

RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT OCTOBER 2024



ON DEPLOYMENT
Firefighting in Canada

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STANDING TOGETHER FOR CANADA



BATTLING THE BUSHFIRES



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SPOTLIGHT

RUBY AND BAILEY READY FOR ANYTHING

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ON THE COVER

British Columbia Wildfire Service firefighters patrolling control lines.

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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.

FOREWORDS



STEVE SMITH AFSM

Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

After 40 days of fighting devastating Canadian wildfires, all QFD staff and volunteers have returned home. Our personnel worked in unfamiliar territory with many hazards, from wildlife to falling trees. Their professionalism and determination were much appreciated by our Canadian colleagues. We're currently facing our own bushfire season with crews fighting a number of fires across the state. QFD has contracted 13 aircraft to support ground crews, including the Large Air Tanker and a Blackhawk, with 150 more available on a call-when-needed basis.

On R U OK? Day, we came together to break down the stigma of mental health. Along with Acting Deputy Commissioner John Cawcutt, I spoke about the importance of having meaningful conversations not only on R U OK? Day, but every day.

At the AFAC24 Conference in Sydney, QFD delegates from across the department got to hear about the latest improvements in the fire and emergency services sector. Congratulations to Inspector Paula Douglas, who received the AFAC People First Award for her work in creating a safe and diverse workforce through the Fire and Rescue Frontline Women's Network.

The independent review of QFD's complaints management system has made 34 recommendations for us to implement. We are developing the implementation plan and have appointed independent expert, former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner Kristen Hilton to monitor its progress. I have made my expectations in terms of behaviour and performance very clear; if you haven't already, I ask that you watch my recent video address and my opening address from the Foundations Forums on the Gateway.

The overwhelming majority of our people show the utmost professionalism and respect, and this can no longer be tarnished by the poor behaviour of a few. It is down to all of us owning our part and working deliberately towards realising these expectations. It's now all about actions; the implementation of the Independent Review recommendations is one, another is the recent establishment of a Sexual Harassment Contact Officer Network that provides information, support and resources for all QFD staff and volunteers. Each contact officer is a QFD employee dedicated to supporting their local area to prevent, respond to and manage sexual harassment. I encourage you to find out more on the Gateway.

I greatly appreciate all that you do every day to support Queenslanders. It takes all of us working together – cooperating, collaborating, respecting each other – to achieve our common goal. Let's make sure we are doing everything in our power, individually and collectively, to make sure this is the workplace we want it to be so we are best placed to live up to the expectations of Queenslanders.



BEN MILLINGTON

Acting Chief Officer

RURAL FIRE SERVICE QUEENSLAND

Rural Fire Brigades across Queensland have worked hard to prepare for the coming bushfire season, completing more than 470 hazard reduction burns in collaboration with our partner agencies.

The AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for Spring forecasts grassland fires in early spring due to a curing event in central and southern Queensland that dried out much of the grasslands and open forested areas. Read more about our members' hard work this bushfire season on page 8.

Our members have also been deployed to wildfires in Canada, proudly representing Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) on the world stage. Thank you to everyone who put their hands up for the deployment.

In response to recent media reports about inappropriate behaviour within QFD, Commissioner Smith and the entire executive team have made it clear that inappropriate conduct, discrimination, sexism and bullying are unacceptable. We will not tolerate such behaviour and if you have experienced it, please raise your concerns and lodge a complaint.

The RFSQ staffing uplift is progressing well and I thank you for your patience while we embed the new arrangements. Once complete, these new roles will provide better frontline support and training for our brigades and volunteer members, as well as streamlining some of our processes.

Congratulations to Crew Leader Dean West from Rocksberg Moorina Rural Fire Brigade who was named Remote Piloted Aircraft System Pilot of the Year at the Australian Aviation Awards Gala Dinner. As a Senior Remote Pilot with RFSQ, Dean has been instrumental in developing this capability as part of bushfire operations.

The Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee (RFSAC) held their first face-to-face meeting in September and discussed a range of topics relevant to brigades. The RFSAC is the peak consultative committee to inform positive change across the organisation and assist the RFSQ Chief Officer. It was a pleasure to chair the meeting and listen to the committee members' feedback on a range of issues. You can read more about the committee on page 22.

Queensland Parliament has passed amendments to expand the scope of cancers deemed to be work-related for firefighters. Queensland now has the most comprehensive Workers' Compensation scheme for firefighters in Australia.

Expanding the list of presumptive illnesses with 11 more diseases and cancers, including reproductive cancers in women, will help firefighters access workers' compensation more quickly and without unnecessary stress.

It has been an early start, but thank you for all your hard work so far this bushfire season – stay safe and please look out for each other as operations continue.



STANDING TOGETHER FOR CANADA

When Canada faced another devastating wildfire season, QFD staff and volunteers were quick to deploy and lend a hand.

When QFD crews arrived in late July, around 750 wildfires were burning across the country, with 315 out of control and more than seven million hectares burnt.

In British Columbia alone, about 600,000 hectares of forest are affected by wildfires each year. In recent years, the area has experienced some of its worst wildfire seasons on record, with the 2017 and 2018 seasons burning more than 1.2 million hectares.

The dangers for firefighters extend beyond flames – hazardous conditions, extreme weather and falling trees can all be life-threatening.

This deployment was coordinated by the National Resource Sharing Centre under

reciprocal arrangements with the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre.

In their time of need

Chief Superintendent Jason Lawler was deployed as the Team Leader for the Australian Incident Management Team (IMT) and performed the role of Incident Commander, hosted by the British Columbia Wildfire Service (BCWS).

“It was a challenging operational environment, particularly for an out-of-country IMT, but with support, leadership and incredibly dedicated people at all levels from BCWS, it was an amazing experience for all of us,” Jason said. “It’s certainly one of the most rewarding operational experiences in my career.

“Due to the significant wildfires every summer in Canada, the whole community across the country has a real stake in firefighting operations. We were all impressed by the levels of engagement across not only emergency services, but government, industry and community.”

The team’s deployment began with a briefing in Chilliwack, a picturesque town in the heart of British Columbia.

From there they mobilised to the Slocan Lake area, where they encountered six wildfires burning out of control near communities in Slocan Valley.

“We were part of the Australian IMT, which consisted of personnel from Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and New Zealand, along with BCWS operational and support staff,” Jason said.

“For most of the deployment, we were based in a fire camp that consisted of purpose-designed transportable buildings with IMT workspace, kitchen, equipment, bathrooms, laundry facilities and sleeping tents.

“Bringing a team of people who mostly hadn’t known each other into a high-pressure environment with time and space constraints is challenging for any leader. Thankfully, due to the professionalism of the team, we quickly pulled it together.

“There were many memorable experiences, from the raw beauty of the wilderness, wildlife and terrain to the amazing people we lived and worked with.

“The frontline firefighters, BCWS leadership teams, out-of-province unit crews, initial attack crews and specialists were always present, capable, dedicated and optimistic in the face of adversity. I was impressed by how incredibly skilled they were.

“Despite the long work hours and adversities we faced, I think I can speak for the team that we thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to work, learn and provide support to a partner country in their time of need.”

Mutual trust

As the Deputy Incident Commander, Darren Phease worked closely with Jason to ensure incidents were controlled and safe for crews and all actions were accountable.

“The Canadian firefighters were an absolute pleasure to work with – focused, professional, driven and with a high degree of integrity,” Darren said. “The BCWS at all levels displayed trust in their people and procedures and in our team.

“The tactics in British Columbia are very different to ours. The landscape and vegetation types are unique, particularly in the Rockies. They rely heavily on aerial bombing but it’s not always as effective as in Australia due to terrain and the sheer size of the trees.

“Crews on the ground use machinery to cut huge guards (fire breaks) and plumb them with lines to provide firefighting water to crews.”

Structural protection crews also fit sprinklers to structures, which worked well because water was more widely available than in Australia.

“It was a difficult to envisage the magnitude of the disaster before we arrived and it took all the skills within our IMT to remain on task once we were on the ground,” Darren said. “I was very proud of the way everyone handled a very intense situation.

“Our team adapted well with great support from BCWS, despite the challenges of terrain, communication issues, vegetation, weather and differences in operational procedure.

“I could not be prouder of how all members of the Australian contingent carried

themselves. The feedback from BCWS was very positive and I would deploy with the same team any time.”

Communicating with the community

Regional Community Engagement Coordinator Julianne Webster-Scott worked as an Information Officer and managed the information unit.

“When I arrived in Canada I was surprised how hot it was,” Julianne said. “It reminded me of home.

“The fires were burning in hot, dry, smoky conditions with dry lightning storms predicted. In the fortnight before our arrival, British Columbia recorded temperatures about 10 degrees higher than normal.

“Our unit was responsible for media, community liaison, stakeholder mapping and identifying any gaps in the public’s understanding of the fire messaging.

“We used this information to develop an engagement and communications plan for the Slovan Lake fire complex to ensure all stakeholders received the information they needed.

“We used multiple communication methods, such as the website, public information phone line and email, community meetings, media interviews and message boards.

“We also had pop-up engagement points where, for example, a community liaison



officer would attend a local market to answer community members' questions."

The challenge of sharing daily communications with communities who didn't use the internet highlighted the importance of community liaison and having people on the ground.

"The Canadian firefighters, liaisons and IMT staff are passionate professionals with great local knowledge and specialist operational skills," Julianne said. "They are some of the kindest people I've ever met.

