

# RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT DECEMBER 2024



**STAND FIRM**  
Keeping bushfires at bay

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Members of Orange Hill Rural Fire Brigade fought a large bushfire at Muckadilla in November. Photo by Tim Bateup.

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

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## SPOTLIGHT

### MATT WALKER: TRUE DEDICATION

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# FOREWORDS



**STEVE SMITH AFSM**

**Commissioner**

**QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT**

This has been a momentous year for our department as we took on our new identity of QFD, while continuing to deliver emergency services to communities during fires, storms and floods.

From Tropical Cyclones Jasper and Kirrily and the Gold Coast storms in January to the bushfires still burning across Queensland, our people have lent a hand on people's worst days.

I want to thank our Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) volunteer and staff members and Queensland Fire and Rescue staff for their ongoing commitment to keeping communities safe this bushfire season. You can read some of their stories on page 4.

On page 10 is the incredible story of four firefighters who rescued a casualty from floodwaters on a remote road, showing great courage in an almost impossible situation. They recently received bravery awards for their efforts.

Congratulations also to RFSQ volunteer Matt Walker, profiled on page 29, for being recognised in the Dedication category of the QBANK Everyday Heroes Awards.

The Hazard and Risk Unit were recently selected to participate in the National Hazards Research Australia (NHRA's) annual disaster challenge. Their selection was a coup for the team and allowed them to showcase how government can innovate to mitigate risks and hazards. Read more about the team challenge on page 27.

Workplace health and safety is one of my highest priorities so I'm pleased the scope of cancers deemed to be work-related for firefighters in Queensland was recently expanded. We now have the most comprehensive workers' compensation scheme for firefighters in Australia.

The presumptive legislation helps firefighters access workers' compensation for 23 types of cancer – a great step forward for supporting our people through a very difficult time. For insights into what this process is like, you can read the stories of two cancer survivors on page 12.

The Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) program has been expanded to reach more young people in regional and remote communities and other settings such as youth justice and detention centres.

It's great to see young people in the regions learning safe attitudes and behaviours on the road thanks to this fantastic program. Read more about RAAP on page 18.

The Working for Queensland (WfQ) survey has given us valuable feedback, which we are now taking steps to address. Your feedback is informing our decision-making at an organisational level and conversations around the survey results are ongoing.



**ADAM STEVENSON**

**Chief Operating Officer**

**STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

With the swearing in of the new government's ministry, Ministerial Charter Letters have been published detailing the government's core values and deliverables for each portfolio.

For Minister Ann Leahy and QFD, key deliverables include ensuring adequate resourcing and maintenance of infrastructure and assets, and delivering effective communications technology across QFD and other frontline agencies to boost response capabilities.

We will also strengthen fire management and community safety by investing in new fire and rescue stations in key areas, expanding digital fire signage and supporting local resources such as light attack vehicles.

The new government also made several election commitments relating to QFD's operations, both frontline and departmental, which are currently being worked through with central agencies. Once finalised, these will be subject to ongoing reporting and tracking by government.

Since the start of this financial year we have bolstered our capability by delivering dozens of appliances, including 23 replacement Rural Fire Service Queensland appliances and 10 Queensland Fire and Rescue appliances. This includes a range of vehicles, from medium-attack to 12,000-litre tankers, Type 2 and Type 3 appliances to improve service delivery across the state.

Following the independent review of QFD's complaints management system (CMS), QFD has established the CMS Review Implementation Program to implement the review's recommendations, including translating outcomes to the operational environment.

QFD will develop a detailed implementation plan including actions against the 33 recommendations that QFD accepted in principle.

Kristen Hilton, former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, has been appointed to undertake quarterly reviews of the implementation's progress.

The IT Directorate recently moved 82 positions from Queensland Police Service to QFD and launched our new IT service centre, paired with a new service management platform called ServiceNow.

This platform is used by other government agencies in Australia and many businesses around the world and behind-the-scenes work has ensured it is easy to use and meets all the department's needs.

Our people are doing a great job in adopting the new platform, which is an important step in the journey of controlling our IT services – just for QFD.

# FIRE AND ASH

Our volunteer members have kept communities safe in northern and western Queensland, where bushfires are still burning.

**W**hile this bushfire season has been quieter than previous ones, Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) volunteer members have deployed at short notice to fight fires, often working tirelessly into the night.

Crews have battled bushfires in the western parts of South West Region (Dirranbandi), in the far north near Pentland (west of Townsville and Charters Towers), near Mt Isa and most recently near Cloncurry.

In the south-east, continuous rainfall is ending the bushfire season but will increase already high fuel loads for next year's season.

The bushfires have highlighted the resilience of our communities and their ability to join together and help each other out.

RFSQ volunteer members, Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) staff and our partners, along with QFD staff and community members behind the scenes, have put in a tremendous amount of work to keep the fires contained.

## **Defending communities**

Dalby Area Manager Ross Stacey said his area had experienced several fires in the Western Downs and Goondiwindi area in previous years.





Firefighters battled intense fires in the north and southwest.

“This year we’ve had more of a routine approach with smaller jobs, as opposed to larger campaign-style fires, partly because the fuel state hasn’t been as dry,” Ross said.

“A few storms have moved across our patch and started fires with lightning strikes, but we wrapped them up pretty quickly.

“My role is supporting brigades with operational demands and scaling up or down as required. When a fire exceeds local resources, my team and I go out to support with command and control. As things ramp up we move into incident management roles to help manage the fire as best we can.

“This year we established an Incident Command Centre in Dalby to manage fires in Montrose, Kinkora State Forest and the Kenya gas fields.

“Kinkora had the most active fire behaviour, burning just under 5000 hectares. Fighting it was a combined effort for deployed resources, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and local primary producer brigades.

“Fortunately the fire was surrounded by freehold land where we could construct containment lines. Aircraft and heavy machinery were fundamental in controlling all the fires.

“We don’t have a lot of resources and people because we’re a regional area, but our volunteer members are very valuable and the community would be lost without their efforts.

“We’ve had several big fires in the last few years and our volunteer members and auxiliary firefighters continue to show up and defend their communities.

“We greatly appreciate those people who deploy and leave their families and other jobs to come and support us in the region. It allows the locals a bit of respite and a chance to take their breath.”

### Putting in the hard yards

Matt Finch, First Officer of Bowenville Rural Fire Brigade and Deputy Group Officer of Rosalie-Jandowae Group, said his area had mainly seen grass fires this year.

“They were short-lived campaigns, about two or three days, but the fires were very fast and hot and conditions changed quickly,” Matt said.

“We haven’t seen many large bushfires like last year, because we had a lot of good winter rain and late summer rain that grew a lot of grass and raised the soil moisture.”

Matt travelled to Graymere to join the Incident Control team at a large fire.

**“Our volunteer members are very valuable and the community would be lost without their efforts.”**

– Ross Stacey

“The fire was in mainly grass country but some timber,” he said. “It was inaccessible rocky country that made the fire difficult to access, so we used aircraft, both helicopters and fixed-wing, to slow and contain it. We put fire breaks in more open country to control it.

“There was a lot of hard work from local crews and the strike teams who came in from other areas.

“I’m a grain and cotton farmer, and the fires started in the middle of our very busy harvest season, so it’s difficult to leave our work harvesting to help others.

“During harvest we normally work 12- to 14-hour days. Once the grain’s dry, especially with the recent rain and storms, we try to harvest it as quickly as we can to make sure it’s not downgraded by weather.

“In our own area, fallen powerlines started a few crop fires that were short-lived but very intense.

“A lot of our winter crops aren’t covered by insurance because of the cost. If one of those fires burnt 50 hectares, for example, the owner would lose five tonnes per hectare, which at \$300 per tonne would add up to about \$75,000.

“Volunteers are putting in a huge amount of hours this year to help out landholders affected by fires, and many crews from other areas have come in as strike teams.

“Our brigade is small and we train once a month. In the leadup to this season, we ensured our vehicles were well maintained and ready to go, and we did scenario training to get new members thinking about what needs to happen when we turn up at a fire.”



RFSQ and QFR ground crews, with support from QFD aerial assets, worked to control a large bushfire at Cloncurry that burned more than 300,000 hectares.



A Strike Team of six trucks and 10 QFR personnel from Townsville helped crews contain a fire burning between Einasleigh and Forsyth.



Firefighters in the Western Downs battled a large bushfire in the Kinkora State Forest.



Crews protected the township of Mt Garnet from a fast-moving bushfire.



Crews in the far north called on a team of fixed-wing and rotary water bombers to help save people and property from bushfires.



A strike team of eight RFSQ volunteers from the Sunshine Coast travelled to north Queensland to help contain a large bushfire at Upper Silver Valley.



A fire in Muckadilla, near Roma, started from a dry lightning strike. Thanks to a combined effort from crews and local machinery, the fire was fully contained within three hours. Photo courtesy of Orange Hill Rural Fire Brigade.



A Black Hawk helicopter relocated from Bundaberg to Mareeba at the start of November to help RFSQ brigades with frequent bushfires.



About 50 personnel worked to contain a bushfire in Forsyth in north Queensland.



Crews worked around the clock to complete back burning, mapping and containment lines for a fire at Upper Silver Valley.



In mid-November, a high Fire Danger Rating was in place for large parts of the state, reaching extreme for Channel Country. Photo courtesy of Orange Hill Rural Fire Brigade.

