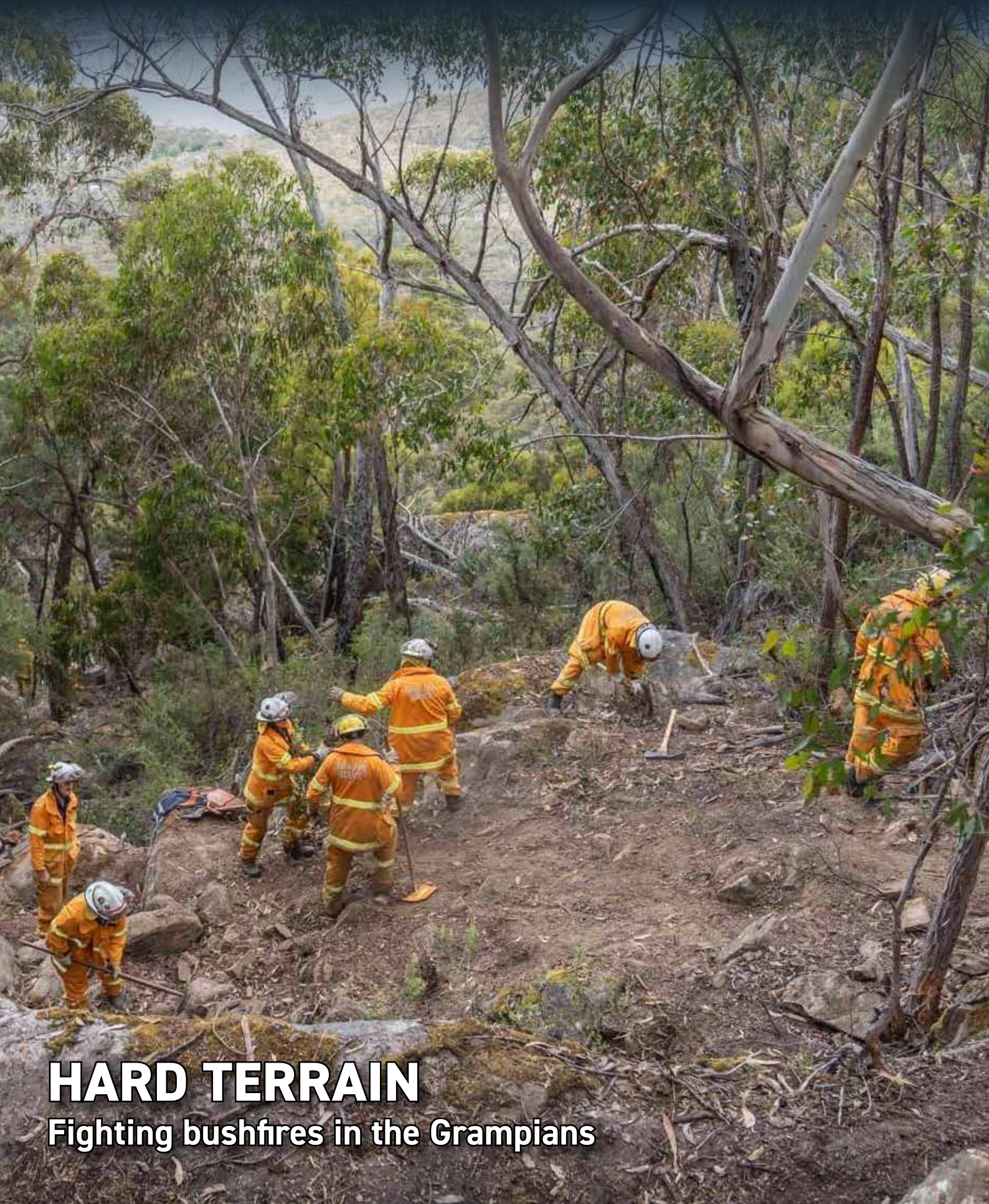


RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT FEBRUARY 2025



HARD TERRAIN

Fighting bushfires in the Grampians

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HIGHLIGHTS

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TACKLING TOUGH TERRAIN



A HELPING HAND IN WET WEATHER



ON THE COVER

Rural Fire Service Queensland members were deployed to the Grampians National Park (Gariwerd) to support Victorian firefighters.