"We were at tourist destinations in the middle of summer holidays and we answered phone calls and emails from community members who'd been evacuated.

"Supporting the evacuees' return journey and meeting them in person was empowering. It was heartwarming to see the relief on people's faces, and to see historical buildings and property re-open."

The team's second deployment was in the Columbia Fire Zone in a fire camp near Invermere at the base of the South Rocky Mountains.

"Firefighting took place in terrain home to dangerous animals such as bears, cougars, scorpions and spiders, and to a lesser extent snakes and dangerous plants such as poison ivy," Julianne said.

"It was beautiful country with lots of trees, large lakes and mountains. Firefighters used helicopters for situational awareness and waterbombing, and boats for transport in some areas.

"This experience reinforced to me that community engagement principles are the same wherever you go. It's important to understand the community you're assisting, how they communicate in 'peace time' and who your stakeholders are.

"You can then develop appropriate engagement and communication plans to ensure everyone receives the right information, at the right time, in the right format, by the right method, at the right frequency and with the right level of engagement."

A mammoth task

Corinne Young, a Crew Leader and Officer with RFSQ Northern Region, deployed as a Logistics Officer.

"In my first week I led the mobilisation and logistics for a 450-person fire camp, ensuring efficient deployment and operational readiness," Corinne said. "With

limited information and resources, we had the camp up and running in three days.

"There were many speedbumps during the process, but to see it operating was a huge achievement for me and my logistics team. IMT, firefighters, catering, washrooms, camping and supplies were all in one place, which helped everyone get settled.

"My role also involved coordinating the distribution of resources, supplies and personnel to sustain wildfire operations across multiple sites. I maintained clear communication with key stakeholders to manage operational needs in high-pressure environments, and ensured compliance with safety protocols and emergency management practices to support large-scale firefighting efforts."

Corinne said it was incredible to work with Canadian personnel.

"Their strong work ethic and determination should be commended," she said. "The amount of thought and expertise they put into catering and food consumption is fantastic. It's all set by calories needed to perform at optimal levels, right down to bagged lunches.

"I knew of the amount of hand tools and hard manual labour used in Canada, but until you're there and see the landscape and work ethic of the firefighters you can't understand. It takes such strength and determination.

"We are strong and determined here as well, but most of the time we get the luxury of taking our truck to the fire. These firefighters carry it all in – hoses, pumps, tools, chainsaws. They have their own tents and gear so they're always ready to camp.

"I discovered one of the resources I could request for the Fire Camp was an Occupational Therapist, so I did. The programme began as an idea, a project team was set up, they trialled it, and now it's a resource we can request. To be able to offer this to the firefighters when they came off the fireground, to keep them operating and iron out their muscles or injuries was of huge benefit.

"There were many challenges but we worked through every one as a strong and experienced IMT with great leaders. We supported each other and looked out for those who needed a hug or some time away for a moment to clear their headspace.

"Another challenge was the different role titles between Canada and Australia and the different names for fireground

equipment. I had to gain this knowledge and understanding quickly as my team was responsible for ordering of people resourcing and equipment, and if we don't know the names of things, it makes it pretty difficult.

"I'm so proud to have been given this opportunity. I was able to push myself further than I thought I could go. We made a huge impact and bonded together so well. I would go again to assist in a heartbeat."

An incredible team

Brigade Support Officer Savannah Terrar was deployed as an Operations Branch Director, akin to a divisional commander.

"Our briefing in Chilliwack included how to fight bears – a skill I never thought I'd need and thankfully didn't, unlike the section on wasps, which was very useful," Savannah said.

"We absorbed the instructions, realising our mission was not just to combat flames but to embrace the surroundings. Wildfires are a natural part of the ecosystem in Canada and many forests are adapted to fire, which can help regenerate certain species like lodgepole pine.

"At Slocan Lake we encountered our first significant wildfire. This blaze, raging through the mountains, was the size of 10,000 football fields, a daunting sight.

"My first assignment was constructing a guard (fire break) 500 metres up from the mountain's base. Thanks to the hard work of my incredible crew, we managed to create a 14.7-kilometre-long guard using heavy equipment and traditional hand tools."

Savannah said one of the most rewarding aspects of the mission was working alongside her team and local First Nations firefighters.

"Indigenous communities in British Columbia have used fire as a land management tool for thousands of years," she said. "Their traditional knowledge is increasingly recognised and integrated into contemporary wildfire management.

"Throughout our time there, the fire was held at bay with a combination of bucket drops and direct attacks, and we protected structures by deploying sprinklers."

After two weeks at Slocan Lake, Savannah was assigned to tackle a second fire in the Rocky Mountains.

“The dozens of crews there were of mixed crew types and skillsets,” she said. “I was consistently amazed by their strength, training and zest for life.

“In Canada, falling trees are a leading cause of injuries and fatalities among firefighters. It’s crucial to conduct hazard assessments before entering areas at risk.

“I coordinated with danger tree assessors and specialists to evaluate and open about 40 kilometres of forest roads. We could then move the crew into strategic positions for direct attacks on the fires and to create fire guards.

“Saying goodbye after two weeks at the Slokan Lake fire was bittersweet, but my experiences at the Rocky Mountains fires left an indelible mark on me.”

Savannah said she loved learning new firefighting tactics.

“Firefighting in British Columbia employs a variety of techniques, equipment and specialised crews (known as packs),” she said.

“Firefighters rely on specialised tools and machinery, such as axes and shovels for manual line construction and larger

equipment like bulldozers and trucks for suppression and support.

“Given the vast forests and mountainous terrain, aerial resources are critical. Drones are increasingly used for reconnaissance, offering real-time data and surveillance for operational planning.

“Driving the giant trucks on the right side of the road was an experience in itself. Learning the quirks of four-way give-way intersections proved tricky to navigate, and I won’t miss how hazard lights in Canada seem to act as a suggestion to overtake, rather than an actual warning of an incident!

“My time in Canada was a blend of hard work, laughter and learning. From mastering bear safety to protecting communities, this deployment sharpened my skills and enhanced my appreciation for teamwork in firefighting.

“I’m grateful for the friendships forged and knowledge acquired – lessons I will carry with me in my future endeavours. With the 2024 bushfire season at our doorstep, the expertise and dedication of firefighters across Canada will be indispensable to me and my fellow firefighters, bolstering our response capabilities.

“British Columbia’s wilderness may be imposing, but the resilience and unity shown by those who fight its fires are even more formidable.

“Together, we faced unimaginable challenges, always remembering we weren’t just saving properties but protecting homes and communities. And for that, I am truly grateful.”



BATTLING THE BUSHFIRES

In an early start to bushfire season, crews battled fast-moving bush and grass fires, with more fire weather on the horizon.

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council's (AFAC) Seasonal Bushfire Outlook forecast grass fire conditions in Queensland in early spring, with an elevated fire risk across northern, central and southern areas due to significant curing in grasslands and open forests

It's been five years since the devastating 2019-20 bushfire season where massive fires burnt through swathes of Queensland, including Sarabah, Peregian, Stanthorpe, Applethorpe and Crows Nest. Now some of those areas are experiencing fire once again.

Crews across the state have taken proactive steps to protect their communities, with Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) and partner agencies completing more than 470 planned burns.

Brigades sharpened their skills through training and engaged with local communities, encouraging them to prepare a bushfire survival plan.

Unwavering support

Deputy Chief Officer Karen Hodges AFSM said it had been an active start to bushfire season.

"We've seen moderate fire activity across north-west, southern interior and inland parts of south-east Queensland," she said.

"While challenging to contain during the days, most fires have responded well to suppression and rapid initial attack.

"In preparation for bushfire season, RFSQ undertook extensive mitigation burning, operational planning and exercising, so we are well placed to support operations.

"RFSQ volunteers have provided unwavering support during the start of the fire season."

- Karen Hodges AFSM

"RFSQ worked closely with local governments, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and other key stakeholders to undertake these critical mitigation burns across the state. This has provided significant protection for communities.

"Moderate fire activities are expected to continue through the mid-spring months, ahead of the forecast onset of the wet season.





“With elevated fuel loads from previous summer rains, much of Queensland is likely to see fuel-driven fires continue through the spring months.

“RFSQ volunteers have provided unwavering support during the start of the fire season, giving their time to standby in pre-positioned strike teams or undertake deployments across Queensland. This support has seen several fires suppressed quickly and the impacts to communities minimised.”

Brigades out in force

Matt Inwood, Deputy Chief Officer for South Western Region, said there had been challenging weather conditions with warm days and strong westerly winds throughout August and September.

“There have been significant fires around Carnarvon and up in Far Northern Region, with a lot of fire activity right across the coast,” Matt said.

Areas and brigades conducted mitigation activities where possible in the leadup to the season.

“Mitigation activities were limited in some areas by wet weather,” Matt said. “The westerlies also made it too windy and dry in some places, however we made sure the community were as well prepared as possible, with hazard reduction burns being undertaken as conditions allowed for them, combined with community engagement activities.”

A new development this year is the trial of pre-determined aircraft dispatch from the Toowoomba City Aerodrome for fires in Toowoomba and Somerset Lockyer areas.

“On days of elevated fire conditions, aircraft will be dispatched as soon as Triple Zero (000) calls come in about a fire. Getting the aircraft rapidly to the fire to drop water on it can help quell the fire before crews arrive on the ground.”

Matt said QFD could have a busy few months ahead, if conditions remain dry and windy.