# LOOKING BACK ON 2024

This year we established ourselves as the Queensland Fire Department, while fulfilling our operational duties of fighting fires and storms, deploying overseas to help other nations and engaging with our community.

**A**t the start of 2024, staff and volunteers were out working with communities in the wake of cyclones and storms, including Tropical Cyclone (TC) Jasper in Far Northern Region.

Severe storms and flash flooding hit the Gold Coast, Logan and Scenic Rim on Christmas Day and again on New Year's Day, leaving around 130,000 people without power.

The state's north had not yet recovered from Jasper when TC Kirrily crossed the coast on 25 January, bringing more than a metre of rain. More than 200 staff and volunteers were deployed to assist.

In mid-February, TC Lincoln soaked already saturated areas around the Gulf and added to flooding in Queensland's far north and west.

## Becoming QFD

Despite the busy operational start to the year, we continued to implement the reforms and shape who we are and how we operate as QFD.

On 3 June, SES transitioned to the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and QFD's four-region model came into place, with eight corporate hubs supporting the

regions. It was the beginning of our new chapter with a new name, new structures and renewed focus.

Other milestones included developing our new branding and simplified governance structure and preparing for our move to the new QFD State Headquarters in Albion.

In May, Steve Smith was appointed as QFD Commissioner following the departure of Commissioner Greg Leach in October 2023. Commissioner Smith brought a vision of a more engaged and better connected QFD with improved partner relationships.

The QFD Foundation Forums in July brought together 700 senior and emerging leaders to exchange ideas, make new connections and embrace the opportunities ahead. Participants discussed the department's vision, purpose and strategic priorities, taking away a sense of optimism and readiness to embrace change.

Many new and continuing initiatives focused on staff and volunteer development, providing role clarity and accountability, along with QFD's approaches to engagement.

The RFSQ Advisory Committee also held their first meetings to provide advice to the RFSQ Chief Officer on matters relevant to rural fire brigades and volunteer members.

QFD's new governance model includes a new Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to guide and lead the department. The appointment of John Cawcutt AFSM as Chief Fire Officer rounded out the establishment of the SLT in September.

## In the community

As always, engaging with the community was an integral part of our work.

The QFD Every Step Counts team took part in the annual Darkness to Daylight challenge in May, walking 110 kilometres to raise funds for Domestic and Family Violence prevention.

At the inaugural Girls Firefighter Experience Camp, a group of girls from years 9 and 10 spent a weekend in June exploring the life of a firefighter. The girls saw demonstrations at Whyte Island including road crash rescue (RCR), volunteer canines and Urban Search and Rescue.

QFD hosted several initiatives around NAIDOC Week in July, including traditional burning workshops as part of the First Nations Fire Training Program supported by NAB Foundation. As a Queensland Government Champion, Commissioner Smith travelled to the First Nations community of Coen to announce funding for the Coen Arts Precinct.



The Girls Firefighter Experience Camp gave young girls the chance to explore a career as a firefighter.



RFSQ members joined partners at a First Nations Fire Training Program workshop in Cairns.



AUS-1 DART deployed to PNG to help local authorities respond to a landslide.





About 700 QFD members came together at the Foundation Forums.

The annual 9/11 Commemorative Sports Day drew a large crowd this year, with QFD teams playing against our QPS colleagues. The day marks the events on 11 September 2001 in New York City where 3000 lives were lost, including 412 emergency service workers.

Six firefighters from Papua New Guinea Fire Service travelled to Australia to undergo RCR training at Bracken Ridge Fire and Rescue Station. The firefighters completed QFD's 40-hour RCR course, allowing them to conduct rescues and instruct other firefighters in PNG.

### Honouring those lost

On 25 February, QFD marked two years since the passing of SES volunteer Merryll Dray, who tragically died while responding to the 2022 Queensland floods.

On 2 May 2024, we marked one year since the loss of First Class Firefighter Izabella (Izzy) Nash at a Slacks Creek factory fire. The Commissioner accompanied Izzy's family to the National Emergency Services Memorial in Canberra where Izzy's family received an Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) memorial medallion and her name was added to the Memorial Wall.

QFD also commemorated the 30th anniversary of the tragic Southport Honda fire where Sub-Station Officer Herbert Fennell and Firefighter Noel Watson paid the ultimate sacrifice. This year, Gold Coast Zone coordinated a memorial service at Cascade Gardens, next to the Surfers Paradise Fire and Rescue Station.

### Supporting PNG and Canada

Staff and volunteer members participated in two major overseas deployments to help other nations in their time of need.

Australia's Disaster Assistance Response Team (AUS-1 DART) deployed to PNG in



QFD staff and volunteers responded to calls for assistance across the south-east.

May to help local authorities respond to a landslide that buried the village of Yambali under six to eight metres of soil. The United Nations originally estimated 670 lives were lost, but the figure was later revised to 2000. AUS-1 DART supported the disaster response through incident management, logistics, damage assessments, drone operations and mapping, and delivery of humanitarian relief supplies.

Canada experienced another devastating wildfire season and QFD staff and volunteer members deployed to support local crews. When they arrived in late July, around 750 wildfires were burning across the country, with more than seven million hectares burnt. They faced many hazards and logistical challenges with a professionalism that was greatly appreciated by Canadian crews.

### Taking action

This year was also a time to reaffirm the department's core values and expectations of how staff and volunteers should conduct themselves.

Commissioner Smith and the executive team reinforced that inappropriate conduct, discrimination, sexism and bullying were unacceptable.

After an independent review of QFD's complaints management system, QFD developed an implementation plan for the recommendations. Kristen Hilton, who chairs the Emergency Services Champions of Change Network and is a former Equal Opportunity Human Rights Commissioner, was appointed to monitor progress of the implementation.

The department also established the Sexual Harassment Contact Officer Network to provide information, support and resources for all QFD staff and volunteers.

QFD does not tolerate poor behaviour and anyone who has experienced it is



Taskforce Bravo in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Jasper.

encouraged to raise their concerns and lodge a complaint.

Since 2015, Queensland legislation has deemed certain cancers to be work-related for firefighters. In August 2024, Queensland Parliament passed amendments to expand the scope of cancers and Queensland now has the most comprehensive Workers' Compensation scheme for firefighters in Australia.

This will help firefighters access workers' compensation more quickly, removing unnecessary stress from an already difficult time.

### Bushfire operations

Bushfire season officially started on 1 August, but Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) volunteer members and staff had already done plenty of work to reduce bushfire risks and prepare brigades. In collaboration with partner agencies, they completed more than 470 hazard reduction burns.

Since early in the season, crews have battled hundreds of fast-moving bush and grass fires across the state. RFSQ and Queensland Fire and Rescue personnel have dedicated thousands of hours to fighting the blazes, including major fires in areas such as Mount Garnet, Dirrinbandi, Graymare, Torrens Creek, Muckadilla, Kinkora and Forsayth.

Thank you to all staff and volunteer members for your hard work in 2024. QFD will continue to face new challenges as Queensland's climate, technology and population change, but we will continue to improve what we do and how we do it so we can meet these challenges head-on.

# EYE OF THE STORM

Four firefighters from Emerald and Capella received bravery awards for rescuing a driver from raging floodwaters.

**O**n an October night in 2022, severe storms led to flash flooding across the region. A courier driver delivering spare parts to a local mine approached a creek crossing that had been dry for as long as most people could remember. She turned a corner and drove headlong into floodwaters.

“She was in the creek before she knew there was water in it,” said Emerald Auxiliary Lieutenant Bill Walker.

“I got permission to borrow a mine’s rescue truck, a high-clearance 4x4 rescue truck. There were so many creek crossings, it was the only way we could reach her.

“A chopper couldn’t rescue her because of the storm. SES boats were more than two hours away. Our technical rescue crews are based on the coast and couldn’t get past the flooded roads. We were the only option.”

The truck could hold six people: Bill and his fellow Auxiliary Lieutenant Tyronne Meredith, Capella Auxiliary Firefighters Brendan Langtry and Ashleigh Topfer, Queensland Police Service (QPS) Officer Rod Mins and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) Officer Luke Meredith.

“We left Emerald around 7pm and it took us about an hour and a half to reach her,” Bill said. “We had to stop and rescue a man who was stuck in rising floodwaters on the main highway to Capella.

“When we reached the creek where her ute was submerged, we got out and tried to find her. The river was about 30 metres wide, totally flooded out.

“It wasn’t looking good. The radio calls from FireCom were saying the water was up to her chest, her neck.

“We heard her scream out from down-river but we couldn’t see her. She told us she couldn’t hang on any longer.”

Tyronne walked through the bush and found her about 50 metres downstream from the crossing. Her ute had gone nose down and the flow was pushing her against the last corner of the tray above water.

“I set up the truck’s light mast and got out the lifejackets and rope bags,” Bill said. “We were still in the middle of a storm with thunder and lightning and near-total darkness.

“There was no way we could reach her with the water flowing so fast, so we had to throw a rope bag. While I manoeuvred through the trees to get close enough, Rod lit the way with a torch and Tyronne went downstream to set up another safety in case something went wrong.

“Thankfully I threw the rope bag to her first go. She managed to grab it and we told her to tie it around her waist, but she was so fatigued she just kept saying, ‘I’m going to let go’.

“She didn’t have the strength to keep holding onto the rope, but because she was holding onto the last piece of the submerged ute, she couldn’t let go to tie the rope around herself. I told her to wrap it around her hand.

“She fell into the water and disappeared. I pulled on the rope as quickly as I could and hoped like hell she was still hanging on.