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

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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

OUR SUPERSTAR SCIENTISTS

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FOREWORDS



STEVE SMITH AFSM

Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

The year is well underway, bringing both challenges and opportunities for our teams across the state.

In Far North Queensland, we have been assisting communities impacted by severe flooding. Around 500 personnel across the state have been supporting these operations around the clock – a huge logistical effort that requires dedication and commitment.

On the ground, Queensland Fire and Rescue's (QFR) swiftwater rescue teams have been busy with rescues and evacuations as well as damage assessments, which provide information to inform the ongoing response and support recovery.

Our Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) volunteers have tirelessly engaged communities ahead of evacuation orders and worked alongside Queensland Police Service and Australian Defence Force personnel to doorknock the most at-risk communities. QFR and RFSQ resources are also supporting recovery efforts through washouts and other clean-up activities and setting up the Flexible Habitat in Ingham to house emergency workers.

Operations are ongoing as I write this, and I want to commend everyone across the department who has stepped up to help those in need whether on the ground or behind the scenes.

While our personnel have been working hard in the north, two teams of 12 and seven QFD members recently travelled to Victoria with our Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service partners to support local firefighters battling intense blazes in the Grampians. This follows an earlier deployment of 30 staff and volunteer members from RFSQ and QFR on Boxing Day. The team put in an incredible effort, working long days in rugged mountain terrain. You can read more about their contributions on page 12.

In December, we assisted our Pacific neighbours after a devastating 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck Vanuatu. The disaster claimed 14 lives, left many injured and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. The AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) undertook search and rescue operations and completed more than 1,200 damage assessments. Their professionalism and dedication in challenging conditions were commendable. More details on their work can be found on page 4.

A special congratulations to the five QFD members who have been awarded the prestigious Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) this year: David Brazel, Andrew Houley, Christopher Markwell, Mark Sellin and Terry Whitehead. The AFSM is the highest honour for firefighting personnel, and each recipient is truly deserving. You can hear from them on page 8.

Congratulations also to Charles Garwood from Tirroan Rural Fire Brigade, who was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM).

As the year progresses, we remain committed to evolving as a department and adapting to whatever challenges Queensland's unpredictable weather may bring. Thank you to all QFD staff and volunteer members for your continued dedication and service.



KEVIN WALSH AFSM

Deputy Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND RESCUE

In 2025, Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) will focus on operational excellence and enhanced training and exercises.

QFR is rolling out the new Officer Development Program for our new station officers with a distinct focus on operational tactics and fireground considerations when managing complex emergency incidents.

In the first half of this year, we will also pilot an advanced program for new Inspectors aimed at managing strategic operations of major incidents.

The Operational Advisory Group roadmap will make a vital contribution to firefighter safety and our crews can look forward to the introduction of Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) kits and an increase in thermal imaging cameras, alongside new procedures that will enhance our frontline readiness.

This year is all about drilling deeper into training – honing skills and exercising the new equipment and procedures with dedicated skills development outcomes across a range of areas.

We continue to identify new and more complex risks in the urban environment as well as greater and more complex wildfires. The challenges presented by structural fires involving lithium-ion batteries highlight just some of the new risks in structural firefighting.

Additionally, the recent deployments to Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea disasters and the QFR Swiftwater teams sent to the North Queensland flood event have confirmed the value of our highly skilled firefighters and their innate ability to adapt to new and more complex operational incidents.

These unique skillsets require a continuous innovative approach to fleet, equipment and operational tactics. We will continue to develop new and more innovative ways of working to address these emerging risks, with training and exercising being a fundamental focus in 2025 for QFR and the department more broadly.