“We still face a significant threat with warmer conditions ahead, particularly in the west,” he said. “The east coast has had a few storms but they don’t penetrate much further west than Toowoomba or Dalby.

“I’d like to say a big thank you to all our volunteer firefighters out there who continue their amazing efforts, giving up their time away from work, family, friends and loved ones to go out and protect their communities.

“It cannot be overstated how much we rely on and appreciate the time and effort they put in.”

“I’d like to say a big thank you to all our volunteer firefighters out there who continue their amazing efforts.”

– Matt Inwood

Support from the air

Complementing on-the-ground firefighting was QFD’s aerial firefighting fleet.

This year, QFD contracted 13 aircraft, including the Large Air Tanker (LAT), with a total waterbombing capacity of more than 32,000 litres.

“We’re using a combination of aircraft contracted through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) and approximately 150 Call-When-Needed aircraft,” said Martin Gibson, Executive Manager of State Air Operations.

“The contracted aircraft fly out of state airbases at Toowoomba and Bundaberg as well as a commercial airstrip at Watts Bridge near Somerset Dam.”

An additional UH-60 Blackhawk has also joined QFD’s fleet this year on a national contract. It will be based in Bundaberg for the start of a six-month national contract, and can be deployed across Australia if needed.

“The Blackhawk can drop 4000 litres of water and travel at 300 kilometres an hour. If the fire risk increases in another state, they can apply through the National Resource Sharing Centre to attain it.”

Martin said contracted and Call-When-Needed aircraft had already been used at several fires across the state, particularly central and north-west Queensland.

“The ground crews are out there fighting fires and we support them with assets from the air,” he said.

“The crews develop a plan for what they need from the aircraft, from waterbombing to observation, mapping and intelligence gathering.

“The ground crews are out there fighting fires and we support them with assets from the air.”

– Martin Gibson

“Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) also provide intelligence-gathering for both RFSQ and Queensland Fire and Rescue at bushfires and fire investigations.

“This year we’re trialling orthomosaic mapping, where drones photograph a scene from different angles. We then use software to stitch the images together into a single mosaic.”

As opposed to traditional aerial photos, orthomosaic maps give a highly accurate, distortion-free view of fire scenes to inform decision-making.

“We’re also trialling new mapping software for the QFD airborne task specialists that is more accurate and user-friendly, making it easier for mapping to be obtained in a challenging environment,” Martin said.

“We’ve released several training packages to help QFD members learn more about working with aircraft, and people have been very receptive.

“Understanding of aircraft is more widespread among ground crews, which allows us to support them more effectively and efficiently. We’ve been getting great support, which makes it easier to dispatch aircraft quickly and without any issues.”

Getting the job done

Ian Richter, First Officer of Rathdowney Rural Fire Brigade near the NSW border, has been a volunteer for 12 years.

His brigade fought fires in the Scenic Rim early in the bushfire season. While not as big as the fires in the devastating 2019-20 season, the fires were still significant.

“We fought the largest fire for 10 days,” Ian said. “The logistics of how to contain the fire were a challenge, but we just got in and got the job done.

“There were six members from our brigade and we had medium trucks, a light truck and an ATV. We worked with incoming crews from as far away as the Gold Coast, as well as the Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Police Service.

“We share a building with the auxiliary brigade and work really well with them. In fact, I was the auxiliary captain for 32 years.

“They look out for us and we look out for them. When structures were threatened, the auxiliary firefighters came out to protect them and luckily none were lost.

“There were fixed-wing and rotary aircraft waterbombing the fire. We see so many choppers we don’t even look up anymore.

“I think we’ll see more fires as the landscape dries out in the heat around Christmas.”



Crews conducting crucial mitigation work near Somerset Dam. Photo by Narangba Rural Fire Brigade.



About 30 RFSQ and QFR crews battled bushfires in the Scenic Rim, supported by taskforces from Brisbane and the North Coast.



RFSQ crews completed hazard reduction burns on the north-western edge of Stanthorpe to protect the Southern Downs community.



Crews at the Pentland airbase worked hard to help contain a large fire near Charters Towers.



The Air Tractor 802F Fireboss can carry up to 3200 litres and travel at up to 280 kilometres an hour.



MAKING CROSS RIVER RAIL FIRE SAFE

Cross River Rail is Queensland’s largest infrastructure project and QFD is working hard to ensure firefighters can respond effectively to incidents in the tunnel.

At just over 10 kilometres long, Cross River Rail (CRR) will reduce congestion by providing a second rail path through the Brisbane CBD.

QFD’s Fire Engineering Section (FES) and Major Developments Unit (MDU) are working with CRR’s project managers, engineers and certifiers to provide advice on how QFD will respond to incidents in the stations and tunnel.

FES and MDU have analysed and inputted into the design and fire engineering of the infrastructure and what will happen in the event of a fire or hazmat incident, including how firefighters will access the stations and tunnel and how passengers will evacuate.

The MDU manager, Acting Inspector Philip Glen, said working on CRR had been a steep learning curve because it was Queensland’s first major underground rail.

“It presents a unique challenge for firefighters because our crews only have experience with road tunnels and short rail tunnels,” Philip said. “The stations and tunnel are large and complex in design and the operational response is a lot more involved than for a traditional building.”

“When I visit the site, I’m always surprised by its scale and complexity.”

CRR has four underground stations at Boggo Road, Woolloongabba, Albert Street and Roma Street. Each station is essentially an inverted high-rise building, 30 metres underground.

“The stations are future-proofed for Brisbane’s growing population,” Philip said. “Roma Street, for example, is estimated to service more than 40,000 users a day by 2036.”

The infrastructure can handle six-carriage trains but is also designed for nine-carriage trains in the future.

“The stations are designed on the same principles but they’re all shaped differently. For example, Roma Street is set back from the street entry, while Boggo Road is a direct vertical drop from the street. Firefighter access differs at each site.”

Challenges ahead

Firefighters will face significant challenges if an emergency takes place in the tunnel.

“For one thing, tunnels are confined spaces,” Philip said. “A fire on an open train line is different because passengers can jump from the carriage and walk away. Tunnels also don’t have fire compartments like traditional buildings.

“The adjoining tunnel is fire separated, with interconnecting cross passages between the tunnels every 240 metres for emergency egress and firefighter access.

“Road tunnels have more sophisticated smoke exhaust than rail tunnels. While major road tunnels typically have smoke ducts every 60 metres to remove smoke, CRR tunnels can only remove smoke at the stations or portals. They use fans to push the smoke towards these exhaust points.

“Major road tunnels also have deluge systems to drop water on the fire. Rail tunnels can’t use those systems because of the 25kV electrical hazard that powers the trains.

“Isolating the power and making it safe is challenging because of technical difficulties. You can turn the power off, but it may still have residual current.”

The good news is rail tunnels are much less likely to have a fire because trains don’t have internal combustion engines, they run on rails and have professional drivers. However, the consequences are greater if a fire breaks out in a rail tunnel.

The tunnel is equipped with double fire hydrants every 60 metres so firefighters will never need to use more than two hose lengths to reach the next hydrant point.



Commissioner Smith on site with Queensland Rail CEO Kat Stapleton and CRR CEO Graeme Newton.

QFD has also considered how firefighters would respond to large-scale terrorist events in the tunnel.

A landmark project

Steven McKee, Executive Manager of QFD’s Fire Engineering Section, said QFD had been involved with the CRR project since its first environmental impact statement (EIS) in 2011-12.

“It’s the first major piece of underground rail infrastructure on this scale in Queensland,” Steven said, adding that it’s rewarding to work on such a landmark engineering project.

“As a major infrastructure project, the tunnel goes through an initial approval process with the Queensland Government Coordinator General. QFD has provided technical and operational input throughout to ensure the tunnel’s fire safety design works operationally for our crews.

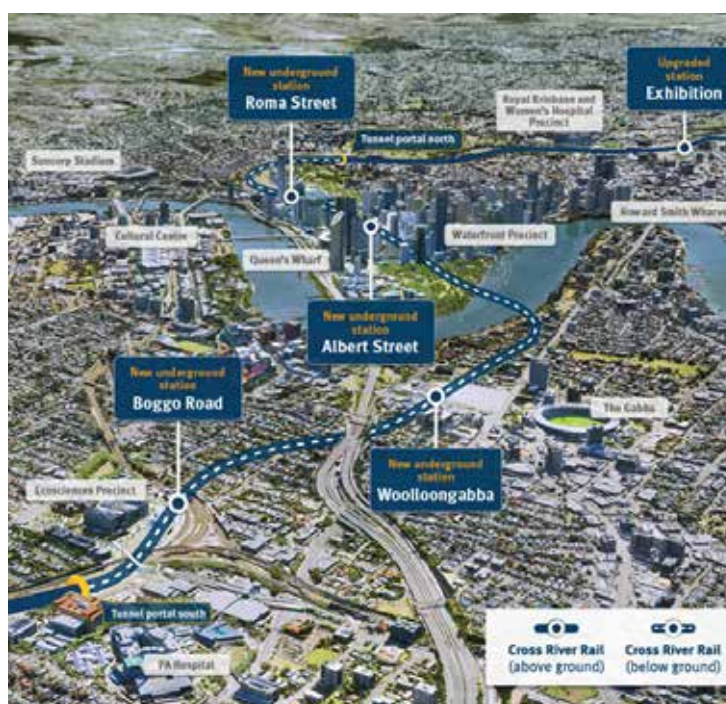
“We’ve progressed through a series of steps over the past 12 years, including the EIS process, the original reference design, project scope and technical requirements and the tender process. In the post-contract phase we have extensively liaised with the CRR Delivery Authority and the contractor.

