

RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT AUGUST 2024



**PROTECTING OUR
BACKYARD**
Brigades at the ready

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Firefighters from Woodlea Rural Fire Brigade responded to an out-of-control burn in the Grantham area. Photo by Woodlea Rural Fire Brigade.

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

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FOREWORDS



STEVE SMITH AFSM
Commissioner
QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

This is our first edition of *Response* under the banner of the Queensland Fire Department (QFD). I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to the many months of planning and hard work to make the transition to QFD happen. It has created a strong foundation for the future of our department and the communities we serve.

The QFD Foundation Forums in July were a fantastic opportunity for our senior and emerging leaders to come together, exchange ideas, make new connections and embrace the opportunities ahead of us. You can read more about the outcomes and what they mean for QFD on page 8.

As QFD, we will face new challenges due to the changing climate, new technologies and expanding populations.

I am confident we are equipped with the right people and capabilities to identify those changes, understand their meaning and develop effective service delivery solutions.

I feel privileged to lead the diverse and skilled staff and volunteers that make up QFD. Your passion and service to the community enables our important work each day.

We have remarkable opportunities ahead of us. The QFD Strategy *Beyond the Smoke: Queensland Fire Department's foundation and direction for a safer tomorrow* is available on the Gateway and I encourage you to read it if you haven't already.

Beyond the Smoke provides guidance and direction on QFD's operations, organisation and service delivery. Now is the time to take this strategy and turn it into practical actions for you and your teams. Together we will work to create the new QFD and our new ways of working.

I believe everyone has a choice in how they turn up to work every day. Leading positively, leading with influence and bringing your best into the workplace creates an environment where everyone feels comfortable, and we get the best out of our people.

When we live our values, starting with respect, we create an environment where people are valued, which will help us go a long way towards being a successful department that strives for excellence every day.



KEVIN WALSH AFSM
Acting Deputy Commissioner
QUEENSLAND FIRE AND RESCUE

We have passed the major milestone of establishing the new QFD, and now Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) has the opportunity to update our priorities, with a deliberate emphasis on 'back to basics' and a focus on exercises and training for operational excellence.

Training underpins everything we do. The importance of meaningful training, as opposed to mere compliance activities, cannot be understated.

I recently had the opportunity to address regional and state training staff at the State Training Workshop in Brisbane.

My key message was the importance of an integrated system of training and learning, and ensuring connections with operational lessons to PPE, equipment procurement, doctrine, firefighting tactics and directives.

We are currently reviewing the lessons management process, which is a key component of informing our training and operational methods.

QFR has already introduced significant innovation with the Mobile LPG Flashover Cells, one of our new training initiatives that supports place-based training to enhance skill maintenance throughout the state.

Virtual reality has also become a major part of our training methods, with firefighters using the latest interactive technology to immerse themselves in lifelike scenarios where they can safely practise their skills.

This financial year, 2024-25, is the year to do things differently. Just because we've done it one way in the past, doesn't mean we can't use a new process to improve the services we deliver to our community.

The Officer Development Program is currently under review to deliver an enhanced method for training firefighters to become station officers. We are also reviewing a professional development program for our senior officers and producing an analysis of how we recruit and train our auxiliary firefighters.

Comprehensive and meaningful training will always underpin our safety in operations, and this will continue as we improve the way we do business in the new QFR.



Deployment to PNG landslide

Australia's Disaster Assistance Response Team (AUS-1 DART) deployed to Papua New Guinea to help local authorities respond to the Enga Province landslide.

As part of Australia's assistance to Papua New Guinea (PNG), AUS-1 DART used their specialist skills to support the PNG Government's disaster response through incident management, logistics, damage assessments, drones and mapping, and delivery of much-needed humanitarian relief supplies to the affected local community.

The team consisted of 11 QFR firefighters, a Queensland Ambulance Service paramedic, liaison officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and two humanitarian logistics capability officers.

QFR has a close relationship with PNG and has supported them through previous disasters, including the 2018 earthquake in the neighbouring province of Hela.

Acting Chief Superintendent Doug May, Director of Specialist and Technical

Response, led the team in Enga, drawing on his 20 years' experience with DART.

"I first started in technical rescue as an interesting extension to my regular work as a firefighter," Doug said. "Being outside, climbing, swimming in white water, along with the technical aspects such as equipment and teamwork, were particularly interesting to me."

"Now, in a leadership role within the technical rescue capability, my focus is on the bigger picture of coordinating humanitarian relief across agencies, states, the Commonwealth and internationally through the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group."

Reaching PNG

"On 28 May 2024, we deployed as a Light Team and we took all our equipment as checked baggage on a commercial flight to Port Moresby," Doug said.

"Daily from the airport in Port Moresby we used Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Hercules and Spartan fixed-wing aircraft to and from Wapenamanda Airport, about 85 kilometres from the affected area. Helicopters took us the rest of the way."

Enga is a remote highland province about 600 kilometres north-west of Port Moresby. Some of its villages are three to five days' walk from any road.

The province has a population of about 62,000 people with scattered homesteads dispersed throughout the landscape. People primarily reside in huts made from bush materials and live off the land.

"It's a spectacular landscape of rugged mountains, green and lush, with giant waterfalls," Doug said.

"People farm all sorts of crops, from potatoes and sweet potatoes to beans and herbs. Instead of tilling the earth, they make piles of mulch and compost and cover

them up with soil. Six months later they plant into these highly fertile mounds.”

Coffee is the main source of cash in the area and revenue is also generated by mining, commercial agriculture and tourism. Pigs are bred not only for their meat, but for social status and dowries.

Precautions

Due to security concerns in the highlands, the team had to travel to and from the site every day from Port Moresby.

“That particular part of PNG is known for its warrior culture and tribal conflicts,” Doug said.

“People carry bush knives (long machetes) for all sorts of purposes throughout the day, so when a conflict arises they already have the knives at hand and things can go wrong quickly.”

Tribal conflicts arise from land disputes, competition over resources and inter-clan rivalries. These conflicts have led to significant casualties and mass displacement of populations.

On the day after the landslide, an unrelated conflict broke out between two clans midway between the provincial capital, Wabag, and the disaster site. Eight lives were lost and about 30 homes burnt down. Several local health posts were destroyed or forced to operate at reduced capacity.

Enga Provincial Hospital’s Accident and Emergency Department was overwhelmed with patients suffering from gunshot wounds and stabbing injuries.

The Royal PNG Constabulary and PNG Defence Force maintained security at the landslide site and deployed additional security personnel to guard aid convoys traveling there.

“Violence against women in the highlands is also well documented so, in agreement with our Commonwealth partners, we didn’t take any women in the team this time,” Doug said.

“Despite concerns, we were well received by the local tribes. They were very appreciative and I think the risk was low to us as a team who’d come in to help.”

Devastation

At 3am on Friday 24 May, after heavy rainfall, the landslide affected six villages in the Porgera-Paiela district of Enga. The village of Yambali was engulfed by six to eight metres of soil.

The United Nations originally estimated 670 people were buried, but PNG’s National Disaster Centre later revised this figure to as many as 2000. About 1000 people were displaced.

PNG regularly experiences landslides, in part due to its climate and mountainous

terrain, and intense rainfall has already led to several landslides this year.

AUS-1 DART arrived five days after the landslide, but the earth was still moving.

“Initial assessments suggested water had penetrated into the tilted sandstone that made up the cliff face above the village, separating the outer layers,” Doug said.

“A huge piece of sandstone fell off and drove down the ground below it. The earth on both sides of that followed it into the depression like a funnel.

“An area roughly 200 metres long and 100 metres wide sank down three metres and, after the initial landslide, kept slowly moving downhill.

“When we arrived, around the landslide everything was like a giant pot-plant sliding along. Many houses and trees were still standing, but the earth was moving below them.

“A local man showed us photos of his house on the edge of the landslide to show it had moved about eight meters since the landslide.

“Between one day and the next, we saw two-metre-wide cracks open up above roadways that were still being used, so we notified engineers from PNG Defence Force and they evacuated those areas.”





After talking with local people, the team discovered about 185 houses had been buried.

“The houses were about two metres by two-and-a-half metres, with seven or eight people sleeping inside,” Doug said.

“The housing was dense because areas at the edge of the village had been burnt down in tribal fighting, so everyone had congregated in this small area for protection.

“There was great concern that decent rainfall would see the whole landslide move down and take out a second village a kilometre below on the river.”

People had evacuated from the second village out of fear it would be destroyed and because the landslide had also contaminated the local creek, their sole source of potable drinking water.

Getting to work

When the team arrived everyone was shellshocked and most people had scattered, with only a few hundred people remaining in the area.

Before DART arrived, a local businessman had donated an excavator but moving terrain and concerns over management of the buried meant that hand digging was

the first response. The nearby Porgera Gold Mine provided diggers to help the rescuers.

“The mission for us was unfortunately never about search and rescue,” Doug said. “We did take some search equipment with us in case of a further slip, but we never expected to find survivors.

“At a structural collapse, we look for buildings where pieces fall on each other and leave triangular voids. But if the building is a pancake collapse where the pieces fall flat, survivors are much less likely.