“She appeared briefly downstream with the rope in her hands and I managed to get into the shallow water and grab hold of her shirt. With my other hand I held onto a gumtree on the bank.

“Her shirt was ripping from the force of the water. Rod grabbed her arm. I had to hold her head above water because she was





*From left to right: Division Commander Chief Superintendent Steve Smith, Kestrel CHPP Manager Derek Wilson, Capella firefighter Brendan Langtry, Capella firefighter Ashleigh Topfer, Emerald Lieutenant Bill Walker, Emerald Lieutenant Tyronne Meredith, Capella QAS Officer Luke Meredith and Assistant Commissioner Gary McCormack.*

being forced under. We couldn't pull her out so Brendan and Tyronne came to help and we all held onto the gumtree."

The crew realised the casualty was tangled in a half-submerged barbed wire fence that went across the river.

"Someone got the pliers off the rescue truck and Brendan duck-dived under the water to cut the wire," Bill said.

"He couldn't reach it all, so we passed the pliers to each other around the tree. Someone handed them to me and I reached down through the water to try to cut more wire.

"Finally we cut her free and got her out of the water while holding each other to make sure no one else got swept out.

"We felt sheer relief when we got her to the bank. In the blink of an eye we'd gone from thinking she'd been killed to saving her."

The casualty could no longer stand so the crew carried her through 100 metres of scrub to the truck, where QAS Officer Luke

Meredith – Tryonne's brother – treated her for exposure to the cold and extreme exhaustion.

"Everyone was a bit cut up from the barbed wire and we had to sit through a cold night waiting for the creeks behind us to go down," Bill said. "We didn't make it back to Emerald until 6.30am.

"We tried to do everything by procedure and follow our training and it all paid off. It was a combined effort with all local emergency services working together."

The firefighters were presented with bravery awards by Assistant Commissioner Gary McCormack and Divisional Commander Steve Smith.

"It was surprising and very humbling to receive the award," Bill said. "We don't do it for the awards but it's always nice to get something to say you did a good job.

"The whole crew did exceedingly well. Everyone went above and beyond that night."

# PROTECT YOURSELF FROM CANCER

*Response* sat down with two firefighters to learn about their journeys with cancer and how they gained support through Queensland's presumptive legislation.

**T**hanks to recent amendments, Queensland now has the most comprehensive workers' compensation scheme for firefighters in Australia, with 23 types of cancer deemed work-related for firefighters.

The presumptive legislation helps firefighters access workers' compensation more quickly, removing unnecessary stress from an already difficult time.

## Peace of mind

Acting Inspector Paul Simmons's cancer diagnosis came out of the blue, but luckily he was familiar with the presumptive legislation and was able to get support right away.

"Three or four years ago while I was on shift at Woodridge Fire and Rescue Station, we were chatting around the messroom table about cancer," Paul said.

**"I would recommend everyone get tested, and when they get tested, they should take a printout of the presumptive legislation with them."**

– Paul Simmons

"A couple of firefighters had recently been diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer. One of the firefighters at the table had an enlarged prostate and another had prostate cancer and had used the presumptive legislation.

"The talk turned to when we'd last gotten tested and I admitted I never had, even though I was 55 and had been with QFD for more than 30 years. I hadn't seen a reason to get tested because I had no signs or symptoms. The others encouraged me to visit my GP.

"A lot of GPs don't know about the presumptive legislation, so I printed a copy and gave it to him to help him understand the laws and what they cover.

"I would recommend everyone get tested, and when they get tested, they should take a printout of the presumptive legislation with them.

"The GP did a physical test and found a lump on my prostate. That was the start of my journey."

Paul contacted his Work Health and Safety (WHS) Officer, told her about the diagnosis and asked to start a WorkCover claim.

"There are three ways to make a claim – individually, or on your behalf through WHS or the union," Paul said. "Our WHS Officer put the claim in for me, which was a great help.

"I was recommended for an MRI and then I went back to my GP, who confirmed it was cancer and recommended me for a biopsy, which came back positive. He then recommended a surgeon.

"There's a bit of misunderstanding around when you're diagnosed and when you're covered by WorkCover – usually you're not covered until after the biopsy.

"I went for a PET scan, which was a unique experience. You have radium injected into your body and then you sit quietly for an hour in a room, and that is very confronting because your mind takes over.

"The PET scan shows whether the prostate is the primary or secondary cancer and whether the cancer has spread anywhere



Paul Simmons used the presumptive legislation to gain support when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.



*Paul recommended all firefighters wear PPE and decontaminate themselves.*

else. In my case, the specialist confirmed the prostate was the primary site and the cancer hadn't spread."

Paul underwent a robotic prostatectomy, in which the surgeon controls three robotic arms to remove the prostate with a few cuts as small as one centimetre, as opposed to 25 centimetres with traditional surgery.

**"Take the time to make sure you're properly kitted up with personal protective equipment."**

*– Paul Simmons*

"Within six weeks, I went from initial diagnosis to lying on the operating table looking at the ceiling and thinking, What the hell just happened?"

Everything was claimed under WorkCover through the presumptive legislation, which helped ease the burden for Paul.

"Once you're diagnosed and are covered by the presumptive legislation, it's peace of mind that everything's pretty well taken care of," he said.

"I was very lucky, but I know others have had horror stories due to processing delays. Some had to pay out the day before their surgery to make sure it went ahead. Everything worked out alright in the end, but it was just one more thing for them to worry about."

After the operation, Paul went through eight weeks of recovery under WorkCover.

"Catheters absolutely suck, but they're part of the process," he said. "I had seven days with a catheter before having it removed, but there were issues with it so they had to put it back in while I was conscious. It was in place for another week."



#### **Self-checks and prevention**

If you notice changes in your body or cancer symptoms, make a booking with your General Practitioner to discuss the changes and symptoms.

Early detection is paramount, so QFD has partnered with Cancer Council Queensland to provide information and resources on prevention and proactive self-checks.

Read more about self-checks and symptoms at [fire.qld.gov.au/about-us/supporting-our-people/presumptive-legislation](https://fire.qld.gov.au/about-us/supporting-our-people/presumptive-legislation)



“You think you can do things while you’re recovering, but you can’t and shouldn’t. You have to sit and rest. It’s a lot of downtime, but you have to recover properly before you put your body through stress.

“The firies came around to visit me at home and management called to see how I was, which helped me get through.

**“Once you’re diagnosed and are covered by the presumptive legislation, it’s peace of mind that everything’s pretty well taken care of.”**

– Paul Simmons

“The outcome was very positive. We work in an industry which is dangerous because of what we may breathe in or absorb through our bodies. We pay a hell of a price with PTSD and these cancers. It’s very refreshing to have the laws to cover us.

“I learnt from people who have had cancer and I’ve spoken to many people who are undergoing it. Some people don’t like talking about it, but I believe if you talk about it, you can educate people about what it’s like and what support is available.”

Paul’s advice to firefighters is to do the right thing and decontaminate themselves after a job.

“Take the time to make sure you’re properly kitted up with personal protective equipment. Don’t breathe smoke in when you don’t need to.

“I never thought I would have this problem, but no one’s immune to cancer. You have to get tested.”

#### **It takes a toll**

Brett Lawrence, a former Senior Firefighter from Cairns, found out he had prostate cancer after a routine blood test in 2021. Unlike Paul, he had some previous experience with the presumptive legislation but knew little about the support options available, which made an already difficult situation even more stressful.

“As far as I know, I was one of the first firefighters in far north Queensland to be diagnosed with cancer while still in the job,” Brett said.

“I hadn’t had regular check-ups with my GP in a couple of years, but I was at a job where it was very hot and an ambulance officer took my blood pressure and said it was up. They suggested I go for a check-up.

“I felt great, but the GP did full bloods and my Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) was almost through the roof. The GP referred me to oncology and that’s when the stress started. I went through two months of biopsies and tests.”

Once the cancer was confirmed as high-grade, Brett travelled to Townsville for a PET scan.

“I still didn’t know how much cancer there was or where it was in my body,” he said. “It was a very stressful time for me and my wife, and I was still going out on the trucks doing a high-stress job.

“Dealing with cancer is enough mentally, let alone while trying to do your job, particularly this job where you really have to have your mind on the ball.

“I had to pay for all the tests and I burnt up a lot of my sick leave going through the procedures. By the end I had to use recreational leave and leave without pay.

“I didn’t know I was entitled to compensation for incapacity, so I was lucky a retired firefighter who was under observation for his prostate told me to put in a disability claim with WorkCover. You have to apply within 12 months of resigning – I applied with only one week



left. WorkCover won't contact you about this – you have to contact them yourself.

“WorkCover referred me to a professor of oncology to assess my age, fitness, health and bloods and confirm which level of capacity was lost due to the operation.

“WorkCover then offered compensation based on the professor's recommendation of incapacity. I got some of my leave back on WorkCover but I had to prove it by going back through months of paperwork.

“I would love to see some sort of special leave to support the presumptive legislation, so people don't use up all their leave while going through biopsies and tests.

“If you break a leg it's more straightforward because you are treated right away, but with cancer there are so many hurdles and hoops.