“We have spent a lot of time ensuring the project’s fire safety design facilitates safe and effective fire brigade intervention in the event of a fire. For example, ensuring there are sufficient protected access routes for firefighters, such as fire-separated stairs and lifts, from the surface down to the platform level.

“Rail tunnels like this have a completely different strategy for firefighter intervention – it’s very complex to get firefighters to a fire located in a deep underground station or tunnel.

“We’re currently in the final stages of reviewing the design documentation for the stations, and then we’ll focus on ensuring the construction of the stations and tunnels aligns with that documentation.

“For example, we’ll make sure that systems such as smoke management and fire hydrants are installed as per the design and are commissioned and functioning appropriately.



“A lot of people have been involved in the team over the years. People’s whole careers have developed over the time we’ve been working on this project.”

Relationships are key

Andrew Sbrizzi, CRR Project Superintendent, manages the team developing the operational procedures for how firefighters will respond to incidents in the tunnel and stations.

He’s spent the past five months liaising between Queensland Fire and Rescue and stakeholders, particularly Queensland Rail (QR) and the CRR Delivery Authority, the government body that manages the project.

“I coordinate the relationships and develop operational procedures, guidelines and agreements for us to work together on this unique piece of infrastructure,” Andrew said.

“CRR represents a unique opportunity to work with other agencies to provide a world-class response for the Queensland public.

“Our relationship with QR is the key to this whole project. They hold the knowledge and technology for all the engineering components such as cameras and ventilation.

“The QR Cross River Rail Commander’s role is imperative to this unique infrastructure and will facilitate the cohesion of all emergency services such as QFR, Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS).

“I’ve found it rewarding to build those relationships and work through the intricacies of understanding what all the stakeholders need.

“The last thing you want to do is work things out when you’re at an incident. The planning needs to happen well and truly before.”

The project team sent the first train through the tunnel on 13 and 15 September to test its performance, which was a success.

“The project is now moving into a service testing period where the team will run multiple trains in both tunnels at operational speed to make sure everything works,” Andrew said.

“During that testing period, QFD will do a lot of our own testing to familiarise crews with the stations and tunnels. First we’ll run a tabletop exercise with 3D rendering to show firefighters where to go, who to talk to, how to get in the tunnel and what to carry.

“Then we’ll run exercises with trains full of people who need to evacuate. We’ll also simulate a mid-tunnel event and see how all the emergency services coordinate together.

“The tunnels and stations are masterful pieces of architecture, technically superior, cavernous and grand.

“As south-east Queensland continues to expand, significant investment in rail expansion work will continue, requiring continuous QFR and QR engagement.”

Responding to incidents

Andrew said QFD could expect a full range of emergency response with all emergency services throughout the whole infrastructure.

If a fire starts on a train, the preferred solution is to get the train to the next station so the passengers can evacuate there. The trains are designed to keep travelling to the station even if they lose power.

“Firefighters would use relatively orthodox firefighting techniques at the stations, but it would still be challenging because each station is uniquely designed,” Andrew said.

“At the end of each platform is a safe zone for firefighters to work. Each station also has a control room where we can manage communications, ventilation and other systems.”

However, if the train is stuck in the middle of the tunnel, QFD’s proposed response is to use high-rail fire appliances that can drive on the road or drop down rail wheels to ride on the track,



From left to right: Adam James, Danielle Simpson, Gavin Taylor and Andrew Sbrizzi at the Queensland Rail Communication Centre (Mayne).

similar to QR's high-rail vehicles. When on track these high-rail vehicles will be operated by QR staff.

"We plan to have two of these vehicles fully staffed 24/7 with two personnel," Andrew said.

Collaboration with agencies such as QR, QPS, and QAS will be crucial for the effective delivery of emergency services during an incident and will play a vital role in the overall success of the project.

"Kemp Place, Roma Street, Windsor and Annerley Fire and Rescue stations will provide the primary response, as well as the technical rescue, BA hazmat, scientific and communications units and the Tango command and control vehicle."

There are two entry points to the tunnel – a northern portal near Victoria Park and a southern portal at Dutton Park.

"Firefighters will drive the vehicles to the portals and hand them over to QR, who will drive them on the tracks. QR will also drive one of their high-rail emergency response vehicles behind us in case we need support for a prolonged incident or a technical rescue.

"The vehicles will travel down the non-incident tunnel to avoid smoke. The ventilation system is designed so the non-incident tunnel is positively pressurised with fresh air.

"If you open the door to the incident tunnel, the air will flow into the incident tunnel, keeping the smoke in there. It's the same with the doors on the platform.

"Cross passages link the two tunnels together every 240 metres, so firefighters can cross into the incident tunnel and access the train.

"There's a walkway all through the tunnel that people can follow to the nearest cross passage so they can evacuate to the non-incident tunnel.

"Getting down to grassroots and working out the best options with operational crews and corporate staff has been a real highlight for me," Andrew said.

You can watch information videos about the project by searching for Cross River Rail on the Gateway.



The concept design for Albert Street Station.



The tunnel will present firefighters with unique challenges.



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IT SERVICES RETURN TO QFD

A new phone number for IT support is the first of many changes resulting from the transition of IT services back to QFD.

The past several months have been busy for the IT Directorate, preparing for and receiving 82 positions who transitioned from the Queensland Police Service to QFD.

Chief Information Officer Garth Wilshire (pictured) said the move gave the IT Directorate more control and responsibility over QFD's IT functions.

"With about 130 permanent staff, we can now focus on the most important areas for improving IT services," Garth said.

"Our priority is to integrate the transitioned staff and IT services so we provide IT service delivery to QFD staff and volunteers."

New IT service centre

Another major change the IT Directorate will deliver is a QFD-only IT service centre.

"A team of service centre analysts have completed training on our new customer service portal, ServiceNow, and are preparing to take the first call," Garth said.

ServiceNow, which is used by many Queensland Government departments and private organisations, will replace the current system, BOSS.

"The new IT Service Desk phone number – 1300 FIRE IT (1300 347 348) – is already operational. It will be linked to the QPS service desk until the QFD IT service centre launches soon," Garth said.

"All calls will go to this new phone number and the service centre team will pass them on to the right team. The Specialist Operational Services Unit will continue to be the main contact point for the Fire Communications Centres."

Regional support

Ensuring dedicated regional support is an important part of QFD's IT Services Model. As part of the transition, QFD now has 20 regional IT positions, which are aligned to the regional corporate hubs and provide onsite IT support.

David Williams was recently appointed as Executive Manager Deskside Support.

"It's been great to join QFD," David said. "The people I've been meeting are very engaged and positive and I've had excellent support from the frontline when discussing their IT service experiences and needs.

"QFD's inclusive culture is helping our people understand what is needed and where to invest our time and budget. All our hubs now have experienced teams of IT support officers, except for Beenleigh and Sunshine Coast, where we are currently recruiting new staff members.

"We have some fantastic staff with great knowledge and connections to the local frontline workforce, who devote their time and efforts to help their regions get the most out of IT services."

Engagement

There are now six Directors and 18 Executive Managers in the IT Directorate, who are tasked with partnering with frontline and enterprise leaders.

Together, they lead our people in delivering day-to-day services and implementing modernised IT solutions supporting frontline operations and business processes.

The team's goals include furthering our foundational Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) strategy by addressing ICT risk and improving the stability of our infrastructure, investing in system integration to get key systems to talk with each other, and making IT simpler and more accessible.

Garth said, "Delivering fit-for-purpose IT can't be a guessing game – we need to be well connected and actively involve our IT customers in our services and projects so their views are represented and we can focus our effort where it's needed most.

"Cyber and information security is also a key area of our ICT strategy and we are working hard to better protect personal information and strengthen cyber security without disruption to operations."

More to come

Going forward, the IT Directorate plans to expand their ownership of QFD-aligned IT services by including Triple Zero (000) IT support and data centres in 2025.

Remember to use the 1300 FIRE IT (347 348) phone number and keep an eye out for the new ServiceNow portal.

For more information and guidance materials, visit the Gateway > IT Directorate.



ASK R U OK? ANY DAY

On R U OK? Day, personnel came together to break down the stigma of mental health and connect with their colleagues.

At the R U OK? Day event, Commissioner Steve Smith and Acting Deputy Commissioner John Cawcutt spoke about the importance of having meaningful conversations not only on R U OK? Day, but every day.

Mr Smith opened the event by emphasising that R U OK? Day is an important day for the department.

“It’s a time for us to pause and think about mental health and normalising and removing the stigma around mental health,” he said.

“The conversations you have and asking the question shouldn’t just be focused on today. These are conversations that can change lives.

“We should be focused on creating a more caring and connected culture and workplace, where people have a sense of connection and a network around them to support them through difficult times.”

Don't wait for a disaster to seek help

Mr Cawcutt shared a story about his personal understanding of mental health after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake.

“After the magnitude-eight earthquake, thousands of buildings were damaged or knocked down, and hundreds of people were missing,” he said.

“The AUS-1 and AUS-2 Disaster Assistance Response Teams arrived within 24 hours to witness the magnitude of destruction and despair.

“Amid the fallen buildings, the dust and injuries, it became clear there was a large emotional impact forming separate from the disaster.

“I was the task force leader and one of the questions I kept asking myself was, ‘The team’s ready to save lives, but are they fully prepared for this emotional toll?’