“With tumbling dirt and rocks six to eight metres deep, there are effectively no voids and a very large crushing force. If you’re not on the surface when it’s over, chances of survival are very slim.”

Some people were still digging to find their family members. The team initially feared the community would expect them to help retrieve their loved ones, but the community were already resolved to the outcome and were grateful to have them help with coordinating recovery.

“The local authorities had initiated their well-designed disaster management arrangements,” Doug said. “We talked with the Enga Provincial Authority, who were understandably overwhelmed by the situation and required additional capacity.

“They were very pleased to see us and engaged with us really well. We determined what their needs were and started to action work they were struggling to get done.”

AUS-1 DART provided drone surveillance to protect people in the area.

“We coordinated with Fire and Emergency New Zealand’s Urban Search and Rescue team, NZL-01, whose geo-technical engineers had a lot of experience with landslides. Before their arrival, they shared with us a pre-programmed flight path for our drones, which we uploaded into our systems and flew every day.

“The drones followed a highly complex set of waypoints and took photos every two seconds to produce a 3D orthographic map. We did this daily to reveal movements in the earth and to inform engineering advice provided to local authorities that saw both the village and the road relocated.

“We also took gear with us to improve communications and the flow of support. We participated in coordination arrangements and boosted their capacity in operations planning and logistics by sharing our expertise and experience.”

The team’s humanitarian logistics capability officers facilitated the movement of all incoming humanitarian supplies.

“The supplies were transported primarily by RAAF fixed-wing aircraft from Australia and other partners including New Zealand, Japan, the UK and the US, and then trucked to the site.

“The warehouse at Wabag was struggling with capacity and became a bottleneck, so we helped get them on track by sourcing containers for security at site, developing load plans and ultimately hand loading the containers.

“We brought swingloader trucks from Mount Hagen to transport them and also sourced 1000-litre intermediate bulk containers for water from Port Moresby to supply 10,000 litres of clean water to site every day.”

The team worked closely with logistics and liaison officers from the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

“Together we coordinated the movements of assets like trucks, helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to get equipment and personnel in and out and deliver food and supplies to the other side of the landslide. The ADF were fantastic to work with. It really was a big ‘Team Australia’ effort.”

Back in control

By the 10th and final day of AUS-1 DART’s deployment, the once deserted site had

transformed into an encampment made from bush materials and tents, with about 3000 people arranging food and supplies.

“People were back on their feet and running things for themselves,” Doug said. “They were confident enough to take care of their own needs for the medium-term recovery.

“Their disaster management system was well structured. Much like ours, it’s local led. That was useful because we could simply find out what locals needed and make it happen, which was familiar to us.

“However, a lot of places lacked capacity because when you’re hit by disaster, your local arrangements take a while to get going, which would be similar here in Australia.

“When we talk about the support we provide, it’s easy to overlook the intangible aspects such as mental health, including anxiety relief.

“When so many people are shell shocked, there’s such a change in their demeanour and morale when help arrives.

“Those intangibles are really hard to quantify, but they’re so important for the recovery of a community that has suffered so greatly.”

Doug recalled a similar outcome when the DART team travelled to New Zealand after Tropical Cyclone Gabriel.

“New Zealand is a more modern country but the team were working with a relatively small community so there weren’t a lot of people to deal with disaster management, and the people who could do it had been impacted themselves.

“Having our team help structure their thoughts and efforts in operational outcomes allowed them to re-establish local control over the incident and get back on their feet.

“That’s the key – getting the community through that acute phase of the disaster until they can function and manage it by themselves.”

AUS-1 DART is preparing for more frequent, smaller disasters in the near to medium future around the Indo-Pacific.

“For a few years we’ve been working on a smaller and more flexible response,” Doug said. “This event was one of the first tests of that capability in an area that was remote, unfamiliar, had security risks and involved a lot of complex interagency work.

“It was a good test of systems and processes and we learnt many lessons we’re keen to work on for the next deployment.”



A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE DEPARTMENT

At the Queensland Fire Department Foundation Forums in July, 700 staff and volunteer members from across the state came together to discuss the department's vision, purpose and strategic priorities.

Commissioner Stephen Smith said he believed participants took away a sense of optimism and readiness to embrace change after hearing a range of leaders speak at the forums.

"The energy in the room was extraordinary – the conversations, the engagement, the new connections being made were really pleasing to experience," Mr Smith said.

"Feedback from participants was very positive about where we want to go, what we want to be, what we want to represent and what we want to achieve moving forward.

"Having that alignment across 700 people including all our senior leaders and many emerging leaders, our key partners, and representation from all levels in our organisation – was a remarkable opportunity for the future."

Speakers also discussed physical and mental health, our shared values, and expectations of QFD leaders at all levels.

Collaboration

Feedback from the forums suggested a collective desire for transformational leadership, effective communication and a focus on people's well-being and development. The biggest focus, however, was collaboration.

"People recognise we're a big complex organisation," Mr Smith said. "We all contribute meaningfully in our own right but we can't do it without each other.

"Everyone's expertise brought to the table makes us better than we would be in isolation. We rely on the sharing of knowledge and experiences to do the job.

"It was great to see collaboration was a strong and consistent theme across both forums. It highlighted people's commitment to focusing on the service we deliver so we can be there to support communities and improve public safety outcomes.

"Collaboration speaks to the need for us to be seamlessly interoperable, and not just in operations."

The forums also made clear that QFD leaders are prioritising effective communication and stakeholder engagement.

"Communication is an essential element for people to feel like they belong and are informed about what the department is doing and where it's going," Mr Smith said. "We have to improve the communication flows within the organisation, we know that.

"We have to understand how to reach the needs of different groups, probably by using multiple channels targeted to different audiences. There might not be a perfect answer but we're going to focus on trying to improve it."

Another major theme at the forums was the importance of a respectful, inclusive and positive culture.

"Diversity, equity and inclusion ultimately means we're attracting and retaining the



right people and they feel valued and have a sense of belonging,” Mr Smith said.

“With a staff and volunteer workforce of 33,000 people, if we can universally create that kind of environment, we’ll get a huge commitment of resources and power to do things better.

“I think there’s a lot of work for us to normalise that thinking into how we operate – our culture. We’re a big workforce and from time-to-time things happen, but if respect is at the core of what we do, we’re in a good position for people to thrive in the workplace.”

Back to basics

Commissioner Smith said it had been a long time since the review was announced and reaching 1 July had involved a lot of hard work from many people.

“Now that we’ve gotten through that, it’s time to create a more focused department, getting back to basics, getting on with the job and focusing on being exceptional at what we do,” he said.

“This is a real chance to reset and do things differently, from our services and functions to engagement with partners and stakeholders. We may have become QFD,

but we’ve got a lot of work to fully realise the benefits of that.

“In the first instance we need to focus on the roles and responsibilities of our department. The baseline of that is being safe and effective in our operations.

“It’s not just the people on the frontline, it’s everyone in the system who makes that possible. We need to acknowledge what everyone does and what their work contributes to that outcome.”

The Commissioner said one of the main priorities moving forward will be role clarity, empowering people to do their work with a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

“We need to develop specific guidance about roles, what’s required and who we engage with, so individuals and teams have a clear outline of the work they do every day and how that contributes to QFD’s mission. We also need to ensure we identify and support personal development needs for people in their roles.

“We’re looking at the development people need, both initially and ongoing. Ultimately,

we’ll put in place a personal development approach to make sure conversations are happening with supervisors and managers to support people to be successful in their roles.”

The forums highlighted that QFD has a responsibility to make sure we’re looking to the future, not reacting to things as they occur.

“We have to make sure we’re trying to understand what things will impact us as a business and how we can prepare ourselves, our people and techniques to deal with that,” Mr Smith said.

“We have a complex operating environment and it will get increasingly challenging over time with climate change and other global trends. We have to be positioned to manage that because that’s what the community expects of us.”



Your thoughts on the forums

“What was your key takeaway?”

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“Change is challenging, but I took away some practical tips, new connections and clearer direction to support my team to move forward.”
 – **Regional Community Engagement Coordinators**

“[The forum] has restored my confidence in a positive transition to QFD and set aside any concerns I had.” – **First Officer, Rural Fire Brigade**

“It is important we continue to work together to implement the necessary changes and to look for ways to further optimise, embed and also provide constructive feedback.” – **Specialist and Technical Response Branch**

“The forum gave me insights into other sides of the business I never interact with and I gained a lot from it.” – **Corporate Governance Branch**



FAST FRIENDS AT GIRLS FIREFIGHTER CAMP

At the inaugural Girls Firefighter Experience Camp, a group of girls from years 9 and 10 spent a weekend exploring the life of a firefighter.

The girls participated in a range of activities led by firefighters at Whyte Island, with support from the Department of Education.

Paula Douglas, Principal Program Manager of the Frontline Women's Network, coordinated the event with the help of Peta Miller-Rose AFSM.

Paula said the girls came from a mix of metro and regional areas, including Ingham, Townsville, Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Brisbane.