Our focus on operational safety will continue this year, and in June we will hold the inaugural QFR Firefighting Safety Symposium. This important event will focus on firefighting operations in the built environment and will become a regular event to promote firefighter safety, share information, explore best practice and participate in practical workshops.

QFR regional personnel as well as fire services from other jurisdictions will be invited to attend to gain insights into emerging risks and discuss new operational considerations for the future.

We must continue our relentless focus on firefighter safety and I look forward to attending the inaugural event in June. Invitations will be sent out to regions in the coming months for staff to register their interest to attend.

Stay safe.



AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

Queensland Fire and Rescue's AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) spent six days assisting local authorities in the wake of devastating earthquakes in Vanuatu.

A 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck near Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, on Tuesday 17 December, followed by a second tremor the next day. Fourteen people lost their lives and more than 200 were treated in hospital.

The earthquake created landslides, flattened buildings and caused major structural damage in others. Some buildings were too unsafe to occupy, forcing several organisations, including the National Bank of Vanuatu, to relocate outside the CBD.

Three bridges and two major powerlines were down and two water reserves destroyed. Prime Minister Charlot Salwai declared a seven-day state of emergency.

Minor earthquakes are relatively common in Vanuatu, which sits at the boundary of two tectonic plates within the Ring of Fire. The island nation is still recovering from twin tropical cyclones in 2023.

Help arrives

Chief Superintendent Doug May led 70 personnel within AUS-1 DART to undertake search and rescue operations and complete more than 1200 damage assessments.

"At our recent deployment to PNG we sent a light team of 16, but in Vanuatu multiple buildings were fully or partially collapsed with people trapped inside, so we sent our full heavy Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team," Doug said.

"The heavy team included team management, rescuers, engineers, doctors, canine handlers, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) officers, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) Liaison Officers, two Humanitarian Logistics Capability Officers and four Fire and Rescue NSW staff."

"We assembled at the State Deployment Centre at 4.30am on the Wednesday, mobilised to Amberley Air Base, and the RAAF transported us to Port Vila on a C-17 Globemaster. Some of Port Vila's airport infrastructure was damaged by the earthquake and there was no power, let alone airspace control or landing systems.

"Before we arrived, a New Zealand Orion aircraft did a flyover to inspect the runway so authorities could re-open the airport to relief supplies.

"We were met by a well-organised group of Australian Defence Force and Australian Federal Police personnel and other staff from the Australian post in Vanuatu. They had vehicles and an immigration process arranged for us. By then it was 6.30pm and near nightfall."

Getting to work

Port Vila CBD was shut down because so many large concrete buildings were damaged.

"The large concrete buildings were most affected as they are rigid and weren't constructed for earthquakes – some of the concrete is lower quality and there's not much reinforcement," Doug said.

"The houses in the villages are a combination of tin and timber or concrete blocks and are built on a slab on the ground, so they're quite resilient."

Soon after they arrived, the team broke off a small detachment with canines to assess the three main collapsed sites – the Billabong building, Wong Garage and an embassy.

"The last of the known survivors had been rescued from the Billabong site while we were in the air, but local rescuers didn't have any technical equipment to assess whether anyone was trapped deeper in the rubble," Doug said.

"The rescuers were made up of Ni-Vanuatu army engineers and a local volunteer road accident rescue group, assisted by liaison officers from the Australian and New Zealand defence forces. They did a remarkable job given their lack of training in heavy rescue work and located seven live casualties.

"We talked to locals about who'd been accounted for. We didn't find anyone else in the rubble, but we conducted an initial assessment, took some direction from local coordinators on what needed doing and established comms."

The search for survivors

AUS-1 DART set up their base of operations in a field inside Cook Barracks, the Vanuatu Mobile Force's (VMF) headquarters.

"The first days were really long because we were setting up the base of operations into the night so we had somewhere to sleep," Doug said.

