapped in a drain at Port of Brisbane and Wynnum firefighters were on the scene to rescue the chick.

Animal rescues are also popular with members of the public. A post shared on QFES' Facebook page about Cooper's rescue received more than 2000 likes, 90 comments and 40 shares.





Santa and his elves braved the storms to bring joy and excitement to the Kilcoy community. Santa had a very strong resemblance to Mark Edwards, the captain of Kilcoy Fire and Rescue Station.



Arama Samuel, Harry Molloy- Webster and Ross McDonald assist in the clean-up and recovery after Tropical Cyclone Jasper.



Kuranda SES Unit members were busy with chainsaw jobs following Tropical Cyclone Jasper.



SES members deployed from all over Queensland to help with the clean-up after Cyclone Jasper, including this team from Brisbane.



Crews helped all creatures great and small escape floodwaters in far north Queensland.



Northern Region deployed State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service members to far north Queensland to provide much-needed assistance following Tropical Cyclone Jasper.



Dave McConnell and Marilyn George were part of the huge QFES team that completed thousands of tasks following Tropical Cyclone Jasper.



Congratulations to Station Officer William (Billy) O'Pray who retired from the Fire and Rescue Service at the end of this tour on 18 January. Colleagues, family and friends gathered at Ashgrove Fire and Rescue Station to recognise and thank Billy for his dedicated and distinguished career, spanning just shy of 36 years.



Fire scenarios put training into practice

Firecom receives a call at 11.30pm about a house fire in Arana Hills. Twelve minutes later crews arrive at the one-storey timber house to two women waving from the footpath.

One of them is holding a toddler and shouting that there is a fire in her child's room at the back of the property.

There are flames coming from the window at the back of the house.

The Officer-in-Charge isolates the main switch at the fuse box and notices the switchboard contains ceramic fuses. The power fuse and the lighting circuit fuse have blown.

Two firefighters don BA and enter through the front door. In the hallway they see flames projecting into the hallway from the child's room.

They gas cool the hallway and head towards the room. They are able to easily knock down the fire, which is mostly burning on the right-hand side of the room near the drawers and cupboard. Moving and removing furniture (overhaul) is kept to a minimum to preserve the scene as much as possible.

When later interviewed, the woman describes how she turned on a heater fan in the corner of the room and an electric blanket in the baby's cot and then fell asleep holding the baby in the lounge room.

There was also a night light on. She says the fan heater and night lamp were bought off eBay two weeks ago for \$20 and she didn't keep the boxes of instructions that came with them. She says there have been no problems or repairs on any of the electrical items in the room.

The Officer in Charge is unable to interpret the fire patterns in the room well enough to determine the cause of the fire, so the Fire Investigation Unit is called.

This is the kind of hypothetical scenario participants face when completing the residential component of the two-year long fire investigation course.

The week-long residential component puts into practice the theory the students have been studying, including investigative processes, scene examination and documentation, information gathering, report writing and legal processes.

South Western Region Station Officer Brett Gehrke is one of eight Fire and Rescue Service personnel studying the fire investigation course who completed the residential component in November last year.

Brett said the hypothetical training scenarios were a great way to test their theoretical training.

"For the past 18 months we have been learning about the fire investigation process so this gives us the chance to apply that in a realistic setting," Brett said.

"Typically, after a fire like the one described, a risk assessment is performed to size up the structure and gain an understanding of the construction and materials used.

"Next we thoroughly document the scene. This involves taking photos, videos, notes, interviews, etc.

"Generally, the Fire Investigation Officer will commence from the least damaged

areas and work towards the area of most damage. The aim is to examine the entire area surrounding the fire scene, even areas where no fire damage has occurred.

"They will identify and document indicators that display direction of heat flow, lowest point of burn, overhead damage and specific fire patterns that indicate path of fire travel.

"All this information and more is then used to piece the puzzle together as to how all the vital elements came together to initiate a fire."

Brett said in the case of the hypothetical fire described above, there are several indicators present.

"There are patterns of fire damage on the cot and other furniture – the area of lowest point of burn, and the area of greatest damage," Brett said.

"These indications eliminated most other possible ignition sources and narrowed down the point of origin. This enabled us to identify the heater fan as the probable source of ignition."

To assist with their training, the students heard from the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Forensic Unit, QPS Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB), Director of Public Prosecutions, Queensland Coroner's Court and QFES Legal Unit.

"We also had QPS Scenes of Crime Officers participate in the practical fire investigation

scenarios which provided another element of realism," Brett said.