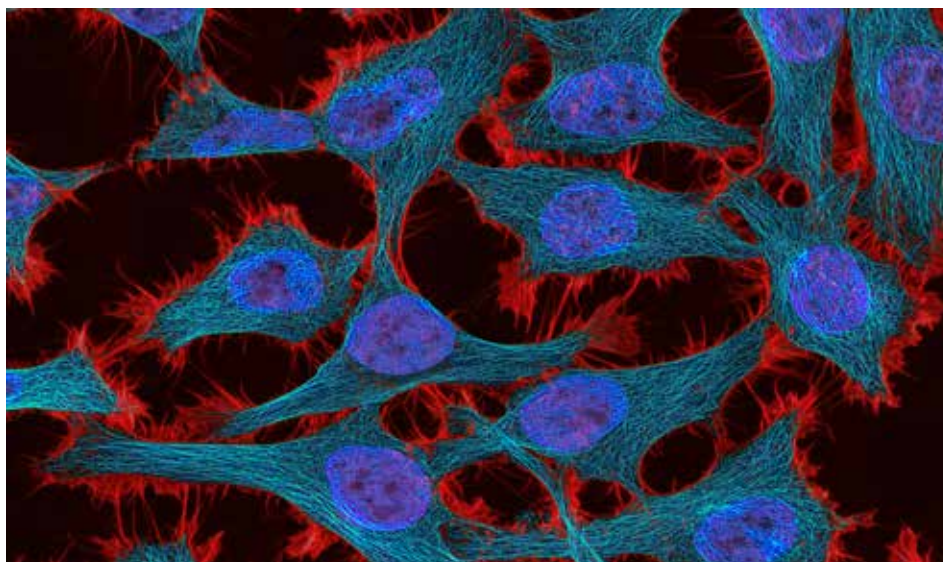
**“My advice to anyone who finds themselves in this situation is to meet with management and get support.”**

– Brett Lawrence

“By the time the cancer was confirmed, my PSA had gone up again and I had to have an operation right away. At that point I was put on light duties.”

Brett was first tested in May 2021 and had the operation in September 2021, after which he decided to retire from QFD due to the high risk and exposure of chemical-related employment.

“My doctor was great. He advised me strongly not to return to that environment at my age. It was a major operation with



a long recovery and I couldn't drive or do anything. Some people can lose their manhood or the capacity to pee, or have to wear nappies.

“There weren't any other permanent administrative roles available for me in Cairns, only on the trucks, so for that reason and my health I decided to resign.

“I'm 61 now, but for six more years I can't claim a pension or unemployment. I'm very blessed that the assessment from the oncologist helped finance my loss of wages for the next few years.

“If you go through all this, there are many impacts – disability, stress, health and possible change of employment, which leaves a massive vacuum after 31 years. My management were good, but because this was new, at least up in Cairns, people didn't know what to say or do. When I was working on shift for those first few months before I knew if the cancer was terminal or not, my crew didn't know how to talk about it.

“I felt I had support from management but it was a new chapter for everyone.

“I've come through quite well, thankfully, although I'm still under stress because for the next three years I have to do blood tests every three to six months, and then once a year for the rest of my life, to check the cancer hasn't spread.

“You always think it happens to everyone else, not you. My advice to anyone who finds themselves in this situation is to meet with management and get support. You have to be yourself and not be a victim.

“I'm a churchgoer and I knew when this happened there was a purpose in it. The oncologist told me if I'd waited another three months the cancer would have gotten into my system and I would have died a long, slow death. There was definitely a spiritual hand covering everything and now here I am.

“My wife was extremely understanding and strong. She is a wonderful life partner and helped me when I would stray off emotionally from the stress. She was rock solid and brought me back to reality.

“I had a great crew, and support came from all my fellow firefighters both in management and frontline. They came out on the trucks one night when they found out I had cancer, and the C shift crew kept an eye on me. They let me work at stations with less stress and a lower call rate.

“Station Officer Jack Emeleus was running the rosters and he made it easier by doing everything possible to organise leave for me, along with Station Officer Darcy Magee and Safety and Wellbeing Officer Sandra Mclean-Tucket from Brisbane. I can't name them all, but there were many others who helped me during this period of life.”



### Support is here

The presumptive legislation covers Queensland Fire and Rescue permanent and auxiliary firefighters and Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteer firefighters and fire wardens, including 'day work' rotations.

Find out more about accessing support and applying for WorkCover by searching for 'presumptive legislation' on the Gateway.

You can also find more resources from the Firefighters Cancer Foundation Australia at [www.fcfa.org.au](http://www.fcfa.org.au)

For confidential support or advice, contact your Regional Safety and Wellbeing Advisor.



# TRAINERS HIT THE ROAD

A 14-day road trip across the far north helped communities and rural fire brigades get prepared this bushfire season.

**A** team of Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) staff members travelled more than 12,150 kilometres to deliver Basic Bushfire Awareness training to 159 RFSQ volunteers.

RFSQ Chief Officer Ben Millington said, “My sincere thanks and commendation to all members who participated in Basic Bushfire Awareness training – including the staff members who delivered this important training at a crucial time in bushfire season.

“The better prepared our volunteer members are, the better we can support our communities.”

Shane Hopton, Acting Superintendent for the Savannah District, said the road trip developed from training sessions run by Area Training Support Officer Sean Hunter last year in Julia Creek, Richmond and Hughenden.

“The road trip was born out of the necessity to ensure communities and the volunteers who reside in and around them are better prepared,” Shane said.

“Last year we ran these sessions on request at a few locations. This year we offered them at all major centres in the northwest.

“We started in Charters Towers and travelled to Torrens Creek, Hughenden, Richmond, Julia Creek, Mt Isa, Burketown, Normanton, Burke and Wills Road House and Cloncurry.

“Our goal was to ensure our volunteer members are in a better position to report, respond to and manage wildfires.

“The training included draughting, producing foam, equipment familiarisation and burnover. The team also demonstrated top-down scenarios using the bushfire simulation tabletop kit.

“Participants represented 38 rural fire brigades, including primary producers, izone and rural brigades,” Shane said.

“We received 66 applications to join local brigades, some of which ran annual general meetings alongside the training.

“The road trip helped us continue to develop effective relationships with brigades and better understand how we can support them.”

Shane said feedback was very positive, with many volunteer members returning from last year’s sessions.

“This was the culmination of a couple of years of work,” he said. “The team and I have spent a lot of time creating opportunities for face-to-face interactions, trying to understand our volunteer members’ training and equipment requirements and building working relationships.

“Training like this ensures the community and RFSQ volunteer members are trained in the minimum requirements for safety when working in and around bushfire.

“This training also allows us to identify volunteer members with the knowledge and experience for leading firefighting operations and understand the training required to further their skillsets.

“It was rewarding to see the level of interest and engagement that allowed us to increase firefighting safety and capacity in the northwest.

“In the future we aim to keep delivering these sessions and build training courses that will suit volunteer members who need to manage firefighting operations and firefighters.”





*Ford*

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COMING 2026

# ROAD SAFETY PROGRAM GOES BUSH

Young people in the regions are learning safe attitudes and behaviours on the road thanks to QFD's expanded driver safety program.

The Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) program aims to provide the same opportunities to all young drivers across the state, including in regional and remote areas.

Last year, firefighters delivered RAAP to more than 31,000 Year 11 and 12 students at more than 350 Queensland schools and alternate learning institutions, making RAAP one of the largest programs offered to students in Queensland.

People aged 17 to 24 are overrepresented in crashes, with six young Australians dying each week. In Queensland, young people equate to roughly one-third of all road deaths but only make up 10% of drivers.

RAAP reinforces the Fatal 5 – seatbelts, inattention, speeding, drugs/alcohol and fatigue – that lead to crashes, as well as age-specific factors such as inexperience, stage of development and risk taking.

In June 2023, RAAP received additional funding of \$2.6 million over four years to deliver more presentations in regional and remote communities and other youth settings such as youth justice and detention centres.

## Regional outreach

Thanks to this extra funding, presenters tour some of Queensland's most remote areas every two years, from Longreach and Winton in the centre to Mount Isa and Cloncurry in the west, Cunnamulla and Thargomindah in the south and Blackwater and Emerald in the north. The presenters connect with local auxiliary crews to help strengthen the message.

Mount Isa Senior Firefighter Brendan Egan said rural attendees had different experiences and risks compared to urban areas, especially the south-east corner.

"People out here are often behind the wheel bouncing around a paddock when they can reach the pedals, so we emphasise different aspects of the RAAP presentation," Brendan said.

"Flooded crossings and roadways are a common occurrence and people often drive through them without a second thought based on how many times or how long a crossing has been up.

"The distances travelled by kids and young adults are a lot longer and more remote than their peers on the coast.

"Regardless of how near or far they are in these communities geographically, they are quite close-knit. Most of these kids will know someone who has, at the very least, rolled a vehicle.

"The program reiterates the importance of sensible choices and how easily the effects of these incidents can spread."

## The next generation

Toowoomba firefighter Doug Maxwell and the RAAP team in Southern Region travel across the Darling Downs, Western Downs, Maranoa and Warrego districts.

"We attend state and private schools in towns such as Dalby, Chinchilla, Tara, Miles, Goondiwindi, St George, Roma, Charleville and Cunnamulla," Doug said.

"Most trips take three to four days with two RAAP presenters travelling more than 1000 kilometres by car.



RAAP presenters at the Cairns School of Distance.

“As a strong advocate for young people living in rural and remote areas, I feel it’s important for them to have access to the same services as metropolitan areas.

“Young drivers on rural roads grapple with issues such as fatigue, speed, substances, seat belts and distraction in the same way as young drivers on city streets do. These obstacles are further complicated by long distances and animals on the roads.