“The aftershocks were literal and figurative – the importance of mental wellbeing increased as the teams worked long hours in extreme conditions, and with a decreasing likelihood of rescuing anybody.”

Mr Cawcutt started to see his team members asking each other ‘Are you okay?’.

“That wasn’t top led, it was naturally occurring from a small team being in a critical incident together.

“It clicked with me that it’s an inherent natural reaction of people who are part of a critical incident to reach out and check on their buddies and other crew members.

“It may not be as formal as ‘Are you okay?’ but it was a deliberate reach out. A rescuer who came into the command tent asking, ‘How are you going, John?’ was just as effective.

“We had a number of psychologists fly out and offer their support services. By embedding the psychological assistance and debriefing before we returned, we had a 100 per cent engagement rate with the psychologists.

“Being able to process the highs and the lows of the event was an essential discussion that helped all of us move on.

“For multiple years after the event, each team member received a call simply asking, ‘Are you okay?’ from the psychologists – it was a genuine enquiry about how we were going.

“We don’t need to wait for a critical incident though. Human beings appreciate that gentle reminder of ‘Are you okay’ because it absolutely makes a difference.

“Mental health is a communal effort, and our support networks are only as strong as our willingness to be there. Let’s start the conversation.”

Confidential counselling services are available to all volunteers, staff and immediate family members. If you feel you could benefit from support, go to fire.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people to locate your preferred counsellor or contact the 24/7 on-call counsellor on 1800 805 980 (calls returned within two hours).



ASK R U OK? ANY DAY

A conversation could change a life.



TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

ESCAPE Week gave a select group of emergency services cadets the chance to interact with firefighters and get hands-on in live-fire scenarios.

Twenty of the top cadets from across Queensland were nominated to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

They spent a day with each emergency service – Queensland Fire and Rescue, Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ), State Emergency Service, Marine Rescue Queensland, Queensland Police Service and Surf Life Saving Queensland.

Activities throughout the week ranged from boat rescue to radio techniques, land searches and road crash rescue. The cadets were joined by three cadet coaches and several PCYC adult leaders.

For their day with RFSQ, the cadets visited volunteers and staff at Birnam Rural Fire Brigade. QFD proudly supports the Emergency Services Cadets program through funding and access to QFD facilities, equipment and personnel.

South Coast Area Manager Wayne Teece said RFSQ was excited to be a part of ESCAPE Week.

“We were grateful they reached out to us,” Wayne said. “We have a good relationship

with the cadets and one of our brigades, Cedar Creek, has a cadets’ program. We wanted to make the day interactive and a bit of fun.

“The day began with a live-fire exercise. We showed the cadets our equipment and talked about what RFSQ is all about. Then we put some fire into the landscape and discussed the different ways fire moves.

“After that we gave them the hoses and asked them to put the fire out, which they all thought was very cool.”

Next up was an exercise where the cadets rolled two lengths of hose from the back of the trucks and used the water to knock tennis balls off witch’s hats.

“Finally, we gave them a soccer ball challenge where two teams had to push a soccer ball with the hose, work their way through witch’s hats and get the ball into a goal.

“At the end of the day we had a big water fight with hundreds of water balloons. The cadets split up into three teams and went

crazy, jumping and laughing and giving each other high fives.

“They enjoyed getting their hands dirty and they had a fantastic day. After each exercise they went up to the people running it and thanked them.”

The team gave the cadets a certificate of participation to say thank you for coming along and being part of RFSQ for the day.

“We achieved exactly what we set out to do, which was for them to have fun,” said Wayne.

“I want to say a big thank you to the volunteers and staff who gave up their time to support the event.

“The cadets are our future emergency services personnel. They’re the next generation who are going to come through and we need to make sure we get young people involved in emergency services.

“I told them that people call Triple Zero (000) on the worst day of their lives, and these cadets may one day be the people who are going to be answering those calls and helping others.”

LESSONS FROM THE TÜRKIYE-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

QFD participated in a meeting in Marmaris, Türkiye to review recommendations from the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye and Syria.

On 6 February 2023, a series of earthquakes struck southern Türkiye, killing more than 60,000 people. To assist, Australia deployed a 72-person Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) from NSW, along with two firefighters from QFD.

Based on the earthquake response, the UN's International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) received more than 100 recommendations.

In September, Acting Deputy Commissioner John Cawcutt travelled to Türkiye for a meeting of the INSARAG Guidelines Review Group (GRG) to consider the recommendations.

Mr Cawcutt is the GRG's Co-Chair, an appointment that puts QFD and Australia at the centre of influence and best practice in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR).

The meeting's 11 attendees represented 90 countries across the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

"INSARAG dates back to the 1980s, when several devastating earthquakes, including



in Mexico City and Armenia, killed tens of thousands of people," Mr Cawcutt said. "International aid and rescue teams poured across borders, but they were poorly coordinated.

"Some areas were searched multiple times while others were never searched. Some USAR teams didn't have sufficient equipment and became an additional drain on the community. As a result, the UN passed a resolution to improve the coordination of disaster assistance, with Australia as a signatory.

"Over time, QFD's reputation on the global stage has increased because of the standard and quality of our team and the contribution we make, particularly to the Asia-Pacific.

"INSARAG is probably one of the most successful programs the UN oversees because it's peer-to-peer and everyone is on the same page. No matter which country they're from, firefighters want to get in and help people. It's a common bond."

The Türkiye USAR team, AKUT (TUR-03), who were heavily involved in rescue efforts following the earthquake, hosted the meeting.

"Memories of the earthquake were still very raw for the Turkish team, but the team was terrific and went out of their way to make us welcome," Mr Cawcutt said.

"Every Anzac Day, the whole team goes to Gallipoli voluntarily, in uniform, to remember the battle fought there. Our nations have a close relationship.

"There are countless awful stories from the earthquake. Rescuers might hear someone alive four storeys down, banging on a pipe. To reach that person would take them days of hard work, and sometimes they had to prioritise and say sorry.

"They had to leave so they could find more people to rescue, because they could potentially save 20 people instead of one.

"That's a very difficult thing when the person's family is standing there and begging you, hanging onto your coat as you try to walk away. First responders are right there in the thick of it and there is a big emotional impact."

The INSARAG guidelines allow all the countries with USAR teams to operate together effectively when disaster strikes.

"When we deploy to somewhere like Christchurch and two teams work on the same building, the guidelines ensure their training, standards and processes are the same, because one team could affect another," Mr Cawcutt said.

"It's incredibly important for the global community and the countries impacted by major disasters that we continue to improve the way we work.

"There are cultural barriers and massively different viewpoints on some aspects. It's a large responsibility for the GRG members to represent all the countries and come to an agreement.

"The main issues we discussed at the meeting were coordination across teams, operations in heritage sites, upgrading national capacity training, and flexible response, such as only deploying the flood response part of the DART system rather than a full USAR team.

"We discussed many technical recommendations around the earthquake, such as markings, sectorisation, area assessment, data collection and so on.

"We have a lot of people involved in USAR, including not just firefighters but doctors, volunteer K9 handlers, engineers and paramedics.

"Australia, QFD and our team AUS-1 DART are afforded a great deal of recognition and respect, and the sector has a lot of confidence in our professionalism and ability to get the job done."

STATE-WIDE DRONE EXERCISE

Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems pilots from across Queensland gathered to share knowledge at QFD's first state-wide drone exercise.

More than 40 of QFD's 150 pilots took part in the large-scale Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) exercise at Wyaralong Dam in the Scenic Rim, testing their skills in day and night scenarios.

RPAS pilots are a vital part of QFD's emergency response, providing mapping, search and rescue capability and aerial observation for crews on the ground.

Air Operations Officer Ben Macht said the RPAS capability was established within many areas of QFD and the technology continued to advance.

"RPAS can be used for a variety of tasks including situational awareness and crew safety; fire investigation; search and rescue; and structure, bushfire and hazard reduction burn overwatch," Ben said.

"The pilots included Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers and staff, as well as Queensland Fire and Rescue staff," Ben said. "The SES is still operating under QFD's Remote Operator Certificate until they establish their own capability."

The exercise offered a variety of landscapes and infrastructure features for the pilots to interact with.

"Activities were based on realistic scenarios RPAS regularly attend. In preparation for bushfire season the focus was on mapping with field maps, automated flying to capture datasets that can be turned into maps, and operating in remote areas, which required the pilots to pack their equipment into backpacks and hike to a remote site.

"At night we focused on search and rescue. SES volunteers pretended to be lost hikers and walked the trails around the dam. The pilots located the volunteers using thermal sensors, made contact with them using

speakers and illuminated their path back to the control point with searchlights.

"This exercise has shown how important it is for pilots from across the state to come together on a regular basis to conduct practical training," Ben said. "Even more important is the sharing of knowledge and experience among our pilot cohort.

"My personal highlight was to see all the pilots work together seamlessly and have a good time learning about new features."

RFSQ Senior Remote Pilot Dean West was presented with the Australian Aviation Award 2024 for RPAS Pilot of the Year by Chief Remote Pilot Martin Gibson at the exercise. Dean has been instrumental in implementing QFD's RPAS capability and has a wealth of experience through volunteering with Disaster Relief Australia.

"The RPAS capability is constantly evolving with new and exciting technology coming onto the market all the time," Ben said. "We're working on various projects that will improve the capability.