"Some of them had done things in their community together but most didn't know each other," Paula said. "Very quickly, they came together through teamwork and built a connection, which was incredible to watch."

New-found friendships

Activities at the camp included demonstrations of road crash rescue, volunteer canines and Urban Search and Rescue.

"The girls saw three live fire demonstrations: a room burn, a flashover technique and a boiling liquid expanding vapour explosion (caused by a rupture in a container filled with boiling liquid, such as a gas tank)," Paula said.

"They got to apply hands-on skills in firefighting, scientific scenarios and vertical rescue, including a top-belay from our training tower."

Paula said there were some nerves over the weekend.

"On the first morning, the girls said they were really nervous. Just being in that environment and not knowing anyone was a

challenge, but they overcame that first encounter and connected with their facilitators and each other.

“There were some challenges with the heights as well. The girls were nervous to go over the rail, but once they started moving down it was easy. They took up the challenge really well.”

The girls stayed overnight in a flexible habitat, a large tent system that QFD members use as temporary accommodation in disaster areas.

“The Technical Rescue Unit set up the habitat for the girls on one of the training pads,” Paula said. “The girls embraced the experience. Camping together at night really helped boost their relationship with each other.”

Future firefighters

The girls gained many insights into what it takes to become a firefighter.

“On Saturday night we facilitated a panel discussion where the girls could talk to firefighters about their experiences and opportunities for the girls to choose this as a career,” Paula said.

“On the Sunday afternoon we had a careers trade display showing other parts of the organisation they might not have considered, such as FireCom and corporate services.

“We wanted to show them all the things a professional firefighter can be and all the other skills they can gain.”

At the end of the camp, the Talent Acquisition Unit gave the girls advice about how they could start their journey towards becoming a firefighter.

“The girls had a lot of questions about things like subject choices and the steps they could take. The camp gave them a great head-

start because they saw firsthand a lot of the activities we do every day.

“Some of the girls were very interested in becoming firefighters and for them the weekend cemented their goals. Others were a little less certain but were thinking of working in the emergency services or defence, so the camp helped them consider their options.

“The girls walked away from the camp with newly formed friendships and a sense of empowerment to be what you can see and do!”

Inspiration

Paula said the weekend was one of the highlights of her career.

“I loved coordinating this event, which empowered young girls to see what a career as a firefighter looked like, thanks to the amazing women and men of our organisation demonstrating our everyday roles.

“The girls’ energy, enthusiasm and eagerness to try everything was inspiring to us. To see them accomplish something new or walk away from a task with a sense of achievement gave us a sense of pride.

“I’m immensely proud of our QFD people for their professionalism and energy, which, combined with some very enthusiastic participants, contributed to a successful event for everyone involved.

“I’d like to acknowledge so many people in the background who were instrumental in planning, supporting and coordinating this event. This would not have been such a success without the involvement of many people from start to finish.”



HIGHEST HONOURS FOR QFD MEMBERS

Five Queensland Fire and Rescue members and two Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers were recognised in the 2024 King's Birthday Honours.

Dean Tucker AFSM Duty Manager of Operations

Dean has taken on many roles over his 28 years with QFD, including Station Officer, Regional Training Officer and Manager of Regional Training.

"To be nominated by your peers is incredibly humbling, but this award is all about my team," Dean said. "Without a team there is no leader."

Dean has helped manage operations during many events, including the 2011, 2017 and 2022 floods.

"As a Duty Manager of Operations, I maintain operational readiness and response," Dean said. "Going into those floods, it was my role to put together strike teams and resources to combat the additional workload."

"In 2011, working with stakeholders, we identified where the water gets cut off and pre-deployed crews on the other side of the Brisbane River, up into Lowood and Esk, which allowed us to rescue more people."

"We received more than 1000 calls in the first 24 hours and our swiftwater capability was overrun by tenfold."

"I worked with FireCom to identify all the Triple Zero (000) calls and decide where to send teams. We had to prioritise 25 or 30 incidents at a time."

During the 2019-20 bushfire season, Dean provided operational leadership to Regional Operations Centres, Incident Control Centres and fireground control points.

"That fire season was a once-in-a-career experience," he said. "I was sent to manage an incident with NSW Rural Fire Service in Lake George. I was Incident Controller of a job with 80 fire trucks, 10 helicopters and half-a-dozen sectors. Several houses were already lost, but we managed some great saves as well."

Dean was also Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team Leader for the Sumatra earthquake in 2009 as part of Operation Indo Assist.

"We were there for 10 days assisting the Indonesian Government. We had a 66-member team including firefighters, paramedics, police officers, doctors and engineers."

"We set up on a sporting field with USAR teams from Italy, Switzerland, United Emirates, the US and other countries."



"The earthquake struck a remote village and caused total devastation. High-rise buildings pancake-collapsed, roads opened up and swallowed buildings."

"The Indonesian Defence Force assigned us buildings to search and we used sonar equipment or canines to scan for survivors. We also set up an in-field portable hospital. We faced many challenges due to the difficulties of accessing such a remote area."

Scott Morgan AFSM Acting Area Commander

During his 43 years of service, Scott has developed QFD's high-rise firefighting capability, implementing training, advocating for community safety changes and helping review the operational response matrix.

"I was shocked but humbled when I found out my nomination had come through from the ranks," Scott said. "It's gratifying that people I've worked with over many years thought enough of what I'd done to nominate me."

Scott has been involved in many service improvements, including implementing the Coroner's recommendations from the fatal Southport Honda fire in 1994, the original Critical Incident Stress Debriefing program and high-rise firefighting training for South Eastern Region. He was also Chairman of the Surfers Paradise Fire and Rescue Station redevelopment committee.

He has mentored new and aspiring Station Officers and Senior Firefighters to ensure their preparedness for undertaking command and control at all incident types.

"Legacy is a big thing," he said. "In this job, experience is everything. Passing on experience to people who are coming up makes us continue to be strong."

Stationed on the Gold Coast for most of his career, Scott is committed to ensuring operational excellence in relation to high-rise buildings.

He developed operational initiatives such as the Queensland 'Code 20 High Rise Firefighting' procedure and the introduction of a concept high-rise-specific pumper to fight fires in high-rise towers. Scott also helped develop fire response plans for buildings above 70 levels such as Q1 and Soul.



“High-rise firefighting is core business in Gold Coast city,” Scott said. “We’re the busiest station in the state for structure fires because there are so many units and apartments.

“I worked with a couple of great station officers in the 80s when the building boom started and we had to develop procedures to tackle some of those high-rise buildings. Over the years it became my specialty.

“The biggest challenge is everything has to go up. You have to carry all your equipment with you. We’ve had advances in equipment and we’re looking at different fire pumps that can cope with the pressure you need to get water at height.

“High rises and medium rises are starting to pop up all over the state, so they’ll present a challenge in other areas as well.”

**Mark Crowe AFSM
Acting Inspector**

Mark joined QFD in 1996, moved to ACT Fire Brigade in 2000, then returned to Brisbane in 2009 as a Station Officer.

He is currently a leading USAR instructor and has deployed many times with the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), most recently to PNG (see page 4). Over the years his focus has been on developing logistics within DART.

“When we deploy, the equipment we carry is essential. The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) has established guidelines we must be able to achieve when we deploy internationally.

“For example, we must be self-sustaining for 10 days, live in the field, perform 24-hour operations, and be able to cut through 200 millimetres of reinforced concrete and 300 millimetres of timber.

“We need about 20 tonnes of equipment for a 75-person deployment, including food, water, operations and accommodation. We can deploy that within 10 hours of notification to anywhere in the world.

“I helped develop an additional deployable cache to bolster international capabilities, as well as provide a national response capability. If we deploy a DART team internationally, we must still maintain a deployable capability within Australia.”

In 2009 he deployed to the Solomon Islands for Tropical Cyclone Aila.

“The Solomons was a political hotspot at the time,” he said. “We had a small team of seven DART members, and we deployed with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to conduct a hazard assessment on an open-cut gold mine that had been flooded.

“With the mine site vacant, there were fears the chemicals and explosives left behind would affect the environment and local communities. We were requested to provide guidance on clean-up for the site, so we assessed what needed to be done.

“We worked out of Honiara for seven days, travelling to the mine each day and working with AFP forensics and bomb squad officers to assess shipping containers of chemicals impacted by the floodwaters.



“We conducted water quality testing of the tailing dams and local water sources to ensure there was no contamination to community water supplies. Through this work we tried to help the community restore normality up in the highlands.”

Mark also participates in swiftwater deployments each year, including Tropical Cyclone Jasper in 2023.



Medals of the Order of Australia

Congratulations to Numinbah Rural Fire Brigade First Officer Philip Thomson and Macleay Island Rural Fire Brigade member Kevin Hughes, who both received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

Philip has been an RFS member since 1975 and First Officer since 1985, all while working as a farmer and sawmill operator and volunteering in various other organisations for the past 40 years.



Philip Thomson.

Kevin is a former QFR firefighter, starting his firefighting career in Brisbane in 1985. He also volunteered with the State Emergency Service over the years. He joined the Macleay Island brigade last year.