"The course finished with a mock court hearing which was held at the Brisbane District Court in the city.

"We had to face cross-examination on the fire we had investigated and reported on earlier in the week from a defence barrister played by a member of the assessment panel.

"Undergoing cross examination was the most stressful part of the course.

"The process takes you out of your comfort zone and gives you an understanding that you must have a high level of knowledge of your subject to withstand that level of scrutiny.

"Other courtroom roles such as judge and prosecutor were performed by QFES Legal and a lecturer from the Canberra Institute of Technology."



Fire investigation students attend a mock court hearing.



Talei wears many hats to support her community

Rural Fire Service (RFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer Talei Elu is determined to improve the resilience of her community.

The 31-year-old Saibai Koedal (crocodile) woman lives in Seisia, a small Torres Strait Islander community on the north-west coast of Cape York Peninsula.

Talei, who was awarded the Queensland Young Australian of the Year in 2023, was first introduced to the RFS and SES in 2021 while trying to get help for a sick relative.

“My relative was having trouble breathing. We called Triple Zero and we weren’t getting connected, so we had to separate ourselves from her and create a three-person network to get connected while still being close enough to talk to her. This highlighted the issue we have in our community around health and responsiveness,” Talei said.

“The Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) paramedic, Karl, who has come to help my family and other community members on various occasions, was also the Secretary for the RFS. In the months that followed we worked together to advocate for a new telecommunications tower to be built for our community.”

Talei and her community, with the help of the QAS paramedics, were successful in their efforts. A new telecommunications tower is due to be built early this year.

After seeing Talei’s passion for her community, Karl encouraged her to join the RFS and SES.

“My first interaction was at an RFS training day where we learnt how to use a drip torch and learnt about fire behaviour,” Talei said.

“They were talking about how fires can spread depending on the landscape, I thought it was fascinating. I knew I wanted to join.

“My first activation was in a place called Loyalty Beach about 15 minutes from my community in a campground area. It was a small fire, but it was a good opportunity to see how the First Officer managed the situation, how he tasked things out and the debrief session we had after. I saw how his local knowledge of the landscape helped to understand the fire and its movement.

“It was a really fun, adrenaline-inducing experience, and great to know we were protecting people from fire.”

Talei said one of the bigger fires she attended was in September last year.

“It was huge and was quite close to my community, so I was able to play a key role,” Talei said.

“I stayed at the back of the community to monitor. We had a few new recruits who were driving the trucks who didn’t know my community very well. When the fire was approaching, I instructed them to avoid certain areas I knew were too soft to handle the weight of our trucks.

“It gave me the opportunity to reflect on how much I had learned and reminded me that I do know this landscape well and I can contribute to making sure our equipment and assets are safe, as well as local families.

“A lot of community members were watching. I had to direct a few to turn on their sprinklers to make sure their yards were wet. A lot of community members were assisting with hoses and driving buggies to monitor different areas, as the perimeter was a lot for the local volunteers to handle at the height of the fire.

“After a couple of years trying to get more local volunteers and educating people about fire safety, it was heart-warming to see so many people jump into action.”

Talei’s first SES activation was a lift assist helping paramedics get someone who was unwell down a set of stairs.

“After you do the job you feel like you’ve helped someone to receive care quickly and efficiently,” Talei said.

“I’ve learnt heaps. One of my favourite training sessions was road crash rescue and learning how to use the cutters. Seeing the more seasoned SES crew cut up a car in less than a minute was so impressive.

“In Cape York we have a lot of tourists and crashes can be pretty intense. These roads are hundreds of kilometres long and far away from the closest hospitals in Cairns and Townsville, so time really is of the essence.”

Talei’s passion for improving her community was recognised in 2023 when she received the Queensland Young Australian of the Year award for several projects she coordinated

to improve health, communications and education in her community.

Talei was born in Seisia and has also lived in Thursday Island and Canberra. She returned to live in Seisia during COVID-19 and said the difference between these lifestyles was stark.

“In Canberra I saw a very different world with a lot of privileges,” Talei said.

“I would go back home on holidays and at that time we didn’t even have bitumen roads. I was going between two really different experiences.

“When I returned to Seisia permanently during COVID-19, I got to experience what it was like living back home again and the hardships experienced by a lot of people living here.”

Talei’s goal is to focus on small community projects and find interventions that help improve the health and wellbeing of the community.

During COVID-19, she worked on a project to translate health messages in Torres Strait Islander creole.



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