"I'd like to acknowledge the facilitator team that made this exercise possible – Senior Remote Pilots Matthew Harris, Christopher Thompson, Leigh Francis, Dean West and Mitchell Deam.

"We plan to make this exercise an annual event where RPAS pilots from different regions and functional areas come together to learn from each other."



NEW COMMITTEE HELPS SHAPE RFSQ

The Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee has held its first two meetings to help enhance the service's capability, culture and operations.

The committee consists of nine volunteer members from across Queensland, including a representative of Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland (RFBAQ) and a First Nations representative, along with four Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) senior officers.

It advises Acting Chief Officer Ben Millington on matters relevant to rural fire brigades and volunteer members, such as operations, membership, fleet, equipment, training and development.

Mr Millington said he received 41 nominations from people across the state, each of them passionate about having a say in creating an even better RFSQ.

"It was fantastic to have such a depth of talent and experience to consider," Mr Millington said.

"With more than 230 years' combined experience represented on the committee, I know the collective knowledge, expertise and

wisdom will help guide decisions to enhance the operations and culture of RFSQ and champion this great organisation."

Matthew Walker from Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade (RFB) said it was an honour and privilege to be named as a committee member.

"This is an important opportunity to bring issues, challenges and opportunities to the table and enhance operations across the state," Matthew said. "We want to contribute to building a strong organisation that is trusted and relied on by the community."

"This is an important opportunity to bring issues, challenges and opportunities to the table and enhance operations across the state."

- Matthew Walker

At its first meetings in June and September, the committee discussed culture and behaviour, brigade model rules, training, uniforms, the 2025 RFSQ Volunteer Summits, results of the Group Arrangements Survey, the RFSQ Fleet Review and Strategy and the Fire Incident Management System.

Mr Millington said the meetings fostered a collaborative atmosphere where everyone's experiences and thoughts were valued and all contributions were considered.

"The group was very positive and eager to make a difference in RFSQ," he said.

Committee members (starting from back left)

Ian Pike AFSM

RFBAQ Representative

Ian is the President of the RFBAQ and has been an RFSQ member for 44 years. He is the First Officer of Federal RFB and the Noosa Group Officer. Ian has attended several major incidents including the Peregian and Cooroibah fires.

Matthew Walker

South Eastern Regional Representative (District 1)

Matthew has been volunteering for seven years and is the First Officer of Coomera Valley RFB. He has attended several large events including the Sarabah Fire in 2019 and has been Incident Controller at many local fires.



Motivations for joining the committee

"I want to be on the committee to represent the views of volunteers from the grassroots on issues and decisions that affect them and to give accurate feedback to the senior leadership of RFSQ."

"To encourage our younger members to step up to responsible positions and develop their leadership skills. To ensure our appliances match the needs of our brigades and firefighters and to develop education for the community about their responsibilities around fire and weather events."

"I am a very passionate and proactive recruiter for the RFSQ and I want to ensure the onboarding and retention processes and training of volunteers are considered. I want to help build something greater than great!"

"To make a difference and build a better RFSQ."

"I want to be part of improving the experience for all RFSQ members, not just in south-east Queensland. The service provides so much to the community and I want to ensure RFSQ continues to strengthen and be forever trusted and relied upon by the community."





David McConnell

Northern Region Volunteer (District 2)

David has been with RFSQ for more than a decade and is a member of Tinaroo RFB. He has been deployed to many events including the North Queensland Floods in 2019. His roles include Peer Support Officer, Volunteer Community Educator and Sector Commander.

Jim Besgrove AFSM

Northern Region Volunteer (District 1)

Jim is the First Officer of Rangewood RFB, a Level 3 Incident Controller and a member of the Northern Regional Operations Support Group. He has been volunteering for 15 years and received the RFSQ Volunteer of the Year Award in 2011.

Fabian Stangherlin AFSM

South Eastern Regional Representative (District 2)

Currently the First Officer of Greenbank RFB, Fabian has been with RFSQ for 22 years. He was the incident controller during one of the longest campaign fires in Queensland and a member of strike teams and task forces including in the ACT.

Barbara Ryan

South Western Regional Representative (District 1)

A volunteer with 10 years under her belt, Barbara is the Volunteer Community Educator at the Ravensbourne-Perseverance RFB. She's been on several deployments including the Peachey fire in 2019.

Sally Rowen

South Western Regional Representative (District 2)

Sally has been with RFSQ for more than a decade and is the Secretary, Training Officer and Volunteer Community Educator of Broadwater Amiens RFB. Her previous deployments include Canberra and the Brisbane Floods in 2022.

Craig Smith

Central Regional Volunteer (District 1)

Currently First Officer of Aldershot RFB, Craig has been volunteering for 15 years. His previous deployments include flood clean-ups throughout Queensland and the 2019-20 bushfire season in NSW.

Colin Weeks

Central Region Volunteer (District 2)

Colin has been with RFSQ for more than 30 years and is the First Officer, Secretary and Treasurer of South Ulam RFB. He has been a Group Officer for more than six years and is Secretary of the Fitzroy Group, as well as a Volunteer Community Educator.

Ben Millington

Acting Chief Officer and Chair

Ben served in the NSW Police Force for more than 10 years before joining the NSW RFS in 2011 and was the State Operations Controller during the 2019-20 NSW bushfires. His distinctions include the National Emergency Medal, National Medal, NSW Premier's Bushfire Emergency Citation and Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal.

Fiona Quirk

Area Manager, Central West

Fiona is a member of Seaforth Town RFB and draws on 21 years of experience with RFSQ, during which time she progressed through the ranks from Brigade Training Officer to Brigade Support Officer. She has worked in RFSQ offices across the state.

Wayne Waltisbuhl (not pictured)

Assistant Chief Officer, Charlton District

Wayne has more than 40 years' experience with RFSQ as a staff member. He is also a member of Gowrie Little Plain RFB. Wayne was awarded the NSW Premier's Bushfire Citation in 2021 and the National Emergency Medal in 2017.

Chloe Swiney (not pictured)

First Nations Representative

Chloe has been with RFSQ for five years and is currently the Acting Area Manager, Cape York. Her substantive role is Bushfire Mitigation Officer (First Nations), Northern Region. Chloe has been instrumental in the Women's Integrated Training Exchange Project, deploying to California in 2022 and Canada in 2023.

Karen Hodges AFSM (not pictured)

Deputy Chief Officer

Karen was a volunteer and staff member with NSW RFS for more than 30 years. Her extensive experience includes her role as an Incident Controller for the Gaspers Mountain fire, which burnt more than 500,000 hectares in 2019-20.

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BUILDING BONDS AT HINDU FESTIVAL

To celebrate Multicultural Month, firefighters from Taigum Fire and Rescue Station took part in Raksha Bandhan, a traditional Hindu festival.

About 40 members of the local Hindu community spent the morning sharing cultural practices and traditions. In return, the crew gave fire safety tips, showed everyone their truck and explained its equipment.

The festival was facilitated by Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), a non-profit organisation that promotes Hindu values through family programs including games, songs and lessons on Hindu culture.

Raksha Bandhan, which translates as ‘bond of protection’, historically focused on rejuvenating connections between friends and siblings. According to HSS, the festival is also a chance for the community to show their appreciation to public servants – including firefighters, police officers, paramedics and community volunteers – for their dedication to keeping people safe.

Station Officer Ben Martin said the crew hoped to make the festival an annual event in their calendar.

“The group leaders welcomed us and everyone came together in a circle,” Ben said. “Members of HSS applied a tilaka (a dot on our foreheads from a red-orange powder) while blessing us, then tied a protection bond around our wrists.

“The protection bond symbolises that we look out for each other in our families, friendships and communities. I was asked to say a few words, and I expressed that we feel privileged in our roles as firefighters.

“The meaning of the festival – protection of each other and the values of brotherhood-and-sisterhood – resonates with us and aligns with our service. As a crew we’re always looking out for each other and protecting each other, and that extends to the greater brother- and sisterhood of the Queensland Fire Department and the entire emergency services family.

“People had a lot of questions about how our equipment works and issues we have when responding, such as making our way through traffic and accessing water. We also spoke with people about what we do and how we spend our shifts.

“Several people asked about our decision-making processes when at incidents and we discussed opportunities with a few of the older children about how to join QFD.”

The community presented the crew with a beautiful box of traditional Indian sweets.

“I’ve spent significant time in India over many visits, but I wasn’t aware of this festival,” Ben said.

“It was a genuine honour to be welcomed by the members of HSS. We all loved being involved in something none of us had experienced before.”



FIREFIGHTER'S ROAD TO RECOVERY

After three decades of rescuing people from road crashes, Senior Firefighter David McCrindle was in a crash himself. His emergency services colleagues came to his aid.

David has responded to many road crash rescues (RCR), including several head-on collisions with trucks, since he joined the State Emergency Service (SES) in Gatton in 1995.

“We provided lighting, traffic control, helicopter landing zones, casualty assistance, body retrieval and scene clean-up,” David said.

He later moved to Mount Isa and became an auxiliary firefighter in 2001 and a permanent firefighter in 2007.

“There are many complexities in responding to RCRs as a remote, standalone station. Mount Isa is a small community and it’s always possible to see family and friends involved in incidents.”

In September 2023, David was on a road trip with friends from the Mount Isa Harley Owner Group (HOG) to the annual HOG rally in Adelaide.

“On the first day we travelled from Mount Isa to the Barkly Homestead in the Northern Territory,” David said.