Former RFSQ volunteer William Faint, who left the Wolfgang Rural Fire Brigade in 2018, also received the OAM for his services to the community of Clermont.



Kevin Hughes.



“The cyclone didn’t cause major damage in Cairns, but the rain kept coming and we rescued and evacuated hundreds of people from the floodwaters in Cairns and surrounding areas,” he said.

“I was coordinating operations, but during the height of the flooding we needed extra numbers, so I ended up in a boat crew evacuating residents from Holloways Beach and ferrying them to a pickup point on the roof of another house.

“They climbed out of our boat and up a ladder on our side, walked across the roof and got into a State Emergency Service floodboat that carried them to dry land. That’s the way we work in that first 24 hours – we just had to keep going and do whatever needed to be done.”

A highlight for Mark was participating in the Asia Pacific Earthquake Response Exercise in Indonesia.

“It was an awesome experience,” he said. “Teams from around the world completed a tabletop exercise on how a country would handle an earthquake with international assistance.

“We conducted the same exercise in Brisbane last year to judge how we’d accept DART teams coming into our country during a disaster. We learnt some valuable lessons – for example, some teams use fresh meat as part of their rations, which would cause an issue with our customs and quarantine.”

**Peter Bradow AFSM
Superintendent**

Peter started his career as an auxiliary firefighter in Gympie in 1996 and became a permanent firefighter in Toowoomba in 1998. His engineering, IT skills and strategic thinking allowed him to progress through various roles, from Station Officer to Director Regional Development.



As Manager Operations Business Management, he implemented many business tracking data analysis tools in South Western Region and played a pivotal role in rolling out the Operations Management System.

Since September 2022, Peter has assumed the role of Director Regional Development, delivering projects such as new station builds, major capital purchases, emergency response vehicle replacement schedules, communications and fleet management.

“I was extremely humbled and honoured to be nominated by my peers,” Peter said. “My career has allowed me to be part of great team throughout Queensland.”

Peter has made significant contributions to the Australasian Road Rescue Organisation (ARRO), where he currently serves as a Senior Road Crash Rescue Instructor.

His involvement with ARRO dates back to the 1990s when he joined as a volunteer with the Toowoomba Road Crash Rescue Team.

“ARRO gave me opportunities to demonstrate my skills, receive feedback and adjust my techniques in future challenges,” Peter said.

In 2003, he represented Australia in a six-person team at the World Rescue Challenge in Canada.

“When we were setting up our equipment, we had to scrape ice off our stabilisation cribbing. Then it started to hail on us, creating a slippery workspace that added to the realism. We placed second out of 35 teams from around the world.

“After retiring from challenges, I joined ARRO as the education and research officer. I provided a learning environment at challenges where teams from Australasia could learn and enhance their skills. I saw this as indirectly giving back to communities by improving rescuers’ skills.”

Peter has undertaken many deployments during disasters in Queensland and interstate, including significant fires in South Western Region and Tropical Cyclone Debbie in Central Queensland.

“As a manager the reward is finding ways to improve how we conduct road crash rescue through technological improvements, as well as passing on my knowledge.”

**Stephen Diete AFSM
Station Officer**

Steve was recognised for outstanding service to the Queensland community. He has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to frontline firefighting along with exemplary leadership as a Station Officer, reflecting steadfast dedication to protecting and serving others.



Steve’s distinguished 35 years of service includes response to international, interstate and intrastate swiftwater and USAR disasters and large-scale wildfires.

Steve first qualified as a rescue technician in 1998 and five years later became one of the founding Senior Swiftwater Floodwater Rescue (SFR) instructors. During his 20 years of technical rescue service Steve has trained in excess of 400 Swiftwater Rescue technicians/operators.

Steve is committed to building Australia’s globally recognised SFR capability, helping develop training materials, doctrine, techniques and equipment. His work has increased safety for firefighters and improved response capability to SFR incidents, resulting in lives being saved.

In 2011, after the south-east Queensland flooding disaster, Steve was seconded to the Flood Commission of Inquiry (COI) Implementation Team. During this tenure Steve took the lead on Curriculum Advisory Group projects, including a suitable motorised rescue craft. Most recently the SFR instructor cadre has developed a Motorised Swiftwater Rescue Craft (MSRC) capability available across all QFD regions.

Addressing a key initiative and COI recommendation, Steve assisted in the development of a helicopter awareness and winch training program in collaboration with Queensland Government Air.

Stephen gratefully accepts this award on behalf of all Level 1 responders and Level 2 SFR technicians/operators, personnel and staff seconded and assigned to the 2010-11 Queensland Flood COI, and most importantly his peers, notably past and present state SFR and MSRC lead instructors.

READY TO TAKE ON BUSHFIRES

With bushfire season upon us, Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteer members and staff are working hard to protect Queensland communities.

The 2024 Queensland bushfire season officially commenced on 1 August. There has been a lot of work already completed to reduce bushfire risks and prepare brigades for the season.

Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) Assistant Chief Officer James Haig said the 2023-24 bushfire season was very intense but ended with large amounts of rain that led to flooding in late 2023 and early 2024. Area fire management groups met and developed risk-based mitigation plans.

“Unfortunately that wet weather, which helped end the season and the bushfire risk at the time, also made it hard to conduct prescribed burns, particularly along the coast and the southern and northern areas,” James said.

“Central Queensland fared a bit better early on, but in coastal areas the rain frustrated some of the early burning by our key partners.

“We’ve been working really hard with our partners ever since then to identify opportunities, and our brigades and staff have delivered key burns when the weather allows.

“In June, for example, a sudden cold snap with drying winds spread almost all the way up to the Cape, providing the opportunity to get some more burns in. Brigades and our partners are still doing that where the local conditions are right, particularly in coastal areas, where many people may have seen plumes of smoke in early August.”

By the end of July more than 300 hazard reduction burns were completed by RFSQ brigades, land managers, state government agencies and private landowners. There has also been extensive community engagement.

“After last year’s season we held a debrief with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to identify things that worked well and some challenges,” James said.

“Following this, we recently held a state-wide briefing with over 40 people from both organisations where we discussed lessons from the debrief and applied them to the

coming season to ensure we’re all on the same page and maintain interoperability even though QFD’s regional boundaries have changed.

“We wanted to make sure people understand how to work together, what the guidelines are and who they can call. Just because we’ve changed our boundaries, doesn’t mean the partnerships are gone, and it’s critical for us to maintain those relationships.

“We briefed the State Bushfire Committee on the outlook for the season and updated them on some of the changes in QFD that are critical for them to know.

“The team from State Operations have also done a lot of Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) training at all levels, from Incident Controller to areas such as logistics, operations, public information and so on. This training will further enhance our incident management capability for any major fires, and we’ve also completed several fire investigative training courses.”

QFD ran a new bushfire advertising campaign this year, using the slogan ‘Respect it or regret it’ to encourage Queenslanders to make a bushfire survival plan, monitor fire danger ratings and be alert to bushfire warnings. The ads are on free-to-air and catch-up TV, radio, billboards, print and social media.

The same cold weather that helped crews complete prescribed burns also led to grass fuels drying out and becoming cured in many areas.

“We need to be aware of the risk of grass fires, particularly early in the season,” James said. “We need our people and partners to be ready. Brigades have conducted exercises in many areas to make sure we’re prepared.

“Now that we’re actually in the bushfire season, QFD’s response is guided by our Commissioner’s Intent and is called Operation Lomandra. The Lomandra is a hardy native plant used by First Nations peoples for many purposes including basket making and cooking. It is well adapted to fire, relatively slow to catch alight and usually recovers well from being burnt.

“The Commissioner’s Intent highlights that, regardless of all of the important changes happening within QFD, we still maintain our core focus, which is to protect Queensland communities from the impacts of bushfire.

“There’s a lot happening and QFD has gone through a lot of change, but our core business of protecting Queensland communities during bushfire season remains at the heart of everything we do.”



RFSQ volunteers conducted a multi-agency hazard reduction burn in Cooktown.



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FROM FIRECOM TO FIRE SCENE

FireCom Officer Bridget Townsley spent a day with the State Fire Investigation Unit to see how they investigate structure fires.

Bridget said she had an interest in fire investigation when she was growing up because her dad, Inspector Geoff Townsley, was a fire investigator for many years and once led the Fire Investigation Unit (FIU).

“Growing up listening to his many stories inspired me to apply for a role as a FireCom Officer,” Bridget said.

“Although I didn’t aspire to work directly on the frontline as a firefighter, I still wanted to follow in his footsteps by joining the Queensland Fire Department. I am proud of his dedication and still, almost 35 years on, he loves what he does, especially now we can share our experiences together.

“Having the opportunity to attend a house fire was eye-opening as I was able to experience firsthand the type of scenes he has experienced.”

The fire was in an abandoned property where squatters appeared to have been living.

“Strewn mattresses, personal possessions and drug paraphernalia were located downstairs,” Bridget said.