“Driving is such an important responsibility in rural and remote communities as it is the gateway to freedom, employment, entertainment and social interaction. It’s vitally important that young drivers in these communities understand the importance of safe driving and the concept of choices, actions and consequences.

“The program is received with great interest and enthusiasm at all the rural and remote schools. Feedback is always positive from staff, students and parents.

“Testimony to this is the fact that all schools are eager and willing to have RAAP presenters return to their campuses each year to provide road safety messages to the next generation of young drivers.”

**Educating young minds**

Brisbane firefighter Mark Paton is working closely with the central school on Norfolk Island to deliver the RAAP program.

“I’m keen to provide the same learning opportunities to all students across Queensland,” Mark said.

“Norfolk is a unique environment for young drivers. It has no traffic lights and only three roundabouts. The max speed limit is 80 kilometres an hour and the island is only 20 minutes from end to end.

“There is a special dispensation for 15-year-olds that allows them to get a small cc motorbike licence. Cows are also allowed to roam and you have to give way to them.

“The students often come to the mainland to complete studies or work, so the program will help prepare them for the driving conditions they will experience when they get here.

“No matter where I travel, I find participants always take something away from the program.”

Senior Firefighter Tarrant Green recently delivered RAAP to the Cairns School of Distance Education, reaching students not just in remote Queensland, but all over Australia and internationally.

“I do RAAP for many reasons but one of the main ones is it gives me an opportunity to have a positive impact on young drivers and the choices they make on the road,” Tarrant said.

“I’m a strong believer that if I only influence one driver to make a better decision that prevents a road crash, it’s all worthwhile.

“Remote regional RAAP is important because road crashes in remote areas can be more severe due to the distance and the time it takes for help to arrive. Young drivers should not be excluded or at a disadvantage just because of their location.

“The distance ed students are some of the most engaging, respectful students I’ve had the pleasure of presenting to.”

Cloncurry’s Auxiliary Captain Nerissa O’Brien finds it rewarding to deliver RAAP in her community.

“As a firefighter, coach and aunt, I’ve seen these kids grow up in our local community,” Nerissa said. “If I can help educate them now on making better choices on the road, then I’ve succeeded.

“If we continue the way we’ve always done things in the past, nothing changes. Educating young minds on the role they play in road safety will help make a better future.”



Presenters drive up to three hours to ensure no student misses out.



RAAP presenters at St Johns College, Roma.



A RAAP presentation in Southern Western Region.

# QFR AND LIFEFLIGHT: A CLOSE-KNIT PARTNERSHIP

From floods and road crashes to mountain rescues, QFR and LifeFlight work together to extract patients from dangerous situations.

The two organisations have built a close relationship based on mutual trust over many years.

Since its inception in 1979, LifeFlight has provided aeromedical care for around 90,000 people. In the last financial year alone it helped more than 8000 patients (one every 64 minutes) and logged 5,159 flying hours.

LifeFlight's fleet of four Air Ambulance jets and nine rotary wing aircraft operates from eight bases across Queensland and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Servicing an area of 1.85 million square kilometres, they support search and rescue efforts across another 53 million square kilometres of land and sea for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

LifeFlight employs more than 180 medical professionals, including critical care doctors, flight nurses and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) flight paramedics.

## Collaborating under pressure

LifeFlight Medical Director Dr Jeff Hooper works as a retrieval doctor on the Brisbane-based LifeFlight helicopter.

"I look after a great group of consultant doctors, registrars, paramedics and nurses," Dr Hooper said. "Every day is different and we are able to bring patients access to higher levels of care, particularly in regional and remote communities.

"The working relationship between LifeFlight and Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) has been excellent. We have worked together for many years and there is mutual respect for each other's roles. We have been fortunate to work and train together at the Combined Emergency Services Academy at Whyte Island and all our doctors undergo extrication training there.

"QFR members have always been professional and approachable and want what is best for the patient."

Dr Hooper recalled a particular rescue where a motorcyclist was wedged in a tree after losing control on a mountain road near Springbrook.

"The helicopter was unable to winch the patient due to terrain and tree cover, so QFR crews set up a rope pulley system to safely extricate the patient," he said.

"QFR played a critical role in getting the patient up the hill to safety where we could provide medical care.

"The patient was safely extricated and we were able to continue critical care such as blood transfusion and intubation and then rapid transfer to a trauma centre.

"The QFR team are practical, pragmatic and can problem solve in difficult conditions. They maintain a safe approach and ensure team members are not put at unnecessary risk.

"QFR are a community asset and do a fantastic job. We work alongside them in at times challenging conditions. We are fortunate to be able to train with the QFR teams and this has created a great relationship and fostered mutual respect."

## A close relationship

Cameron Herbert, QFR Area Commander for Maroochydore, said QFR crews had worked closely with LifeFlight for many years at a range of incidents.

"We have a great working relationship," Cameron said. "LifeFlight is located



Dr Jeff Hooper has been with LifeFlight since 2006.



Firefighters and LifeFlight personnel loading a patient into a helicopter after a bus and car collision in the Somerset region.

at Sunshine Coast Airport and our Maroochydore crews often complete familiarisation training with their aircraft.

“We have worked with them very closely at flood and swiftwater incidents, where they transport our swiftwater personnel or equipment. LifeFlight also attends serious road traffic crashes if casualties need to be transported a long way to hospitals.

“The main body of work we perform with LifeFlight is in the Glasshouse Mountains, where we rescue many lost climbers and injured hikers. Our remote rescue personnel usually locate the patient and then work closely with LifeFlight to remove them via helicopter.

“Crews at the base and on the mountain have to have strong communications to ensure the patient, our personnel and the LifeFlight crew all remain safe.

“We have a valuable relationship with LifeFlight and we’re always evolving and learning with them. We’re very appreciative of their assistance at these incidents.”

### Remote rescue

QFR Station Officer Scott Daly is part of the remote rescue team that attends incidents on the Glasshouse Mountains.

“It’s a close-knit, very rewarding partnership,” Scott said. “We have direct communications with the LifeFlight helicopter so we can talk to the pilot, tell them exactly where the patient is and assist their winch person or doctor when they drop down from the helicopter.

“We’ve had a close working relationship since 2016 when QFR started conducting remote rescue on the Glasshouse Mountains, along with the SES. A lot of us are close friends with LifeFlight personnel outside of work as well.

“They help us out tremendously in mountain rescue. We perform frequent rescue operations in the mountains, particularly Mount Beerwah, Mount Tibrogargan and Mount Ngungun.

“Our remote rescue team has advanced first aid skills but we can’t administer drugs.

“The doctors onboard their helicopters can administer pain relief and apply splinting to remove the casualty without causing further harm. LifeFlight can also carry much more equipment than we can. They’re second to none when it comes to assisting injured patients.

“Because we have so much experience working together, we can confidently direct the pilots to the casualty. Before they arrive



QFR and LifeFlight responded to a single ute rollover in the Maranoa region.



LifeFlight and QFR worked together at a single vehicle incident in Cloncurry.

we make the area safe by clearing debris out of the way, closing the mountain and stopping people from climbing up or down into the area.

“We determine whether the winch spot is safe enough for a doctor to land. They have great trust in us that the area will be safe.

“We then secure the main line or anchor point so we can anchor the winch person or doctor. We retrieve their equipment and help package the patient, placing them in the stretcher and giving them safety goggles and ear plugs to protect them from the dust kicked up by the helicopter’s downdraught.

“We assist with a tag line that stops the patient from spinning around while LifeFlight winches them out.

“Extraction is more difficult at night, when the pilots find us with infrared. We put glowsticks on a piece of string and swing them around in a big arc that the pilots can see from miles away. We also light up the winch area.

“In one of our most recent rescues, a casualty was stuck on Mount Beerwah but

we couldn’t locate them correctly and a storm was on the way. We knew the storm would hit before we could reach the patient, so we called the LifeFlight helicopter to make it safer for everyone.

“They located and retrieved the casualty while we were still climbing up. The helicopter left with the casualty just before the storm hit. We were thankful because it would have been very difficult for us to get the casualty back down to base through the rain.

“I remember another rescue on Mount Beerwah where we assisted a patient with a dislocated shoulder. We packaged the patient, placed him on a stretcher and carried it hand-over-hand to a place where the helicopter could winch him out. We had to manoeuvre the stretcher about 150 metres over boulders and tree roots – about an hour of very difficult work.

“We have a close relationship with LifeFlight and they’re always willing to assist us with training and advice on how we can do things better.”

# SAFETY FIRST AT GOLD COAST 500

Community safety officers took on the marathon task of maintaining safety at the Gold Coast 500.

Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) has assisted at the annual supercars race since its inception in 1991. This year, Station Officer Michael Mills and his small team put in hundreds of hours to ensure the safety of 200,000 attendees.

Michael said the logistics for planning, race management and post-event activities were enormous.

“Another Station Officer and I spent 150 to 200 hours before the race weekend preparing and obtaining resources,” he said. “My role involves preplanning with the Gold Coast Zone Superintendent to ensure all details are covered.

“In June each year, buildings within the race precinct start having maintenance inspections and from July all stakeholders meet monthly to plan for the event. After the race weekend there’s a debrief in November.

“Gold Coast Zone Commander Rob Bloss and Inspector Tim Burchmann have significant input and oversight into the event.