“At 3.30pm we were about an hour west of Camooweal, travelling at about 130 kilometres an hour, when my bike ran off the side of the road. I remember fighting the bike and trying to keep it upright until I hit a lump in the long grass.

“When my friends reached me, my helmet had been split and ripped off my head, I’d taken my jacket off and I was kneeling on the ground over a pool of blood from my head wound. They managed to put me in the recovery position on my good side.”

Time stands still

There was no mobile service in the area, but a passing road train stopped and let David’s friends use their satellite phone to call for help. The driver gave David water and a blanket and stayed on scene until he was transported.

“As a patient, time stands still and your recollection is really limited until you start your recovery in hospital,” David said.

“By the time help arrived I’d been drifting in and out of consciousness for a couple of hours, which I would continue doing for a few days in hospital.”

Two ambulances arrived, along with a Mt Isa LifeFlight helicopter with a Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) critical care flight paramedic.

“I had difficulty breathing from five broken ribs and a punctured lung, so they gave me oxygen and pain relief,” David said. “I really appreciated their professionalism and knowledge. Once they were on scene, I knew I could relax and go with the flow.”

At 6pm, a Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) plane with a doctor and flight nurse touched down at the Avon Downs airstrip 20 kilometres up the road. Once the paramedics had stabilised David, they drove him to the plane.

“They transferred me to the RFDS stretcher system with all its monitors and equipment, and the system automatically loaded me into the plane,” David said.

“RFDS planes are small to start with and as a casualty they’re even smaller, but they’re an amazing piece of equipment. I was able to lay back and let the doctor and nurse take care of me, and we arrived at the Mount Isa Base Hospital around midnight.

“The whole casualty management — from the time they arrived on scene right through until I was handed over to hospital staff — was amazing.

“There were many complexities: distance, location, time, communications. Normally an incident like this would be completed in a matter of minutes, but my friends had to look after me as a casualty for an extended period.

“Since there was no mobile service, my family weren’t notified until the RFDS crew rang my wife on the way to Mount Isa. She was out of town and had to organise for my daughter to meet the ambulance at the hospital.”

Healing in stages

On top of broken ribs and a punctured lung, David sustained a brain injury and a hematoma on his right hip.

“My recovery was slow,” he said. “I spent 10 days in hospital, including six in ICU before I was transferred to the surgical ward. It took six to eight weeks for my ribs to heal enough for me to lie on my right side.

“Once I’d gotten out of hospital my sinuses started to bleed and I had mental health issues. I found out later this was caused by concussion syndrome, where my brain moved inside my head and caused a tear behind my sinuses as well as impacting my mental health. I’ve since learnt that the body heals in stages, concentrating on major issues first — chest, head and then the rest of the body.

“I was four months off work recovering both mentally and physically. My bike didn’t recover and sadly I had to replace it.

“With the mental health issues, I was feeling overwhelmed and often could only sit outside on the veranda to try and process things. I eventually sought medical help because too many people, noise and information overload were causing me issues.

“Once I was diagnosed with concussion syndrome, things started to fall into place and time helped me heal. I sought counselling and, as a firefighter who is always in control and very active, I had to learn to slow down and be the patient. One of the mottos I had to learn was ‘This is all you can do at this time’.”

Finding closure

David said he was lucky to have a close family to support him.

“My wife, children, grandchildren and brother visited me as many times as they could during my hospital recovery,” he said. “My Inspector Jarrod Olivero, my crew and other members of my QFD family came to check on me.

“I found it hard to be off work because of the disconnect, especially since I view my involvement in emergency services as a life choice rather than a job.

“My crew responded to a large grass fire with structures threatened while I was in hospital and all I could do was watch the smoke build from the window in my room. The most frustrating part was not being able to help, especially during larger incidents in the area.

“To return to work, I had to be signed off by doctors at the hospital, as well as QFD doctors. I returned to non-operational

daywork in January and by the end of the month the hospital reviewed my case and discharged me, and I got clearance from the QFD doctors to work operationally, starting with day shifts.

“It was therapeutic but I was also cautious, not wanting to aggravate things. I’ve since performed CPR at several fatal motorbike crashes.

“After one of those incidents, a friend from the Queensland Police Service pulled me aside and asked how I was. I appreciated the gesture, but until then it hadn’t entered my thought process. It’s a box that is closed, and I have moved on.”

When David got out of hospital, he tried to drive out to the scene of the accident but couldn’t find it.

“However, we dropped in to see the Avon Downs police officers and Camooweal Hospital nursing staff who attended the scene,” he said.

“At work I often speak to the LifeFlight and RFDS crews. During my recovery I ran into the LifeFlight paramedic, Jake Graham, in town. I later caught up with Jake and the RFDS Doctor, Shima Ghedia, which helped give closure to everyone involved.”



MATESHIP IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY

Competition between QFD and Queensland Police Service was fierce at this year's annual 9/11 Commemorative Sports Day event.

Now in its 13th year, the sports day is held to mark the events on September 11, 2001 in New York City where 3000 lives were lost, including 412 emergency service workers.

Event organiser and Station Officer Cameron Mackenzie said it was important to recognise our emergency service friends in New York.

"In firefighting we consider ourselves a family. We are not peers, colleagues or work pals – we are family," Cam said.

"That concept extends through your shift, stations, town, region, state and even across the country and sometimes around the world.

"When you hear about an injured firefighter, no matter where they are, you feel it and you understand the pain and emotion that comes with it.

"When the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) lost 343 firefighters, it was nearly impossible to fathom.

"Prior to our sports day, we did not have anything official to recognise the sacrifice they made for their citizens when called up.

They stood tall without hesitation and in doing so, epitomise bravery for firefighters around the world."

Cam said sport brings people together and promotes the values of teamwork, reliability, courage and loyalty.

"Those qualities in team sports cross over to being a good first responder – whether that's a paramedic, police officer, firefighter or defence force personnel.

"Normally, we only see each other in passing at critical incidents, so the sports day gives participants a chance to have fun and play the sport they love against people they respect.

"We had special guests attend this year's event, retired FDNY firefighter Steve Orr and his wife Jill.

"Steve spoke to teams before their events and gave an insight into his journey on 9/11 and the friends he lost.

"He was part of the FDNY football team, the FDNY Bravest. They tragically lost 22 squad members on 9/11.

"The QFD rugby league team have been in contact with Steve for the past 10 years. It was a huge honour to have him and his wife attend our event, which honours their friends."

Pickleball was added to the rotation this year, joining soccer, cricket, rugby league, rugby union, Aussie Rules, basketball and grappling.

"We won nine out of the 11 sports we competed in," Cam said. "The basketball team had their first win over Queensland Police Service and the rugby league squad also had a win.

"The highlight of the day is having our families and kids there having fun. Our role can be tough at times, but it's tougher on our families, and we don't get many chances to thank them for their support at home.

"As much as the day is about remembering those lost abroad and closer to home, it's also about thanking our loved ones for being so supportive."



RUBY AND BAILEY READY FOR ANYTHING

Volunteer Canine Handler Ruby Strauss and her dog Bailey are the newest additions to the K9 Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team.

After more than three years in training, the duo has qualified to join the other nine canine and handler teams in the AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team. The K9 USAR team are trained to deploy to disasters such as earthquakes to search for survivors in collapsed buildings or trapped under rubble.

“Bailey is a kelpie, a working dog with inexhaustible energy. We had to find something to keep her busy,” explained Ruby.

“We tried herding first, but that didn’t quite work out. Then we happened to come across the USAR team, who were looking for new dogs to join at the time. When we tried out it was a good fit for Bailey and we haven’t looked back since.

“The team looks for confident dogs who love people and have a really strong desire to work. Bailey definitely ticks those boxes. She’s good fun and up for everything.”

Outside of USAR, Bailey enjoys running and kayaking with Ruby, who is a researcher in healthcare and clinical sciences.

“Research is a rewarding career but it’s very much a desk job so it’s nice volunteering for the USAR team so I’m up on my feet more,” she said.

In the event of a disaster, the USAR canines and their handlers deploy with the rest of the AUS-1 DART team. Each year, QFD conducts a mock deployment of the entire deployable USAR team to ensure each of the search and rescue teams are mission ready.

“We teach our dogs to search almost independently for people in a disaster. Working alongside firefighters, paramedics and engineers, the dogs’ job is to let us know if they can smell someone trapped underground.

“Sometimes they need to search areas we can’t access easily, so if they do find someone the dogs are trained to bark continuously until we can reach them.

“We expose them to every possible scenario – all weather conditions, unstable surfaces, ladders and machinery. We also do a lot of obedience training to make sure they can work safely in an operational environment.

“It’s a massive commitment of time. We spend most weekends and a lot of time at home training and maintaining the skills we need to be ready for deployment.”

Ruby was proud when she and Bailey received their qualification.

“It’s been a lot of work to get to this point and it has been a huge team effort,” she said. “We are lucky to have a wonderful team of helpers and trainers who have devoted their time to help us improve. They’re a great team to work with.

“It’s rewarding to know we might be in a position where we could save someone’s life one day. That’s pretty special.”





+ AIRSHOW

The Rural Fire Service Queensland Specialist Services State Air Operations team participated in the 2024 Pacific Airshow on the Gold Coast.

Technical Rescue Coordinator Southern Region Mark Haddow ensured QFD's air response capabilities were on display to the crowd of more than 100,000 people over the weekend.