“The origin of the fire was identified in the upper level. There was extensive damage throughout but by reading fire patterns, using available information and eliminating certain ignition sources, investigators were able to determine the fire was intentionally lit and categorised the fire as ‘incendiary’.

“The outside of the property showed clear signs of fire, with identifiable patterns on the walls and significant damage to windows due to the extreme heat.

“As a FireCom Officer, I often take the first Triple Zero (000) call for incidents including structure fires. It was surreal to be on scene witnessing fireground operations and inter-agency interactions.

“Often in FireCom we don’t get the opportunity to entirely grasp the incident.

By going onsite I could physically visualise what we only hear through calls and radio transmissions. This made it a very memorable experience.”

Bridget performed an internal and external perimeter walk of the structure with FIU.

“They taught me about the patterns fire creates and how these can assist in determining the origin. I observed the extent of damage and evidence that can lead to identifying the cause.

“It was eye-opening to see the number of moving parts on scene, with multiple agencies attending (FIU, firefighters, police, paramedics and detectives) and their responsibilities.

“Spending time with the fire investigators helped me build rapport to create a stronger working relationship between FIU and FireCom.”



Bridget with her father Geoff at her graduation.



Bridget on site with a Fire Investigation Unit officer analysing fire patterns.

BLAK, LOUD AND PROUD

This year's NAIDOC Week theme – *Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud* – had particular relevance for the Queensland Fire Department.

Fire symbolises connection to Country, each other and the rich tapestry of traditions that define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Queensland Fire Department (QFD) hosted several initiatives in and around NAIDOC Week to strengthen our connection with First Nations peoples and celebrate the stories, traditions and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

First Nations Fire Training

QFD is delivering 15 traditional burning workshops across the state as part of the First Nations Fire Training Program supported by NAB Foundation.

Workshops have so far been held at Jacaranda Ivory's Rock, South Burnett, Longreach, Murgon Weir and Cairns (Yarrabah and Machans Beach).

Emily McInnes, First Nations Bushfire Mitigation Officer for South Eastern Region, organised the workshop at Jacaranda Ivory's Rock.

"Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) volunteer members, staff and fire wardens, along with representatives from Lockyer Valley Regional Council and Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium were a part of the day," Emily said.



RFSQ members joined partners at the Cairns workshop.



Participants at the Murgon Weir workshop.

"Two local Uncles from Yuggera Dancers gave us a Welcome to Country, and then we held a group discussion.

"Robbie Williams, a ranger from Fire Lore, an Indigenous-owned and operated cultural land management consultancy, gave a presentation. He was amazing to work with and I absolutely appreciate Fire Lore working together with RFSQ and building the relationship with us. It was an awesome opportunity for everyone to listen to Robbie's stories and background.

"We finished the day with a live fire tabletop display because some of the participants didn't have a fire background.

"The participants took away a different perspective on burning land. Every participant thanked me for inviting them and seeing



Participants at the South Burnett workshop.



The Jacaranda workshop included a live fire tabletop display.



The Cairns workshop was well attended by RFSQ and partners.

so many smiling faces at the end of the workshop was my highlight.”

RFSQ personnel and partner agencies at the Murgon Weir workshop had the chance to learn from the Bunya People’s Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal organisation focused on healing Country and expanding knowledge of the environment from an Indigenous perspective.

One participant said, “I’ve gained a greater understanding of Indigenous connection to Country and the importance of burning at the right time to suit land types, grasses, trees, soil and animals. I’m thankful for the opportunity to expand my thinking.”

RFSQ coordinated the Yarrabah workshop in collaboration with Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji People PBC (GMYPPBC).

Attendees included RFSQ staff and volunteers, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers, Wet Tropics Management Authority, Cairns Regional Council, Dulabed and Malanburra Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation Jawajawa rangers and National Australia Bank staff.

The GMYPPBC rangers talked through the importance of traditional fire practices and opportunities to manage Country, including joining the Yarrabah Rural Fire Brigade and working with other key stakeholders. The rangers then took attendees on Country to show them the value of burning at the right time.

For the Machans Beach workshop, RFSQ worked with Yirrganydji Gurabana Aboriginal Corporation (YGAC). Attendees included RFSQ staff, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and Wet Tropics Management Authority. Walking through Country, the YGAC traditional owners identified plant species and shared knowledge on the right time to burn and the importance of cultural burning for the land and for cultural continuity.

First Nations polo shirts

The Uniforms and Logistics team are running a trial of First Nations polo shirts until 30 October.

Selected participants across QFD are wearing the shirts for culturally significant events, including NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week, recruitment activities and year-round when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The polo shirt showcases QFD’s ‘Together’ artwork and honours the rich heritage and ongoing journey of First Nations peoples and the diversity of our workforce.

After the trial period, participants will provide feedback on the shirt’s comfort, fit and wearability and how it has been received by colleagues and the community.



Cherbourg Fire and Rescue sported their brand-new polo shirts during their interactions with the community this NAIDOC Week. It was smiles all around as kids and adults alike found out what it was like to be a firefighter, spraying the hose, learning how to keep themselves safe and most importantly practising get down low and go, go go.

A visit to Coen

As the Queensland Government Champion for the First Nations community of Coen, Commissioner Stephen Smith travelled to Far North Queensland to announce funding for the Coen Arts Precinct and meet with the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation.

Coen is a tight-knit community and the new precinct will be valuable for locals as well as providing a tourist attraction for people visiting the Cape.

Mr Smith visited the Coen Women’s Support Centre to review plans for new housing and meet with the passionate people who work every day to strengthen their community.



First Nations Fire Training feedback

“I would love to engage with members of Bunya People’s Aboriginal Corporation (BPAC) planning future burns on my property.”

“This has reinforced my knowledge of burning at the correct time with the correct lighting pattern for the country being burnt.”

“I can take these processes back to our local community and explain the advantages of long-term benefits.”

“The differences of cool burning versus the hot hazard reduction burns that we do as a brigade was explained really well, and perhaps in the future can be utilised in our burns.”

“BPAC put fire into landscape in harmony with the plant observations, weather, wind and recent rains, taking great care to differentiate between the needs of different types of vegetation zones. I will put into practice the BPAC methods on my own 300-acre property using guidance from visits they offered.”

“Passing on knowledge and practising First Nations traditional burning methods is essential.”



UPS Systems & why they need to be maintained

An uninterruptible power supply (UPS) is a type of continual power system that provides automated backup electric power to a load when the input power source or mains power fails. A UPS differs from a traditional auxiliary/emergency power system or standby generator in that it will provide near-instantaneous protection from input power interruptions by switching to energy stored in battery packs.

The on-battery run-times of most UPS's are relatively short (only a few minutes) but sufficient to "buy time" for initiating a standby generator or properly shutting down the protected equipment.

Typically, UPS's use VRLA (valve regulated lead acid) batteries which have a design life of 3-5 years, these batteries over time will lose capacity reducing the runtime of the UPS. If not maintained, these batteries can overheat, swell, leak acid and eventually become a fire hazard.

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FIRE INVESTIGATORS TAKE TO THE BUSH

Ten fire investigators from across Queensland converged in Grafton to participate in a week-long bushfire investigation course hosted by the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Participants observed hazard reduction burns to reinforce their knowledge of fire behaviour in the landscape. They spent many hours in the ‘black stuff’ identifying fire patterns and flagging and documenting fire scenes.

One of the participants was Station Officer Tom Simpson from Caboolture Fire and Rescue Station, who completed two-and-a-half years of study in 2022 to become qualified as a fire investigator. He spends about three months each year in the State Fire Investigation Unit at Hamilton.

“We observed how topography, weather, wind and macro features such as large trees and rock outcrops play a significant role in fire development and path of travel,” Tom said.

When investigating a structure fire, investigators generally move from the area of least to most fire damage, but with bushfires it’s the other way around.

“Many of the indicators are also at the micro level, even though you’re working at such a large scale,” Tom said.

“Unlike a structure fire, a bushfire can be very large, protracted and cover expansive and varying terrain. In essence, everything in a bushfire investigation is the opposite to a structure fire, and this takes some getting used to.

“To work towards the area of least damage, you have to interpret fire patterns on macro (large) indicators, such as the angle of char on tree trunks or fenceposts.

“As a fire moves away from its point of origin, the flame front leans in the direction of travel. These observations can point back to where the fire has come from.

“We use coloured flags to identify these indicators. A red flag signals an advancing fire, green a lateral (sideways) moving fire, and blue a backing fire. The flags allow

the investigator to step back, reflect and identify the general area of origin.

“The investigator then identifies the specific area of origin by observing micro indicators such as the angle of char on grasses, cupping on twig ends, and sooting on object faces closest to the fire,” Tom said. “Ultimately, the investigator can determine a point of ignition and ignition source(s).”

Toward the end of the week, participants put their newfound skills to the test when a bushfire started nearby, spanning about 20 acres of grazing pasture.

“Local RFS crews extinguished the fire and two days later we attended the scene,” Tom said. “The fire highlighted the practicalities of getting around the fire-affected area and obtaining solid intelligence from all information sources to narrow the investigation area.