"We broke up our cache so we could use our technical search equipment and sent a team down to the Billabong building. They conducted a technical search with listening devices and search cameras, which we can put down holes and crevices to look for people and listen for tapping or movement.



The team, including canines and their handlers, flew to Vanuatu on a C-17 Globemaster.

"By that time local rescuers had been working for more than 24 hours so they went home to rest, which was fortuitous because the excavators stopped and we could use the listening devices through the night.

"The team finished at about 3.30am and another team went down early to work with the local rescuers. We moved a cache of equipment down there and were given the task of delayering the whole site back to the slab to make sure no one else was trapped inside.

"Over the next 24 to 36 hours we stripped the building right back down to the ground."

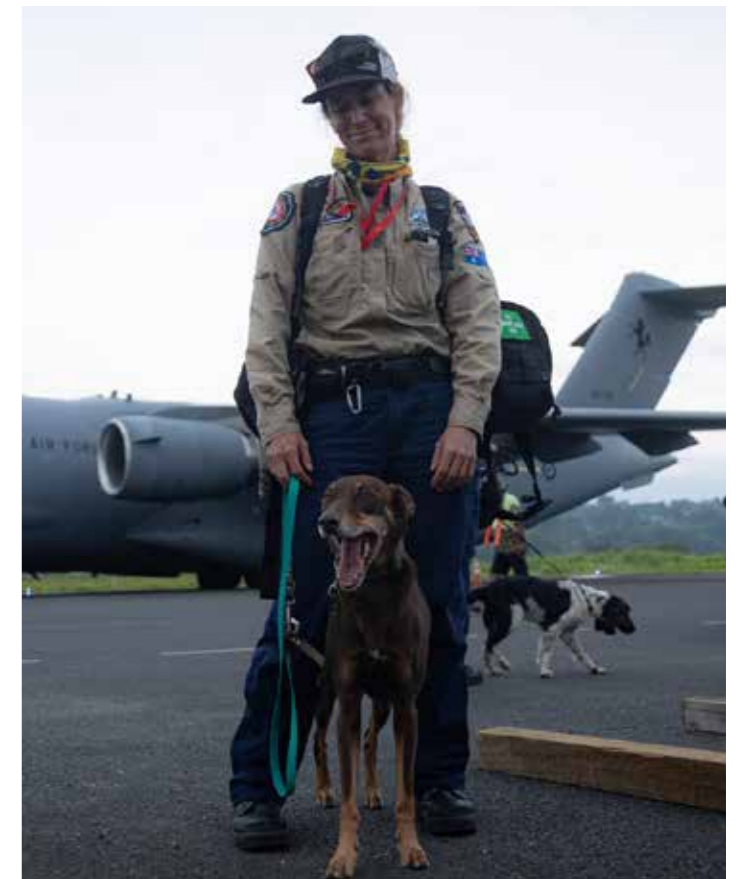
The next day, AUS-1 DART sent teams back to the other two buildings to do a deeper assessment and make sure no one was inside.

"We talked to people there and determined everyone had been accounted for," Doug said. "We also assessed the biggest of the landslides close to town, which was blocking a long stretch of the road to the port.

"That road was the only way to get supplies in and out of the port, and it was suspected that vehicles with people were trapped underneath.

"We did an assessment overnight and sent a drone team in the morning to work alongside the VMF engineering team and provide initial assessment of the main dangers, who was safe to work there, cracks in the landscape and the chance of any vehicles to be sighted.

"We kept working there for a few days and built a 3D picture of the site to help local rescuers dig it out with heavy machinery and to inform the future recovery work."



Assessing the damage

The team used drones for several tasks, including mapping a landslide on the north side of the airport that had collapsed into a village, where a person was missing.

“After mapping the area, we went back over the coming days to show the villagers what could and couldn’t be done in terms of recovering the deceased from the landslide,” Doug said. “We also provided visual data back to local authorities.

“Our engineers received some initial wide-area assessments from local authorities and attended meetings with the UN Infrastructure Cluster to understand what needed to be further assessed.