“On the race weekend, my small team – consisting of Scientific Officer Dr Damien Reid and Station Officer Randall Gribble – ensures all QFR personnel are in place and have the appropriate resources. We troubleshoot any problems or queries as they arise.

“Each day at 5.30am the crews meet at Southport Fire and Rescue Station for a morning briefing, before travelling to the track via bus and our appliance.

“Once all crews are in place, my team delivers food packs to them around the track and conducts a continuous dynamic risk assessment of the race precinct on foot. This year we clocked up more than 45 kilometres over the three days.

“We enjoy collaborating with other stakeholders, taking in the festive atmosphere and getting to see some of the racing and entertainment.”

Michael and his team coordinated with other emergency services, event management and local authorities, including the Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, Supercars management, National Security Management, Event Co and iEDM.

After the event, QFR presented building managers with mantle plaques as tokens of appreciation for accepting our personnel and equipment to be staged at their location.

“We’ve built our stakeholder relationships over several years and we know what each partner brings to the event,” Michael said. “If they need something from QFR or vice-versa, it’s easy to pick up the mobile and get what is needed to facilitate a good service.”





# MOVEMBER IN MACKAY

Queensland Fire and Rescue firefighters in Mackay ran events throughout Movember including bootcamp sessions, gym classes, yoga classes and coffee catchups, capped off with a 60-kilometre swim.

**Q**FD participates in Movember each year to raise awareness about mental health and suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer.

Staff and volunteer members raise funds by growing moustaches, hosting events or setting personal fitness goals. This year, QFD raised more than \$43,000 in total.

On average, men die 4.5 years earlier than women. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men over 45, affecting about 10.8 million men globally.

Senior Firefighter Kyle McCormack has been running the Movember activities in Mackay since 2021.

“The way it was run by the team before me was great and I saw it had potential to scale further,” Kyle said.

“In 2020 the event was a 60-kilometre relay swim with QFD, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) and Queensland Police Service (QPS) combined. Due to its popularity, we’ve since turned it into a

competition to see which service can reach 60 kilometres the fastest. QAS holds the current title.

“This year we approached men in the health and fitness space in the Mackay community to donate their time to us as first responders to host men’s health and fitness sessions.

“During Movember we participated in yoga, beach runs, hikes, an ongoing strength competition, muay thai, swim training, hot cold therapy, breathwork and bootcamp-style workouts.”

Kyle said it was important to support Movember and celebrate the traits our workforce have to bring to the plate, such as courage and strength.

“Our men need to be supported in taking ownership of their health and understanding the different ways we can do this,” he said. “It was fantastic to see everyone banding together, having good conversations and looking after one another.

“I really enjoyed talking to different men about what health meant to them – how they look after themselves and their families and have enough left in the tank for the job we do. I learnt a lot from the good blokes around me, which was invaluable.

“Our mission this year was ‘Putting our health first’. I believe it’s important as a workforce, at a crew level, to take ownership of our own health, mental and physical, due to the nature of our job.

“We are the ones taking the lead in high-stress situations, putting in the work that others run away from. Our own health and wellbeing has a direct impact on those around us, at home and at work. Our resilience as a team comes from the sum of its parts.

“My partner, QAS Paramedic Darcy Popp, has been my main support. She keeps me going each year with this event and facilitates a lot of organisation for QAS.”





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# LISTENING TO YOUR FEEDBACK

More than 1700 staff members gave their feedback in this year's Working for Queensland (WfQ) survey, improving on last year's response rate by nine per cent.

The survey provides valuable insights to ensure we create a workplace where every person feels their skills and knowledge are valued.

Overall, feedback from the survey aligns with the insights gained from the Foundation Forums in July. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will focus on the key areas identified in the survey and forums: collaboration, leadership, development, communication, workplace behaviour and wellbeing.

QFD's organisational values obviously resonate with the workforce, with 91 per cent believing QFD should retain the QFES values of respect, courage, integrity, loyalty and trust. In terms of engagement with QFD, 67 per cent said they are proud to work for the department and are inspired to do their best.

Commissioner Steve Smith said, "As in previous years, the most positive results were at the team level, in areas such as workgroup effectiveness, respect and direct managers' leadership. The least positive results were for development, performance and fair and equitable treatment.

"I know there is a belief that nothing is done as a result of the WfQ survey feedback – I can assure you it is and you will hear much more about the steps we are taking in response to the feedback received over the next 12 months.

"The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will use the survey results to inform decision-making and strategies at an organisational level. Leaders will be encouraged to look at their survey results to inform their plan-on-a-page."

The focus for conversations about the survey will be on the QFD value of respect and how it is the foundation of everyone's experience working for QFD.

Teams are encouraged to use a toolkit on the Gateway to have conversations about respect and how it's demonstrated in their team. Over the next few months, the Workforce Experience team will promote all the different ways we can respect each other.

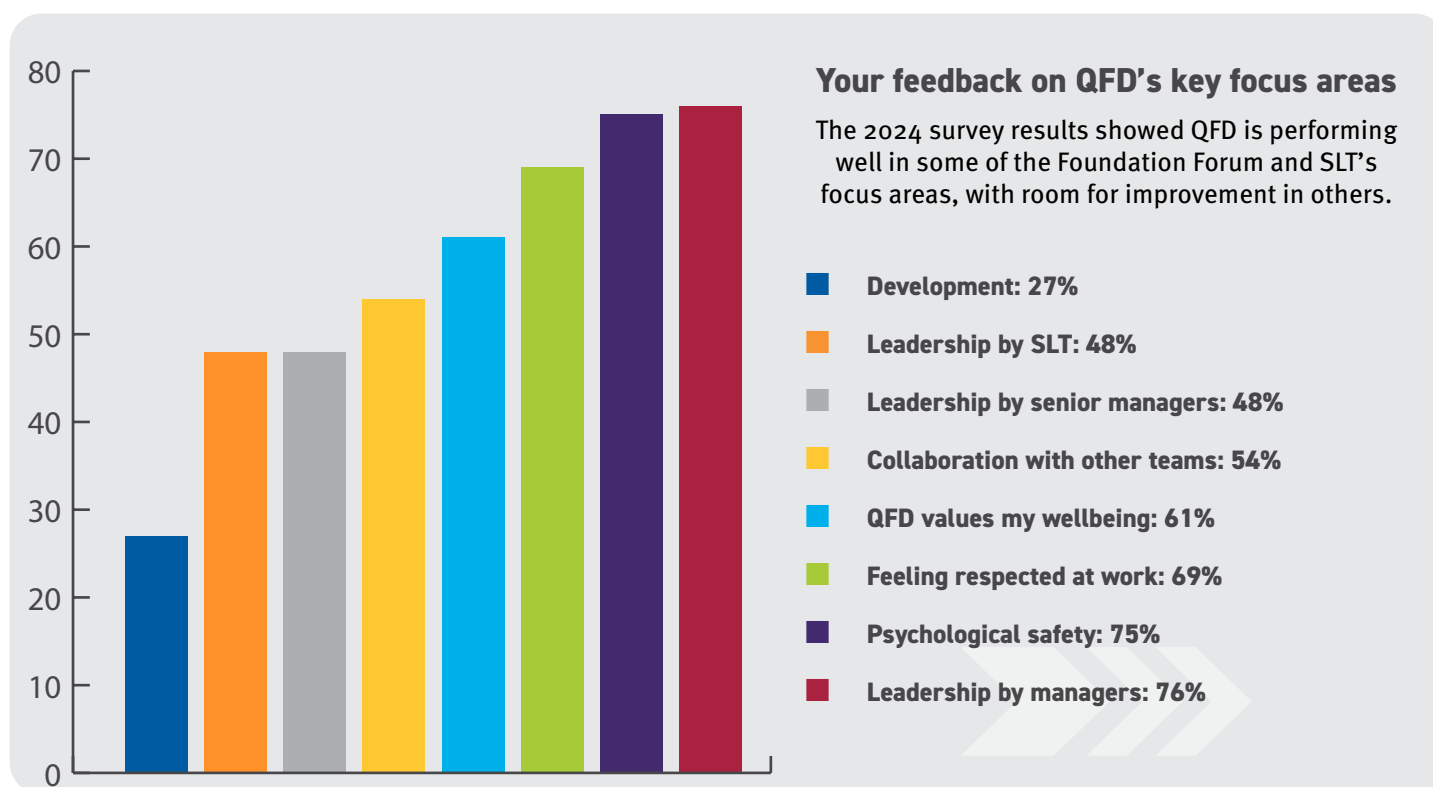
The Volunteering for Queensland survey will be run in March and April 2025, outside peak operational periods.

You can read the survey results and download the toolkit by searching '2024 Working for Queensland survey' on the Gateway.

## Improved communication

One of the items in the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Action Plan in response to the 2023 WfQ results, was to improve communication from the ELT and SLT and that goal was achieved:

	2023	2024
ELT communicates a clear direction for the future of the organisation	43%	53%
ELT keeps employees informed about what is going on	44%	51%



# PAINT FOR CHANGE

QFD supported the Polished Man campaign in October to help end violence against women and children.

QFD members held morning teas, made donations and painted one nail on each hand, representing the one in five children who suffer physical and/or sexual violence before the age of 18, and the one woman a week who loses her life to violence from a current or former partner.

Events were spearheaded by Senior Firefighter Mark Paton, who has supported the campaign since it launched in 2014. In acknowledgement of his decade of hard work, he was named a Polished Man Ambassador this year.