“It also highlighted the benefits of technologies such as drones. We developed and tested several hypotheses and through

a process of deductive reasoning and elimination, determined the origin and cause.

“The property owner had ignited the fire in grass along the roadway for weed control but left it unattended and it escaped into their adjoining pasture.”

The success of the training was thanks to the support of the NSW RFS fire investigation team led by Mark Fullagar. Fire investigators Peter Arthur and Jason Booth helped Mark facilitate the course.

The Clarence Valley District RFS staff and volunteers based out of the Ulmarra Fire Control Centre provided the training environment and catering services. The hazard mitigation team planned and conducted hazard reduction burns for the participants.

Such partnerships will continue to strengthen our capabilities in risk management and bolster community resilience against bushfire threats.



Rural Fire Service Week: Stories of community

The recipients of this year's Rural Fire Service Week Awards demonstrate the caring spirit that makes rural fire brigades an invaluable part of their community.

Rural Fire Service (RFS) Week is the annual celebration of our volunteers who attend regular training, engage with the community and respond to incidents to enhance community resilience, preparedness and response.

Brendan Gold from Guanaba Rural Fire Brigade was named State Volunteer of the Year for his special contributions to the service. He joined Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) in 2003, became First Officer in 2019 and spends many hours each week at training sessions, area meetings, hazard reduction burns and community events.

"I couldn't believe it when I heard about the award," Brendan (pictured right) said. "My mum and brother were in Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade. I wasn't old enough, but I made friends with the other members' kids and now we're all members."

During the 2023 Christmas Day storm on the Gold Coast, which damaged about 800 homes and led to nine people losing their lives, he was out leading crews to get the community back on its feet, giving up two weeks of annual leave.

"There was damage from Tamborine Mountain right through the valley down to Helensvale," Brendan said.

"It was hard to keep it together and help people as much as we could after everything they'd gone through. People who'd lost everything were still out helping their neighbours.

"I opened up our fire station because Guanaba had no power or phone reception and everyone was going stir crazy. A friend of mine donated a generator and we asked an electrician to wire it up so we could offer people power, washing machines, showers and refrigeration.

"When you see what you've achieved and you walk through the streets and people thank you, it's an unreal feeling." - Brendan Gold

"We were there every day cooking barbeques and the whole community came together. The members of my brigade put in the time and hard work to make it happen. One of my members, Jenny, was there every day getting tea and coffee going.

"We kept the station open for three weeks. People were starting to come to terms with what had happened and then a big rainstorm came through on New Years Eve and flooded everything. It felt like all our hard work had been washed away and we had to start again.

"Our station was flooded but we waited at the bridge for the water to go down and we cleaned the station up and got it open

in three hours for the community to come back in again. We got the barbeque going and everyone was back down having showers and doing their washing.

"I was out there every day from Boxing Day to the second week of the new year. I've got to give it to my employer for allowing me to do that. They paid me while I was there, no problem. Without employers like that, you can't do it."

Brendan has been on many deployments across the state, but one of the most memorable was to Tara, Wieambilla and Bennett in 2023, just three months after the shootings at Wieambilla.

In December 2022, three residents of the town shot and killed their neighbour Alan Dare and police constables Matthew Arnold and Rachel McCrow in a religiously motivated terrorist attack. The attack led to a six-hour siege where police fatally shot all three perpetrators.



“It was very raw out there still,” Brendan said. “All the firefighters with me had a feeling of fear. Everyone was looking over their shoulder. A lot of rumours were getting thrown around.

“I was running a strike team out the front of Bennett Fire and Rescue Station when a car pulled up. The driver called me over and it was Kerry Dare, Alan Dare’s wife, and I looked at her and she looked at me and she asked what was happening with the fires.

“I said, ‘Oh you’re Kerry Dare’ and she hopped out of the car and I just hugged her and she stood there hugging me and we both just cried.

“On our way home from the deployment I got a phone call from the operations officer at Dalby Fire and Rescue Station asking if we could return.

“I went back with one crew, a truck and a tanker into what was absolute hell. I’ve never seen fire like I saw it that day. It jumped from road to road with massive flames above the treeline. There was no stopping it. It was just a matter of what the fire left behind.

“We were still sending crews out there for two or three weeks after that, and then eight or nine months later we were back out there again.

“I really enjoy the sense of helping someone. When you see what you’ve achieved and you walk through the streets and people thank you, it’s an unreal feeling.”

Looking after people

Ben Pearson (pictured right) from Gilston Advancetown Rural Fire Brigade was named State Young Volunteer of the Year for his outstanding compassion, support, commitment and diligence.

He uses his advanced chainsaw skills to help the community, spends much of his spare time on maintenance for the brigade, and trains and mentors other members. Ben also uses his peer support skills to check in on people’s wellbeing.

“It was good to know we looked after people the best we could as a crew.” - Ben Pearson

“I’ve been with RFSQ for about five years now,” Ben said. “My mate was in the brigade and told me I should come down to a training session. I haven’t looked back since.”

Ben deployed eight times during the 2022-23 fire season and attended some of the most dangerous fires, including Stanthorpe, Tara, Miles and Moonee. He was a sector commander and also took on the role of crew leader many times.

“It was difficult to see how dangerous these fires were and to see people lose everything,” Ben said. “However, I met a lot of good people and developed some long-lasting relationships.

“The biggest challenge was trying to rest after coming back from the fires, only to go out to another fire. It was a six- to 10-hour drive to each fire and then we worked for five days straight. It was a constant flight or fight response.”

Ben’s skills shone through again during the 2023 Christmas storm. He helps run a tree cutting service and was out all night as a community member clearing up trees for his neighbours.

He responded with his brigade the next morning and continued heading out with the crews all week. Every day after the trucks got back, he cleaned and sharpened chainsaws for the tired crews.

“There was destruction everywhere,” Ben said. “We’ve never had storm damage like that on the Gold Coast.

“A street in our area was completely cut off so we helped organise food and water for people and they were super appreciative. It was good to know we looked after people the best we could as a crew.

“We’re a pretty small brigade with 10 or 12 active members, but everyone’s super close with everyone – it’s run like a family.

“I enjoy working with my mates and feeling like I’m giving back to the brigade and the community. One of the best times is getting back from a fire or hazard reduction burn and having a feed at the pub with your mates and chatting about everything from the day.”



Regional winners

Bailey Smith, Central Region Young Volunteer of the Year

Lachlan Steele, South Eastern Region Young Volunteer of the Year

Claire Case, South Western Region Young Volunteer of the Year

Stuart Yendle, Northern Region Volunteer of the Year

Nigel Kemp, South Eastern Region Volunteer of the Year

Christina Myers, South Western Region Volunteer of the Year

A special posthumous award was given to Raymond Murphy as Central Region Volunteer of the Year





Keeping our buildings safe

The Community Safety and Resilience Branch is a hard-working but little-understood team that safeguards Queensland buildings from the risk of fire and other hazards.

Manager of Compliance and Prosecutions Kelvin Mercer said Queensland Fire Department (QFD) held a legislative role to manage building fire safety across Queensland through referral agency advice and safety assessment inspections.

“About 40 Building Approval Officers (BAOs) and 40 Safety Assessment Officers (SAOs) regulate every building in Queensland,” Kelvin said.

“The BAOs and SAOs work out of four Regional Community Safety Operations Offices. The Community Safety and Resilience Branch (CSRB) provides the BAOs and SAOs with direction to ensure the services they deliver across Queensland are consistent and effective.

“BAOs play a crucial role in mitigating fire safety risks in all developments, from units to large buildings, prior to construction. They provide essential checks and balances against legislated requirements and standards to ensure the utmost safety for communities and firefighters.

“BAOs must possess extensive operational expertise to comprehend how fire affects the built environment and how operational crews will interact with fire safety installations.”

Once BAOs become thoroughly familiar with the National Construction Code, they can apply to become a BAO2, which requires 12 months of tertiary education and allows them to interact with fire engineers who design or modify safety solutions in buildings.

“SAOs inspect buildings post-construction to verify compliance with legislative requirements. They ensure fire safety installations are maintained and operate as expected in a fire event.”

Within the building industry, QFD representatives are often the only independent party not paid by a developer, so they are essential to protecting occupant and firefighter safety. Integrity is paramount.

“Through building approvals and safety assessments, our branch influences the future built environment to keep occupants safe and ensure firefighters can access fire safety installations,” Kelvin said.

The letter of the law

The Compliance and Prosecutions Unit manages the enforcement aspect of building safety.

“Our tasks include collaborating with regional SAOs, training new SAOs, and reviewing and approving all enforcement actions issued to building owners and occupiers,” Kelvin said.

“We offer guidance to owners and occupiers about their legislative obligations and, as the central point of contact for domestic smoke alarms compliance in Queensland, ensure adherence to regulations.”

QFD is unique because operational firefighters advise on legislation – in other states and territories, it’s building certifiers.

“The Compliance and Prosecutions Unit maintains a close partnership with the QFD Legal Services team to address legal matters related to building fire safety. As a result, the team frequently represents QFD in court proceedings to resolve compliance issues.”