“We worked with the New Zealand USAR team engineers, who do a lot of work in landslides, and proposed marking and reporting systems for all engineers to use.

“Our engineers then coordinated deeper engineering assessments on the damaged buildings, starting with government buildings so the government departments could re-enter and improve their capacity to mount the response.

“Staff from the national disaster management office were working out of tents in the carpark because their building was compromised.”

The team completed a damage assessment of the whole island to understand the full extent of the damage.

“We did a door-to-door damage assessment around the whole ring road and all the villages over three or four days,” Doug said.

“We provided the data on a Geographic Information System layer that was publicly available to all responders and government agencies so they could see where damaged buildings were, how damaged they were and look at photos, as well as knowing if people were displaced and if there was water or electricity.

“That data set is now being used for the medium- and long-term recovery.”

A rewarding deployment

Doug said the locals were very welcoming of the team’s assistance and came up to shake their hands and say thanks.

“Local rescuers were in touch by text while we were at Amberley to let us know they were keen for us to arrive and apply our specific expertise,” he said.

“People were keen to engage with us when we went to their villages and the agencies were very thankful for the capability we brought to bear.

“Community resilience was quite high. We went to one village where an avalanche had partially buried houses and they’d had to pull a child out, but they were still happy for the things they had.

“Kids were running around happy during the day, but I understand from conversations with expats and others that at night the kids were very different and sometimes they were too scared to sleep inside. Some work would need to be done to restore everyone’s mental health and comfort.”

Doug said the incident was a rare opportunity to deploy a heavy USAR team.

“The team was put to use on reinforced concrete structures – using heavy plant to lift, separate and cut up steel components – which is something we practise a lot but thankfully don’t put into practice very often.

“To see it work exactly like we trained for was quite rewarding. It’s a big undertaking and we put a lot of work into it.

“I think everyone on the team was in good spirits at the end of the deployment. They knew it had gone well and our work was well received. We were thankful to get home before Christmas with a day spare to buy presents for our families.

“Thank you to our partners in Queensland Health and QAS, our canine and engineering volunteers and Fire and Rescue NSW for supporting the team components and to RAAF Base Amberley for the air movements and for looking after our canines on return home.”

CELEBRATING A SECOND CHANCE

When Acting Inspector Kelvin Mercer saved John’s life at a car crash, he never expected to see him again, but at a special reunion John gave his heartfelt thanks.

Kelvin was on his way to work when he saw an accident in the opposite lane. The driver, John, had suffered a heart attack behind the wheel, blacked out and crashed into a post.

“Two police vehicles were on scene,” Kelvin said. “It looked like a minor accident but I decided to turn around to render assistance.

“I went to the passenger-side door and found John having a medical episode. A good Samaritan, Kath, was doing a fantastic job keeping John’s head straight and his airway open. I took the car out of gear and turned it off, then asked Kath if she had medical training.

“She said she didn’t and I could see she was uneasy so I took over head control and let her have a break.

“I checked John’s breathing rate and did a head-to-toe search to see if he had any other injuries. That’s when I noticed his breathing was slowing down. I called to the two police officers to come and assist.

“I handed over head control to one of the officers and asked the other to get under John’s hip so we could move him to the pavement. On my call I lifted his legs and made sure he kept his spine and neck straight.”

Kelvin started giving first aid but John’s breathing stopped.

“Fortunately QFD has defibrillators in all emergency response vehicles and fire trucks, which was an absolute blessing – otherwise we probably wouldn’t have been as lucky that day,” Kelvin said.

“I applied the defibrillator pads to John’s chest, gave him the initial shock and delivered CPR for three or four minutes.

“I gave another shock and started CPR again. About five minutes later ambulance officers arrived and I continued CPR while they took my defibrillator off and applied their pads, which had more diagnostic tools.

“Fortunately John’s heartrate came back so we ceased CPR, but within 30 seconds his heartrate dropped again. The ambulance officers applied another shock and his

heartrate came back. I gave CPR for another 30 seconds before his heartrate stabilised.