Donations helped raise funds to support 'Polished Innovators' grants to tackle different aspects of domestic and family violence (DFV) across education, housing, finance and empowerment.

Commissioner Steve Smith congratulated Mark on his long commitment to the cause and his new role as an ambassador.

"QFD members took part in activities across the state, which shows QFD's commitment to raising awareness in this space," Mr Smith said.

"The Polished Man initiative highlights that men need to step up and take responsibility. At QFD we are models for the community and need to be seen to be out there challenging violence and making our community safe for everyone."

Mark said he first joined Polished Man when his two young daughters enjoyed painting his nails.

"I wanted to raise awareness and do something good for the community," Mark said. "As a man in uniform in a male-dominated industry, this is an opportunity to influence as many men as I can into being aware of violence against women and children."

"Not all men are perpetrators but unfortunately the violence is disproportionately against women with men as the main perpetrators."

"I want my wife, my daughters, my mum, my sisters, my aunts and my nieces to feel safe. As men we need to step up, speak out and take a stand."

"I felt really honoured to become an ambassador and felt a sense of

responsibility to try and influence as many people as I could. All too often DFV is heard about or even seen but rarely is it brought up as a talking point.

"This year has been a highlight of my involvement, with the whole of QFD from the Commissioner down fully supportive of my campaign. The amount of staff who have contacted me personally to thank me or even tell me of personal experiences has been really humbling."

"I would really like to thank the whole of QFD for the support my campaign received, especially from the Senior Leadership Team, DFV Working Group, Media Team and the Community Education Unit."

"From a personal perspective I'd like to thank Commissioner Smith, Chief Fire Officer John Cawcutt, Assistant Commissioner Kevin Reading, Inspector Leon Andrews, Reg O'Toole, Kaylene Neal, Leah Hornibrook, Nick Elsworth, Laurel Nordling, Scott Stoddart from Stoddart Electrical and all on-shift firefighters."



Mark Paton (fourth from left) with the Executive Leadership Team at a Polished Man event in Kedron.

# QFD TEAM LEADS DISASTER INNOVATION

A QFD team competed in the Disaster Challenge Final in Western Australia.

The annual Disaster Challenge, coordinated by Natural Hazards Research Australia (NHRA), promotes innovative approaches to real-world problems faced by disaster management and resilience personnel.

Three finalists pitched their ideas to build and sustain trust between communities and the organisations involved in preventing, preparing, responding to and recovering from disasters.

The QFD team included Manager Natalie Oliver and Program Officer Alexandra Gunn from the Hazard and Risk Unit, along with Lillian Norris, a PhD candidate from the University of Queensland.

The final was attended by emergency services and disaster resilience experts, academic leaders, scientists and tertiary students.

“After being selected as a finalist, we were working on a very short timeframe to get our idea ready,” Natalie said.

“The Disaster Challenge gave us the opportunity to work with mentors from NHRA and industry to build our idea and challenge our thinking.

“In the Hazard and Risk Unit we’re always thinking of how we can educate others on risk and what we can do to reduce our risk to hazards.

“I asked myself, what is something we consistently see as an issue post-disaster, and insurance came to mind.”

Alexandra said the team’s idea, Home Insurance Risk Reduction Options (HIRRO), aimed to increase trust between homeowners and insurers.

“This is achieved through two key improvements to how insurers operate – increased risk transparency, and premium reductions through home resilience improvements,” Alexandra said.

“If an insurer provides greater transparency on what a home’s priority risks are and what the insurance actually covers, homeowners can feel more empowered to make decisions about what risk reduction options they might take.

“This leads to clear reductions in insurance premiums, which are locked in when the homeowner completes their quote. This has many benefits for both the insurer and the homeowner, increasing resilience at the household level.

“Through the integration of risk data and Artificial Intelligence (AI), HIRRO will inform homeowners about the most beneficial, risk-reducing improvements they can make, such as raising appliances and power points above flood level or using flood-resistant materials.”

Natalie said many different stakeholders were working to improve how insurers would deal with a future of more frequent and intense severe weather events.

“HIRRO provides a solution that focuses on the homeowner’s experience and empowers them to make decisions to be more resilient in their own home,” Natalie said.



From left to right: Andrew Gissing from NHRA with QFD team members Lillian Norris, Natalie Oliver and Alexandra Gunn.

“This is not a brand-new idea and some insurers have begun to make steps toward something similar, but there is still a long way to go.

“HIRRO also aims to improve underinsurance and insurance affordability, which is a huge problem in Australia. With a variety of risk reduction options, homeowners can choose something to suit their own budget and priorities, which directly reduces their premium.”

Alexandra said having their idea selected from many other submissions across the country validated that the problem they identified was important.

“It was great that all three finalists presented such different ideas, showing how diverse thinking can be when attacking a problem,” she said.

“It’s great to have representation from the research industry and government. Innovation in government is so important for solving challenges.

“The Hazard and Risk Unit will continue to work with researchers to understand our risk to hazards and what this means for QFD into the future. We’ll keep looking for opportunities to be involved in these kinds of projects and how we can best represent our team and QFD.”



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# TRUE DEDICATION

First Officer Matt Walker from Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade recently took out the Dedication category in the QBANK Everyday Heroes Awards.

**M**att was recognised for his outstanding service as a firefighter with Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ). He was one of 23 finalists selected from across the state for the 10th annual awards.

A father of three and finance broker by day, he leads a team of 60 volunteers each week to conduct bushfire mitigation and suppression.

“My father was a life member of the NSW RFS and growing up I always wanted to follow in his footsteps,” Matt said. “I joined RFSQ in 2017, once my work life was at a point where I had enough spare time.

“It’s rewarding to assist members of the community at what may be the worst day of their life. The look on their face when you arrive at their property to lend a hand is priceless.”

Matt was particularly recognised for his response during the 2023 Christmas storms on the Gold Coast, when he worked for 15 days straight even though the roof was partially lifted off his own home.

“The storm came through around 9.30pm while people were finishing up their Christmas celebrations,” he said.

“The amount of damage to property and infrastructure was just incredible. For several weeks residents were without power and running water and the whole area had no phone coverage or internet. It felt like we’d gone back in the past.”

The region experienced a week of extreme heat and humidity and then on New Year’s Day torrential rain caused local flooding.

“Everything was working against us,” Matt said. “However, the way the community banded together and helped each other out was truly inspiring. Neighbours grabbed chainsaws or whatever they could to help.

“Even if they couldn’t help physically, neighbours would get food and water for each other or lent an ear to listen. Everyone bonded and made the community stronger.

“As soon as the storm stopped, our brigade went into action, but we couldn’t get trucks out of the station because it was blocked by major debris. It took us a few hours to clear everything and roll out the trucks.

“It was amazing that brigade members just turned up at the station. They didn’t need to be paged – they just knew they were needed.

“Our station became the staging area for the northern Gold Coast sector. We were basically a hub where brigades came for tasking and to grab essential equipment. We did all this with no power – truly a momentous effort by all.

“For two weeks we helped the community to clear debris from roads and around homes. Our chainsaws have never been used so much. We were so grateful to other brigades from south-east Queensland coming to lend a hand.

“After the two weeks we moved into a recovery period. We’ve been assisting local property owners with hazard reduction burns as fuel levels have increased significantly. This is ongoing because so many property owners need assistance.”

Matt has recently taken on an inaugural role in the Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee, advising the Chief Officer on matters relevant to brigades and volunteer members.

“The concept of the advisory committee is fantastic as it gives volunteers, who are the bread and butter of the RFSQ, a voice to improve the service to make it the best it can be,” he said.

“The committee members are a fantastic group of people as they all have the same goal and that is to make the RFSQ an outstanding organisation. Yes, there are challenges but as we are all on the same page with the same goals, I truly believe the committee will achieve everything it sets its sights on.”

Queensland Fire and Rescue Senior Firefighter Lochlan Patterson was also a finalist in the Ownership category for his efforts in community education, community engagement and supporting his peers.



Matt Walker (third from left) at the QBANK Everyday Heroes Awards.



**+ SPOOKY REMINDER  
TO BE FIRE SAFE**

On Halloween, Regional Community Engagement Coordinator Julianne Webster-Scott and Predictive Services Coordinator Ven Daidone led a hands-on workshop for 30 service users of the Home Support Association (HSA), where they presented the results of the Australian Warning System (AWS) Pilot Project.

The HSA, which supports 250 people with disabilities in the Rockhampton area, has been working closely with QFD, Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) and the Rockhampton Regional Council over the past year. Their shared goal is to co-design a program that improves awareness of the Australian Warning System and prepares people to respond before, during and after emergencies.

During the pilot, service users and HSA staff participated in a workshop and educational sessions to identify key needs and determine the best ways to stay safe during emergencies. Feedback revealed a need for tailored education and resources that directly address the specific challenges faced by people with disabilities in emergencies.

The Halloween session presented the AWS Pilot Project's findings and custom resources to reinforce safety practices. Each participant received an AWS emergency backpack, containing a battery-powered radio with simplified English instructions, an easy-to-read Bushfire Evacuation Kit Checklist, a Home Fire Safety guide, an AWS magnet, a Safehome postcard and a waterproof document wallet.

Participants eagerly shared their knowledge, asked questions and discussed what they would do in different emergency scenarios.

The urgency of the message was underscored by a nearby house fire, which some attendees witnessed enroute to the event. This real-life incident served as a powerful, if eerie, reminder that fires can strike at any time. The workshop concluded with a fire evacuation drill by HSA.