Managing the risks of cladding

In response to the Grenfell Tower fire that caused 72 deaths in 2017, CSRB’s Complex Infrastructure Section (CIS) enacts a whole-of-government cladding management agenda.

“CIS oversees the 2615 buildings with cladding in Queensland, implementing strategies to mitigate the risks to community and firefighters in response scenarios,” Kelvin said.

“They collaborate with our community safety regional partners to gather information on each building and establish the degree of risk and ensure appropriate measures are in place.”

CIS’s remit recently expanded to include overseeing building approval submissions that pose a high risk to QFD, addressing other complex building fire issues such as battery storage facilities, and reviewing and uplifting statewide policies and procedures.

CSRB’s work can be arduous and time-consuming, with officers sifting through large amounts of data from the National Construction Code to Australian Standards.

Major project work

CSRB also participates in national and state industry forums to develop building fire safety strategies and provides subject matter expertise in fire behaviour and fire brigade intervention requirements.

“CSRB’s priorities moving forward involve emerging technologies like lithium and hydrogen, the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games, as well as continuing to represent QFD in tribunal hearings, government building committees, industrial forums and building regulatory reform,” Kelvin said.

“Our Major Developments Unit is also working with Cross River Rail’s project managers, engineers and certifiers to provide advice on how QFD will respond to incidents within the tunnel.

“Cross River Rail incorporates significant feats of engineering and design, so everyone involved with the project takes a forward-thinking approach within very restricted timeframes.

“It takes a diverse range of skills and abilities to ensure the smooth functioning of CSRB, and we deeply appreciate all who contribute.”



Who we are

- **Building Fire Safety Unit** – BAOs assess and inspect building works that contain special fire services, hydrants, sprinklers, detection systems and so on. This not only fulfills a regulatory requirement, but ensures buildings are safe for the community to work and live in.
- **Fire Alarm Management Unit** – responsible for fire alarm connections, disconnections and commissioning, as well as updating emergency contacts into ESCAD. The unit also provides Alarm Signalling Equipment technical support, as well as advice to help occupiers reduce alarm activations.
- **Safety Assessment Unit** – provides guidance and support to regional SAOs by interpreting legislation in relation to building fire safety, training new SAOs and ensuring consistent advice is given. The unit facilitates two major training courses each year and arranges training for fire officers from Papua New Guinea.
- **Complex Infrastructure Section** – oversees buildings with flammable cladding and implements strategies to mitigate the risks.
- **Compliance and Prosecution Unit** – collaborates with regional SAOs, reviews and approves all enforcement actions, offers guidance to owners and occupiers about legislative obligations, and represents QFD in court proceedings.
- **Fire Engineering Section** – consists of two business units. The Fire Engineering Unit deals with policy, strategy, engagement, knowledge and research. The Major Developments Unit works on road, bus, rail tunnels and major infrastructure, including the Cross River Rail, Brisbane Metro and Inland Rail.



CSRB statistics

- **2532**
building assessments and inspections completed by BAOs since July 2023
- **8000**
buildings in Queensland overseen by the Fire Alarm Management Unit
- **19,000**
unwanted alarm activation responses by QFD each year
- **2615**
buildings with cladding in Queensland
- **862**
building approval activities completed by the Complex Infrastructure Unit since 2019
- **11,000**
enquiries received since the smoke alarms legislation was introduced in 2017





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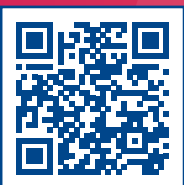
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Smoke alarms in caravans and motorhomes

Queensland has introduced new legislation mandating photoelectric smoke alarms in caravans and motorhomes.

From 1 July 2024, all caravans or motorhomes whose Queensland registration is commencing or being transferred must have a photoelectric smoke alarm installed on the ceiling.

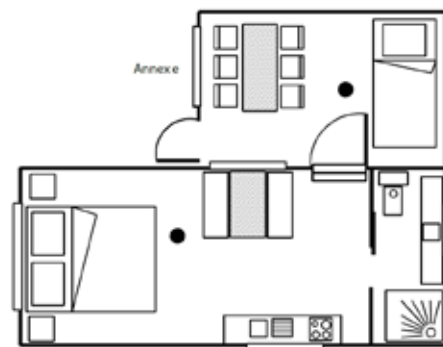
All other Queensland registered caravans and motorhomes must have a photoelectric smoke alarm installed from 1 January 2027.

Queensland Fire Department (QFD) recommends placing at least one smoke alarm inside the van where the bed is, and one in the annexe if you sleep there.

The legislation does not apply to mobile homes. However, QFD recommends mobile homes and unregistered caravans and motorhomes have a working smoke alarm installed to give early warning of fire.

The smoke alarms must comply with Australian Standard 3786-2014 and be powered by a 10-year non-removable battery.

Don't wait until it's too late. Upgrade your smoke alarms today. Find out more at fire.qld.gov.au/safety-education/travelling-in-queensland



● Suitable smoke alarm location

FIGHTING THE CANADA WILDFIRES

QFR and RFSQ personnel have deployed to Canada as devastating wildfires burn across the country.

Coordinated by the AFAC National Resource Sharing Centre, the first deployment of 25 firefighters were highly trained and well-equipped for the tough conditions in Canada, where they joined firefighters from other states and New Zealand.

For 40 days, the team assisted with incident management, fire behaviour analysis, operation support and aerial operations, providing much-needed relief to local crews.

A further two deployments to Canada, with 42 additional personnel, took place in late July and early August to continue supporting firefighting efforts.

Thank you to everyone who put their hand up to assist, particularly the RFSQ volunteer members, many of whom left their paid jobs.

A full story about the Canada deployments will be featured in the next edition of *Response*.





Crews battle storage unit fire overnight

When a massive fire engulfed a storage facility in Kingston, crews faced many challenges as they tried to bring it under control.

Queensland Fire and Rescue crews arrived just before 11pm and heavy smoke was emanating from several rooms of the L-shaped building. They tried to contain the fire to the fire compartment where it started burning, but the construction of the building hindered them.

Inspector Chris Griffin, the senior officer on call, said the building was about 100 metres long and 20 metres wide with a concrete and steel roof.

“The building was constructed with concrete ‘tilt-slab’ walls,” Chris said. “It had three fire compartments with many storage units in each. The compartments were separated by fire walls and doors, but the storage units shared a common roof space, allowing the fire to spread quickly.

“The fire walls could contain the fire for several hours with the assistance of firefighters, but eventually the fire breached the first wall and our crews had to leave the building because the structural integrity was compromised.

“They changed from offensive attack inside the building to defensive attack outside with support from aerial appliances, concentrating on holding the fire in the first compartment.”

By 11.40pm, Queensland Police Service (QPS) had enacted a PSPA and evacuated all nearby homes, setting up an evacuation centre for about 30 residents. Surrounding roads were closed.

By 1.35am, the fire had breached the second fire wall and there were fears the whole building would be lost if it breached the final wall.

“The heat energy emitting from the structure was intense due to the fuel load,” Chris said. “Even with the large amount of water we applied, the water runoff was boiling as it went down the roadway. We had to consider the environmental impact of the water running off into a local creek.

“There was also a service station next door and part of it was connected to the tilt-slab design of the storage facility. Crews immediately evacuated the service station

and isolated the fuel pumps, but they didn’t know what would happen if the facility’s wall collapsed on top of it.”

Firefighters finally got the fire under control at about 5.45am and saved the third compartment. In total, 150 lockers were destroyed and 107 were saved.

“Several agencies provided great support onsite, including QPS, Queensland Ambulance Service, Energex and Logan City Council,” Chris said. “We also liaised over the phone with the Logan Local Disaster Management Group and the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation.

“I’d like to call out the professionalism, courage and hard work of the firefighters on scene. Some of them were there from the beginning and kept working the whole night.

“With all their hard work they were able to save one third of the building, which contains the valuable property of many people in the community. I am incredibly proud of them and I was very thankful to have them under my command.”



A PATH FORWARD FOR FIRST NATIONS

Kade Brindell joined the Queensland Fire Department in November 2023 as the Director of the new First Nations Partnerships and Strategy Branch.

A descendant of the Dunghutti Nation from the mid-north coast of NSW, Kade moved to Queensland when he was six and has lived most of his life in Brisbane.

Joining the Queensland Government in 2002 through a graduate program, he worked his way up from admin officer to Director of Engagement and Partnerships at the Department of Housing. His most recent role was as the Acting Executive Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing, Housing and Homelessness Services.

“I’ve worked with First Nations communities throughout Queensland for about 20 years,” Kade said.

“I’ve held several roles, from community engagement through to securing and negotiating with federal and other government departments for First Nations focused programs and services.

“I’ve worked with First Nations councils and housing organisations around repairs and maintenance, new housing, land development and local employment outcomes.

“It was rewarding to see positive outcomes for people’s health and living, and to help reduce overcrowding, which is a big challenge.”

Kade is excited by the opportunity to lead the new First Nations Partnerships and Strategy Branch.

“My key piece of work is to develop and implement a program to align QFD with federal and state Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and priorities,” he said.