“The ambulance officers gave him adrenaline. They had things well under control so I stepped back and let them take over.

“I went over to Kath and another good Samaritan who’d done an amazing job providing the first response. I asked how they were feeling after being confronted with such a scene and said if they had any adverse feelings they should seek a GP or get in touch with QFD to organise any additional care.

“It’s fantastic for someone to put their own life aside and go in and help save a stranger’s life. I’m so thankful for people like that who make our job so much easier.”

After John recovered, his wife Louise reached out to Kelvin’s fire station.

“Her tracking me down was unbelievable,” John said. “I was more than happy to fill in the blanks for John.

“I’m so happy for the family and thankful John’s going to be around for many more years to come. It’s an amazing feeling to see John up and walking around.

“As an emergency services worker, we try not to think too deeply into things because we get confronted with a lot of tough scenes and build up a bit of buffer.

“You don’t normally hear anything at all after a road traffic crash. Quite often I

search the papers to hear if people have made it because it’s good to know if they’re going to see their family again. You’re always left wondering and at the back of your mind you think, ‘I hope they made it.’”

John said, “It’s been great meeting the people who were actually involved in the rescue, because usually everyone just moves on from an event like this.

“I’d never seen Kelvin and Kath before in my life because I was unconscious the whole time so to actually meet them and thank them in person was just unreal. It made everyone’s Christmas and mine especially because it’s a second chance at life.”



From left to right: John, Kelvin Mercer, good Samaritan Kath and John’s wife Louise.

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Five QFD personnel were awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) as part of the Australia Day Awards – the highest honour QFD personnel can receive.

David Brazel AFSM

David has dedicated more than 38 years to frontline firefighting operations in Brisbane, serving as a firefighter through to superintendent.

“It was humbling to receive the AFSM,” David said. “All the congratulatory emails and messages make you feel appreciated and that what you do is worthwhile.”



David Brazel AFSM

“I remember one fire on Stradbroke Island where everything that could go wrong went wrong – helicopters dropped their buckets of water in the ocean, fires started upwind in the wrong places, light attack vehicles were burnt out. It was a relief when we eventually got sufficient rain to extinguish it.

“I’ve enjoyed every part of my career, from riding trucks through to community safety and operations. It’s the camaraderie and the relationships you build with people that help you through everything.”

Andrew Houley AFSM

Since joining RFSQ in 1998, Andrew has served in a range of roles in the Mackay region including District Training Officer and Area Director.

“I started my career in 1986 with the Forestry Department, where we lit low-intensity fires to protect timber and fauna,” Andrew said. “I would rather light a fire than fight a fire any day.

“We still have a lot of farming-based brigades and they’re in it for life. Neighbour helping neighbour or the individual would be overwhelmed.”

– Andrew Houley AFSM

“When I joined RFSQ, most staff were ex-Forestry and I continued my focus on fire-lighting to prepare early for the bushfire season.”

He mentored many RFSQ volunteer and staff members on fire lighting and volunteer management.

“The management and leadership of volunteers is completely different to any other staffing model,” Andrew said. “There is no remuneration, career advancement or personal gain, in fact a lot of RFSQ volunteers lose income by attending fires.



Andrew Houley AFSM

“Volunteer management is all about mutual respect and partnership. Volunteers get to elect their brigade leadership every two years. To lead volunteers from a staff perspective, you need to be credible and walk the talk.

“Fire management is a skill that was starting to be lost because it can be difficult to achieve a planned burn within volunteer timeframes and some community and legislative constraints. Each land use tends to focus on their needs rather than consider neighbouring land use.”

One of his proudest achievements was developing a set of fire management guidelines for Queensland.

“The guidelines, which I facilitated with the local Natural Resource Management Group, cover about 60 million hectares,” Andrew said. “Early collaboration and planning are the key to good fire management across a variety of land use.”