This initiative has paved the way for future collaborations and ongoing engagement. Photo courtesy of Kellie Guinane.



**+ SONY CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY CAMP**

The Sony Children's Holiday Camp is a unique respite program where high school and university students take on the responsibility of caring for children with a disability, allowing their families to have a valuable weekend off.

In September, several Brisbane schools hosted camps for more than 140 children. Crews from Kemp Place Fire and Rescue Station attended a camp at Anglican Church Grammar School to engage with the children and received heartfelt thanks for providing a wonderful experience.

**+ SENIORS MONTH**

The team from Queensland Fire and Rescue Southern Region were busy attending community events for Seniors Month in October.

Home fire safety was an ongoing theme for their conversations with seniors and the team answered many questions about home fire safety equipment, when to call Triple Zero (000) and smoke alarm legislation.

Toowoomba Area Commander Chris Martial (pictured) educated a group of seniors at the Toowoomba Seniors Seminar and Expo.



**+ CARNARVON GORGE FIRE SAFETY**

Caravanning enthusiast and Emerald Area Commander Scott Castree recently delivered 200 motorhome and caravan safety packs to the Carnarvon Gorge Breeze Holiday Park, formerly known as Takarakka, to coincide with the new caravan smoke alarm laws being introduced in Queensland.

Emerald Auxiliary Firefighter and Administrative Support Officer Amanda Wolff took the lead on putting together 200 packs including caravan and motorhome fact sheets and information on road safety, fire danger rating signs and the Australian Warning System.

Scott said it was encouraging to see the Carnarvon Gorge area recovering well after it experienced level 3 bushfire incidents about a year ago.



**+ TOOWOOMBA STREET FIESTA**

The Toowoomba International Multicultural Society recently hosted their third annual International Street Fiesta in Queens Park. Attended by a crowd of thousands, the street fiesta is a celebration of culture through food, music, language and people.

The fiesta invited emergency services to attend with useful information for families, seniors and multicultural groups. Firefighters and Charlton Hub staff were kept busy providing home fire safety information to adults and children.



Project Booyah is a Queensland Police Service youth mentoring program that helps young people aged 14 to 17 make better life choices through activities such as adventure-based learning, problem-solving exercises and resilience training.

QFD supports Project Booyah across several regions by delivering the Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) program to participants.

Southern Region RAAP facilitators recently invited Project Booyah participants to the local fire station to cement learning outcomes from the RAAP presentation.

Project Booyah's Program Manager said, "The boys had a great day and were on a high when they got back to our office!"

"Seeing the damaged cars and the tools needed to cut people from a traffic crash was very effective in getting the boys to really think about what can and does happen.

"They are at that age where change is a process that occurs over time with repeated reinforcement. I can't thank [firefighters] Noah and Will enough for what they did and their efforts in support of these boys."



## + BATTLE OF THE CAMP COOKERS

Captain Pat Kooyman from Springsure Fire and Rescue Station, south of Emerald, hosted a camp oven cook-off alongside his wife and firefighter Cheryl.

The event attracted camp oven chefs from around the region to demonstrate their culinary skills across four categories – smoko, lunch, tea and jerky. About 40 people attended the event and local businesses provided prizes for the winners.

The event was unable to be run last year because fire conditions called for a complete fire ban. Pat said he looks forward to a bigger and better event next year and encouraged the QFD family from far and wide to consider coming to Springsure to show off their camp cooking skills.



## + HAZMAT AT BROOKES BEACH

When a mysterious five-foot-long cylinder washed up at Brookes Beach on the Cassowary Coast, QFD members sprang into action.

On-call Scientific Inspector Anneke Dorgelo provided expert advice alongside experienced BA Hazmat-qualified Station Officer Brian Jewell to safely resolve the incident.

Brian took the opportunity to share his extensive knowledge with the responding crews of Mission Beach Auxiliaries and Innisfail Fire and Rescue Station. They conducted an impromptu training session on the AP4C universal chemical detector, wet chemical kit and other BA Hazmat air sampling equipment.



## + EMERGENCY EXPO SEASON

Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) and Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) showcased their expertise and dedication to the community at emergency services expos in areas such as Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Gympie, Moffatdale and Gin Gin.

These events allowed the public to learn about fire safety, emergency preparedness and the vehicles and equipment firefighters use.

QFR and RFSQ presented a range of displays and interactive activities to educate and engage attendees of all ages. The displays included demonstrations of fire equipment and firefighting techniques, preparedness planning for bushfire and home fire safety, and the various roles within the fire services.

Children enjoyed exploring the fire trucks and learning the importance of fire safety.

One of the highlights was in Maryborough, where QFR won the prestigious Community Spirit Shield for most engaging display. This award, voted by the community, recognised QFR for its commitment to creating a welcoming and informative environment that resonated with visitors.

The award is a testament to the team's dedication to fostering strong relationships with the community.

Overall, the expos were a success, bringing together residents and emergency services personnel to strengthen the community's readiness and resilience in the face of emergencies.





## + BIG MAP EXERCISE

QFD members participated in a 'Big Map' exercise in Gayndah organised by Disaster Relief Australia and the Red Earth Community Foundation. This initiative brought together community stakeholders and emergency services personnel to map essential community infrastructure and develop detailed community profiles across the Burnett Catchment.

The exercise strengthened disaster preparedness by visually identifying infrastructure, resources and key locations that are essential in times of disaster while building a profile of local community risk and resilience measures.

This involved gathering insights from locals and experts to create a shared understanding of the area's assets and vulnerabilities.

Working closely with local stakeholders helped build a foundation for improved coordination and planning, reinforcing the Burnett Catchment's ability to respond to and recover from potential disasters. Thank you to the Red Earth Community Foundation for the invitation to participate.



## + IPSWICH STATION OFFICERS MARK 20 YEARS OF SERVICE

Four Ipswich Station Officers have marked an extraordinary milestone – Brad Barnes, Sean Toohill, Phil Paff and Shane Hogan each celebrated more than two decades as operational Station Officers, with 125 years of service between them. This accomplishment makes them the only officers in Ipswich Command to reach this level of tenure.

Brad began his journey in May 1987 with the then Ipswich Fire Brigade and was promoted to Station Officer in July 2000. Sean stepped into his officer role in October 2000, Phil Paff followed in February 2003 and Shane earned his title in January 2004.

In October, Brad completed his last shift at Brassall Fire and Rescue Station and transitioned into retirement. His last day was a mix of nostalgia and camaraderie, with his crew sharing fond memories and stories that highlighted his steadfast leadership, mentoring and calm presence under pressure.

This year another Station Officer, Andrew Murphy, also reached the 20-year mark.



## + POLICE REMEMBRANCE DAY

Emerald and Blackwater Fire and Rescue crews were invited to attend a special Police Remembrance Day event at the Bedford Weir, where Police Constables Patrick William Cahill and John Francis Power were killed in 1867.

The constables were part of a horseback escort of £4000 being transported to Clermont. Gold Commissioner Thomas John Griffin joined them on the pretence they were young and inexperienced and would need his assistance, but his real plan was to ride as far as Mackenzie River, steal the money and make it look like bushrangers had attacked them.

The group set up camp on 5 November and Griffin, Cahill and Power attended a local pub. Griffin allegedly poisoned their drinks and shot them before riding back to Rockhampton, burying most of the money along the way.

The decomposed bodies of the two officers were later discovered, wrapped in paperbark and buried on the banks of the Mackenzie River.

Griffin was suspected of the murders after he passed banknotes in Rockhampton with serial numbers matching those stolen from the escort. Cahill and Power's bodies were later relocated for burial at the Rockhampton Cemetery. Griffin was sentenced and hung at the Rockhampton jail on 1 June 1868.

Firefighters from Emerald Command attended the event and as an extra show of support, Northern Region Acting Station Officer Mackenzie Rowe played the bagpipes, providing a moving atmosphere as local police, other agencies and guests remembered the sacrifice made by both constables nearly 160 years ago.





1. QFD got behind Lifeblood's Annual Emergency Services Blood Drive, making more than 670 donations in three months. This put QFD at the top of the charts for Queensland, saving more than 2000 lives.
2. QFD took the Governor of Queensland, Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM on a tour of the State Fire Control Centre and gave her an overview of the bushfire season and preparations for severe weather season.
3. The Brisbane Emergency Services Expo brought together all of Brisbane's emergency services at Brigade Park in Chermside.
4. Flinders Peak Rural Fire Brigade celebrated their 70th anniversary with an open day.
5. On Firefighters Remembrance Day, QFD paid our respects to firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty. QFD flags were flown at half-mast and commemorative events were held in each region.



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- 6. A big thank you to the local businesses from Townsville to Hughenden who generously donated food and drinks for crews fighting fires at Pentland, Torrens Creek and Hughenden.
- 7. QFD personnel attended the Local Government Association of Queensland Conference in Brisbane to engage with councils and partner agencies from all over Queensland.
- 8. Firefighters and QFD staff tackled the Rhapsody Hotel 2024 Stair Climb, walking up 41 storeys while wearing breathing apparatus or weighted vests. The climb raised thousands of dollars to support firefighters with cancer.
- 9. A crew from Bundamba Fire and Rescue Station assisted the mounted police unit in Brisbane with sensory training to help their horses get comfortable with the sight and sound of fire trucks.
- 10. Firefighter Stevan Ivic recently secured the title of reigning Australian National Boxing Federation professional heavyweight boxing champion.



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