“This will include developing a First Nations framework for Queensland Fire Department (QFD), to guide how QFD works with First Nations peoples and communities moving forward.

“Visiting regional areas of QFD to understand our current engagement and partnerships with First Nations communities and Traditional Owners is high on my radar. I want to understand what’s working well and where there are opportunities to improve.

“Another priority for the Queensland Government is the Path to Treaty work with the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry starting from 1 July 2024. I’m on several Queensland Government working groups to guide and support QFD’s preparation for the Inquiry.”

QFD has commitments under the Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan and other First Nations reform activities that require action and support from all areas of QFD.

“The First Nations Strategy and Partnerships Branch is there to support QFD on this journey of acknowledging the First Nations

peoples of Queensland and ensuring our department is reflective of the communities we serve,” Kade said.

“There are some good First Nations initiatives and activities already happening across QFD, but they’re not well known and shared across the entire department. There may be opportunities to better coordinate and highlight the outcomes from these activities.

“Ultimately it would be fantastic if we could involve Traditional Owners in decision-making in QFD’s planning, preparation and response, especially considering First Nations communities’ connection to Country and the role they play in protecting Country.

“People at QFD are passionate about serving others and making the community better. That’s the nature of this department and for me that’s refreshing and aligns with First Nations cultural and community values.

“A lot of people have offered their support towards me and the work we need to do to improve First Nations outcomes.”





+ BUSHFIRE INVESTIGATION

NT Fire and Rescue Service members joined QFD members for bushfire investigation training. Their visit coincided with parts of Queensland experiencing a serious cold snap with ‘feels like’ temperatures well below zero. Crews spent time in the field investigating several sites and honing their skills.

+ EXERCISE REFORMO

More than 100 RFSQ members attended Exercise Reformo at Millmerran, where they worked through five scenarios to enhance their knowledge.

The scenarios included air-to-ground strategies, heavy plant and dangerous tree awareness, structural defence strategies, incident support (mapping, command vehicles, drones and tankers), and skills and drills.

Crews had the chance to work with various pieces of equipment and talk directly with operators to gain vital knowledge and practise using the equipment in a real-world context.



+ CAIRNS SHOW

RFSQ members and auxiliary firefighters from Cairns South Fire and Rescue Station came together at the Cairns Show to teach families about the role of each service and what it’s like to be part of QFD.

There were plenty of smiles and lots of great activities, and Blazer and Bushy caught up with the local radio team.



+ FIRST NATIONS ART

An artwork commissioned by QFD’s First Peoples Consultative Group has been featured at Roma Street Fire and Rescue Station and the School of Fire and Emergency Services Training.

Artist Ambrose Killian, a desert/Eastern Arrernte and Western Bundjalung man, designed the stainless-steel artwork specifically for QFD. His artist statement says the piece represents “the coming together of communities and connection through fire, earth and water.

“Along the bottom of the artwork, mountain figures have been created to represent connection to the land beneath us, and acknowledging those that came before us. Through the artwork, leaves have been scattered to represent our flora and fauna, as well as representing new life that appears after burn-offs on country.”

The communities on the left and top right of the image represent QFR and RFSQ.

“All of these symbols are connected through the smoke emitting off the bottom of the fire, symbolising a common interest between the community and staff of QFD.”



JUMPERS & JAZZ

One of the Southern Downs' biggest drawcards returned for its 20th anniversary in 2024 – Jumpers and Jazz in July at Warwick.

QFD, RFSQ and the State Emergency Service have a long history of supporting the event and providing information to visitors. They also help install static art displays around town.

One of the key events is Stroll and Swing in Leslie Park, where emergency services mascots hold a dance-off on the mainstage. Unfortunately, this year's dance-off was cancelled, but that didn't stop Blazer from warming up and encouraging the audience to participate in the iconic Nutbush.

+ SENIORS EXPO

The Seniors and Carers Team from the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services hosted a Seniors Expo at the Brothers Leagues Club.

QFR attended because the expo's primary focus was home fire safety. There was a great turnout and participants asked many questions about smoke alarms in houses and caravans, as well as lithium-ion batteries.



Given the number of seniors hitting the open road in vans and motorhomes, it was a good opportunity to share information about the Australian Warning System, Fire Danger Ratings and Emergency Alerts.



+ GIRLS ON FIRE

Crews from Cairns Fire and Rescue Station and Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting Service came together with Girls on Fire to deliver a fun-filled day of activities. Girls on Fire works with QFD and other organisations to introduce young people aged 15 to 19 to fire, emergency and disaster management skills.



+ AWS WORKSHOPS

About 220 students in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at TAFE Loganlea participated in six Australian Warning System (AWS) awareness workshops.

Southern Region's Regional Community Engagement Coordinator facilitated the workshops to raise awareness of local hazard risks and the AWS among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in Logan.

The workshops explored students' experiences with disasters, local risks, AWS hazards, icons, levels, colours and call-to-action statements, as well as where to find warnings. The content was tailored to the students' English proficiency, with support from AMEP teachers.

Activities included group discussions and a tour of the QFD warnings and incidents webpage and the Logan Disaster Dashboard. Small groups focused on what students had learnt and ways to improve community awareness of warnings. Preferences included community presentations, multilingual radio, school education and digital engagement.



+ DEFENCE FORCE TOOLKIT

Northern Region QFR have been working with a local supplier to develop and produce a fire appliance toolkit specifically for Australian Defence Force vehicles. Local crews identified the need for the toolkit to make it easier for them to access defence vehicles – many of them with battle armour – in the event of an incident.



+ CORRECTIVE SERVICES TRAINING

QFR crews from Camira and Bundamba joined Queensland Corrective Services' Tactical Response Officers at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre as part of ongoing training for emergencies.

Crews conducted pre-incident planning for potential riots, fires, rescues and hazmat incidents, focusing on access, water supply and safety requirements within the facility.

The training included a demonstration of the equipment and capability on QFR's standard 'Alpha' appliance and 'Lima' Heavy Rescue.

The two services worked well together and discovered a lot of common ground with equipment, preparation and response procedures. Future exercises will focus on simulated riots and fires, with both services working together to achieve safe and effective outcomes.



+ SOUTH BURNETT EXPOS

QFR and RFSQ crews have been busy in the South Burnett participating in Community Resilience and Emergency Services Expos at Taromeo, Blackbutt and Ballogie – a great example of local events connecting local people to their local service providers.

The expos were a fantastic opportunity for crews to talk about bushfire preparedness and home fire safety, answer the communities' questions and help them feel a bit more prepared. Thank you to South Burnett Regional Council for allowing QFD to participate.

+ PRIMARY SCHOOL VISIT

QFR firefighters visited Glendon State Primary School kindy, prep and year 1 students. The visit also included Queensland Police Service officers from Glendon and Nebo, and a member from State Emergency Service Glendon.



+ DALBY CAREER EXPO

The Dalby Career Expo invites Year 9 to 12 students to engage with stallholders from local businesses about potential career pathways. The event gave students the chance to explore various professions and industries in their community. Both RFSQ and QFR staff attended, engaging with about 800 students who enquired about careers in QFD.



+ FIRECOM MANAGERS FORUM

Northern Region welcomed FireCom managers from across the state to their first branch meeting in July. As part of the transition to QFD, FireCom managers now report to the State Fire Communications Branch within the State Operations Directorate.



+ OPERATION LUXTON

RFSQ held Operation Luxton in Northern Region over a weekend to test regional capability to deploy large teams and stay in a remote location within a base camp.

Participants experienced a large regional deployment and gained familiarity with process and base camp arrangements.

They practised driving under operational conditions, using bushfire tactics for prescribed burning, and working in an operational Incident Management Team. They also took part in information sessions about the FAST QLD app and information and warnings.





1. More than 100 RFSQ volunteers took part in Exercise Reformo at Millmerran to tackle bushfire and emergency scenarios.
2. The Redlands and Logan community came together for the opening of Mount Cotton Road Fire and Rescue Station.
3. Townsville's PCYC Emergency Services Cadets competed in the 2024 PCYC Cadet Games, with support from QFR and RFSQ senior officers and crews.
4. Twenty firefighters participated in this year's SkyPoint Sea to Sky Q1 Stair Challenge, climbing 1331 steps in full turnout gear to raise funds for mental health.
5. A big piece of Roma's firefighting history, the original fire station bell from the 1870s, was lovingly restored.



6

- 6. The crew from Airlie Beach Fire and Rescue Station visited Whitsunday Christian College for their Under 8s Day.
- 7. Glass House Mountains Rural Fire Brigade, Queensland's first registered brigade, celebrated their 75th birthday.
- 8. Twenty-five Volunteer Remote Area Operators undertook their annual skills recertification training at Cunninghams Gap.
- 9. Mackay firefighters supported 16-year-old Murray Macgroarty as he walked around Mackay's Blue Water Trail for nine days to raise awareness about veteran homelessness.
- 10. After three years of training, K9 Bailey and volunteer handler Ruby are QFD's newest qualified K9 Urban Search and Rescue team.



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