During the 2018-19 bushfire season, Andrew led the operational response for 10 fires covering 240,000 hectares in the Mackay RFSQ Area. There were significant fires from Carmila up to Proserpine and west to Eungella.

“The Eungella and Finch Hatton fires were particularly challenging, because a lot of residents believed the rainforests would not burn. Generally, this is true, but in an exceptionally dry period they will burn. The fires ran for 10 days requiring a continual rotation of volunteers to contain them.

“I want to acknowledge the incredible commitment from volunteers in the Mackay area – the sugarcane, cattle and village brigades who have enabled me to stay and support them for so long.

“They’re just such good people. We had a fire warden at Mount Blackwood last year who received a medal for 61 years of service and his brother had 51 years of service. Three of his sons had served 25 years and several of his grandchildren are in the brigade.

“We still have a lot of farming-based brigades and they’re in it for life. Neighbour helping neighbour or the individual would be overwhelmed.”

Christopher Markwell AFSM

Christopher started as a firefighter in 1985 and has served many roles including firefighter, station officer, HazMat officer, fire investigation officer and safety assessment officer. He is currently a building approvals officer with the Community Infrastructure Branch.

“I worked within the Fire Investigation Unit as a Fire Investigation Officer for 10 years and then continued to provide support to the unit across a further 10 years as the Principal Instructor and Assessor for the development and delivery of the fire investigation training course,” Christopher said.



Christopher Markwell AFSM

“In 2013 we made a case to the industrial commission and they approved fire investigation as a specialist skill.

“I developed the training course to Advanced Diploma level and trained many of our current fire investigators.

“Fire investigation is a fascinating process. You’re quite literally trying to work out a big burnt jigsaw puzzle with half the pieces missing.

“Firefighting is a fabulous career and I’ve always enjoyed it. It’s an extraordinary dynamic space and there are so many facets to it.”

– Christopher Markwell AFSM

“In many cases we deal with loss of life, so we learn as much as we can to prevent it from happening again.”

“Firefighting is a fabulous career and I’ve always enjoyed it. It’s an extraordinary dynamic space and there are so many facets to it.”

Since 2019, Christopher has worked with the complex infrastructure section to review combustible cladding and major battery energy storage systems.

He volunteered as the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) representative on the Australian Standards Committee from 2018-2023 to represent fire safety and the fire services.

“We successfully advocated to maintain power isolators for solar panels so we could turn them off during a fire and avoid the risk of electrocution for firefighters. I was really proud of that because it was a national standard.

“I’m incredibly honoured to receive this award, which is a collective award for all the people who have worked with me and supported me along the way.”

Mark Sellin AFSM

Since starting with RFSQ in 1988, Mark held the role of First Officer of Ocean View Rural Fire Brigade for 15 years and Second Officer for four years before stepping back to a crew leader and firefighter role.

“I was a little taken aback when I heard,” Mark said. “I didn’t really believe it to start off with. We don’t do it for the medals, but it’s nice to be recognised.

“I love what I do, getting in and helping the community out and working with my fellow brigade members.

“I’ve seen a lot of changes within RFSQ over the years. Back when I started it was really just a bushfire brigade and we had no equipment. To get what we have now, the service has moved ahead in leaps and bounds.”



Mark Sellin AFSM

Celebrating Queensland's everyday heroes



Fires test communities worldwide. We've seen it recently in California. It's a stark reminder of how fires can push people to their limits, but also how they bring out the best in us.

In our own sunburnt country, Queenslanders show true grit when disaster strikes. When things get tough, our communities stick together. Neighbours help neighbours. Strangers become mates. Ordinary people turn into heroes. It's this spirit of resilience and mateship that makes Queensland special.

That's why QSuper, part of Australian Retirement Trust, proudly sponsors the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) Australia Day Achievement Awards. For 17 years, we've helped to honour the amazing QFD staff and volunteer members who keep us safe.

This year, we celebrate 81 outstanding Queenslanders. Let's meet some of these local heroes.