Executive Helicopters provided their AS350 Squirrel Air Attack Platform, McDermott Aviation provided a Bell 214B Helitak, and Precision Aerial provided two AirTractor AT-802 fixed-wing bombers.

This kind of tactical display is not typically seen by the public. The airshow provided an outstanding opportunity to demonstrate QFD's support for communities during bushfires.



+ BOLT AND KARA GET READY

Bolt and his owner Kara completed some special training to prepare them for search and rescue.

The duo are valued volunteers with the Disaster Assistance Response Team (AUS-1 DART). Bolt is seven years old and spent two years working with Kara and the AUS1-DART team to become a qualified Urban Search and Rescue dog. He can assist communities in need, both at home and overseas, after disasters.

Kara was excited to use the A++ training facilities at Charlton Hub, where the Queensland Fire and Rescue crew, with treats in hand, helped with different search and rescue scenarios. This training will assist Bolt with his advanced assessments.



+ CALOUNDRA SOUTH OPEN DAY

More than 1000 people came through the gates of the new fire, police and ambulance stations at the Caloundra South Emergency Services Precinct.

The Fire and Rescue Station and appliances were a hit not just with the little kids but the big ones too.

The community were treated to demonstrations of road crash rescue, kitchen fires and remotely piloted aircraft systems. They went on station tours, viewed a range of appliances and chatted with the crews.

Acting Deputy Commissioner John Cawcutt attended the event and thanked everyone who helped make the day a huge success.

The event was a collaborative effort with full-time and auxiliary crews from Sunshine Coast Division and Metro Division as well as staff from Kunda Park, Regional HQ, Commissioner's Office, Rural Fire Service Queensland and Queensland Fire and Rescue.



+ MOUNT COTTON ASKS ARE YOU OKAY?

Mount Cotton Fire and Rescue Station marked R U OK? Day with Senior Officers and crews, both on- and off-shift, coming together for a barbecue lunch and a spirited pickleball competition. The day served as a reminder to check in with yourself and your mates, fostering support and connection among the team.





+ MORETON BAY RESCUE TRAINING

With the arrival of a new U-tanker at Moreton Bay Central, the old 528V has been secured as a heavy rescue training prop.

This will enable on-shift crews to perform regular competency maintenance training on heavy rescue techniques including lifting with 50-tonne jacks, low-pressure and high-pressure lifting bags, power-shores, suspension blocking and strapping and cross chaining.

Many thanks to Inspector Leon Andrews for supporting this amazing increase in training capability.

+ HIGHFIELDS OPEN DAY

Highfields Fire and Rescue Station held an open day with an incredible turnout from the community thanks to the dedicated efforts of the auxiliary crew.

The event featured a wide array of stalls providing vital information on preparing homes for bushfire season, Safehome visits, community safety, road safety, and opportunities to become an auxiliary firefighter. The auxiliary firefighters proudly displayed three fire appliances and gave a road crash rescue demonstration. Children were thrilled with hands-on branch handling activities, tours of the appliance cabins, activity books and high fives with Blazer.

Special thanks to the Gowrie Little Plain and Cabarlah Rural Fire Brigades for bringing their fire appliances and sharing their expertise on bushfire preparedness. The Highfields Emergency Services Cadets also handed out information and operated the barbeque. A vintage fire appliance, kindly brought in by the Toowoomba Fire Brigade Historical Society, offered a fascinating glimpse into the history of firefighting.

The hard work and leadership of Lieutenants Peter Thornton and Emily Becker were instrumental in making the day a success.



+ KILCOY CELEBRATES 60 YEARS

For 60 years, the Kilcoy Fire and Rescue Station has served the local community and the beautiful Somerset region. Celebrations were held on 14 September for the 60th anniversary of the station opening. Former firefighters at the station, some who had served for 30 years, joined the festivities.

Special thanks to Assistant Commissioner Dave Hermann for his valuable time and kind words addressing the families, friends and crews who attended. Thank you to Captain Mark Edwards and his team for organising the morning.



+ FIRE SEASON FORUMS

Rural Fire Service Queensland in Fraser Coast Cooloola has been busy running Fire Season Forums for First Officers.

The forums were held in Gympie and Maryborough to help prepare our brigades for bushfire season. Presentations covered topics such as permits to light, investigation and scene preservation, Australian Warning System and fire season operations.

There was also a special presentation from the Bureau of Meteorology and State Air Operations Unit. The forums helped brigades to put their best foot forward this fire season.





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+ FESTIVALS AND SHOWS

QFD members have been out and about in their communities engaging with members of the public at festivals, shows and community days.

1. Rollingsstone Rural Fire Brigade took the opportunity to discuss the Australian Warning System, Australian Fire Danger Ratings and bushfire safety with their community at the annual Pineapple Festival on 31 August.
2. At this year's Quilpie Show, firefighters held a fire safety and recruitment display, identified potential new recruits and put on a kitchen fire demonstration.
3. Purono Park Rural Fire Brigade attended the St Anthony's Catholic College Winter Carnival on 23 August. With the support of Saunders Beach Rural Fire Brigade, the team spoke with community members about bushfire plans and fire danger ratings.
4. Mount Isa Queensland Fire and Rescue crews attended the Mount Isa Motor Show on 25 August and conducted a live road crash rescue demonstration.
5. The Charters Towers Rural Fire Brigade joined other community groups in August at Centenary Park for the annual Prospect Community Day.
6. Congratulations to Townsville Division Queensland Fire and Rescue personnel who participated in the McDonald's Townsville running festival. They ran in uniform in this annual event that started over 50 years ago as the Townsville Marathon.



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+ CONGRATULATIONS
R155

The Northern Region Emergency Services Complex celebrated the completion of Recruit Course 155 and welcomed new firefighters to the region.





+ NEW PUMPER TESTING AT BLACKALL

In late August, instructors from Blackall and Emerald conducted Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) training at Blackall Fire and Rescue Station, after receiving a new type 2 pumper.

The training enabled crews to enhance their pump skills, view the effectiveness of the pump during bushfire operations and test the CAFS operation using the artesian basin water supply.

The underground water supply in Western Queensland emerges at a temperature of about 83 degrees Celsius. Firefighters don't have hot-water systems and use cold-water systems to cool the supply.

The longer the water is pumped, the hotter it gets and in turn heats up the delivery lines and branches. At times, branch operators have worn dishwashing gloves over structural gloves to give relief from the heat.

The extreme heat can cause the formation of vapor bubbles in the pump and affect the firefighting stream, making it sputter. The heat can also melt the glue in the hose lines, allowing water to weep and leak.

The training used tank supply and reticulated supply and produced no real change in operation of the CAFS. The supply of superior quality foam production was evident when on reticulated supply.

Overall, the weekend was an immense success with thanks to Central Region Training, Troy Bowen, Bill Walker and Rowan O'Donoghue for organising and thanks to the members of Blackall Station who gave up their weekend to attend. Thank you to Blackall Tambo Regional Council for use of their facility.

+ BUNDABERG FIREFIGHTER HONOURED

Bundaberg Station Officer Graham Smith received the 2024 Brian Prince Award, a Rotary award recognising outstanding emergency services employees and volunteers.



Graham was nominated for his dedication and commitment in providing what can only be called exceptional leadership. Graham has a genuine interest in mentoring others and a passion for firefighter development.

+ WINGS AND WHEELS

Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) and Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) crews got amongst the action at Wings and Wheels, an annual car and plane show that raises funds for Community Flight.

Both services ran interactive displays, providing community education and an opportunity to show off what we do best.

QFR ran road crash rescue car cut-up demonstrations and RFSQ gave the community the opportunity to spray a fire hose with their new flame targets. It was a great day out for a good cause with a sea of Blazer and Bushy stickers to show for it.



Toowoomba Region is a multicultural hub, with more than 10 per cent of the population not born in Australia. Of that 10 per cent, five per cent speak a language other than English at home.

Through a collaboration with Toowoomba TAFE, Charlton Fire and Rescue Station staff welcomed a group of English language students to promote fire safety and the work of our firefighters. These visits are beneficial as many refugees have limited access to education about emergency and fire preparedness and prevention. Breaking down these barriers through an interactive experience gives the students memorable skills to help reduce fire risk in their homes.



1. Craignish Fire and Rescue Station hosted a road crash rescue demonstration for Emergency Services Cadets.
2. Auxiliary firefighters from Caloundra Fire and Rescue Station demonstrated their skills to students from Caloundra Christian College for their Foundations Day celebrations.
3. Team QFD at the Brisbane Pride March 2024.
4. Rural Fire Service Queensland members engaged with senior leaders at a townhall in Eton.
5. When Kim Probert graduated as an auxiliary firefighter, her Polynesian community suggested she have the Tualima tattooed on her hand, featuring the diamond titled Malu. In Māori and Samoan cultures, these symbols represent her journey and accomplishments as a protector of family and community.



- 6. A record five K9 Urban Search and Rescue teams recently passed the Mission Readiness Test, with one team passing the Advanced Operational Assessment.
- 7. Air Base Operators from Rural Fire Service Queensland practised supporting our aerial firefighting fleet in Toowoomba.
- 8. Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteer member Haylie Powell and Queensland Fire and Rescue firefighter Aly Bull celebrated their Paris Olympics experience together at the Queensland Olympic and Paralympic Welcome Home Dinner in Brisbane.
- 9. Queensland Fire and Rescue auxiliary firefighters on Thursday Island wearing QFD's new First Nations polo shirt.
- 10. Queensland Fire and Rescue firefighters shared safety tips with families at the Ekka.





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