Kevin Harney and Tracy Harney

Kevin Harney and Tracy Harney: it's in their DNA

At 80, Kevin Harney lives for his community. He's led the Cungulla Rural Fire Brigade near Townsville for 25 years, and he's not slowing down.

"I'm going on to 81 and I reckon I'll be doing the same thing when I'm 91," Kevin said.

"I reckon if you can help someone in your lifespan, then you've done well in this world."

For the Harneys, giving back to the community is in their DNA.

Kevin's daughter Tracy, also an award winner this year, keeps the Brigade running smoothly as Secretary. Meanwhile, Kevin's wife makes sure they stay fueled up during emergencies.

"The whole family is very community minded. The main thing is we're here for the community. And we're here for any emergency responses," he said.

While the awards came as an unexpected surprise to Kevin and Tracy, they find their real reward in keeping their community safe.

It's the Queensland way – stepping up for the greater good when times are tough.

Gemma Dziurma: caring for our carers

Looking after our minds is as vital as our bodies. QFD Manager Mental Health Services, Gemma Dziurma champions this for our firefighters.

In 2024, Gemma went above and beyond and visited nearly every fire station in Queensland. She met firefighters, trained leaders, and linked people with support.

Thanks to Gemma, our firefighters can better care for themselves, while serving others.

Arthur Brennan: leading by example

Former police sergeant Arthur 'Bill' Brennan is service and leadership in action. During the Darling Downs fire season, Bill tackled at least 10 major incidents, many lasting for days.

Bill risked his life time and again to save families and properties. His mix of police and fire skills makes him a great mentor for younger team members.

Bill's dedication shows the true Queensland spirit of mateship and resilience.

Recognising Queensland's finest

These stories are just a taste of the incredible work QFD staff and volunteers do across the state. All 81 award winners share the same drive to serve and protect their fellow Queenslanders.

Australian Retirement Trust Chief Member Experience Officer Simonne Burnett said, "We're proud to support the recognition of the individuals who are giving their time and expertise to serve, protect, and care for their fellow Queenslanders in times of crisis or emergency."

"I congratulate all award recipients, QFD staff, and volunteers across Queensland for their outstanding and selfless contributions throughout the communities where our members live and work," she said.

Mark mentors other members and is a dedicated leader and teacher, sharing his enthusiasm and expertise.

"We've always got new members coming through and it's interesting to meet them and learn about their skills."

"Back when I started it was really just a bushfire brigade and we had no equipment. To get what we have now, the service has moved ahead in leaps and bounds."

- Mark Sellin AFSM

He has been deployed with many strike teams as a firefighter and crew leader in Queensland and interstate, and helped during the 2011 flood cleanup through suburbs of Brisbane.

"I remember in 1997 we went down to the Narrabri and Muswellbrook area and the rocky terrain played havoc with the radio comms. When you go interstate there's different fire and different terrain, so it's good to get away on deployment and get that experience.

"We've got a great bunch of members in our brigade. Everyone works together and we collaborate with neighbouring brigades and the local auxiliary crew. We're a very community-spirited brigade and our First Officer shows great leadership.

"It's a big commitment that I've given to the brigade over 37-odd years but I love what I'm doing."

Terry Whitehead AFSM

Terry joined Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade in 1990. He helped gain funding to build the brigade's station and was heavily involved in constructing it.

Terry has been on deployments to NSW, Victoria, Canberra and throughout Queensland as a strike team leader.

"I went to Canberra for the massive fires in 2003 and my job was to organise all the transport trucks and get them into the Snowy Mountains for crews to use."

"I'm a bricklayer by trade and my dad was a bricklayer too. He brought me up to knuckle down and get the work done, and that's the way it was in the early days of RFSQ."

- Terry Whitehead AFSM

In 1995, he was a founding member of the Guanaba Rural Fire Brigade and became First Officer for nearly 20 years.

"To have the members of the brigade elect me every two years, I felt great pride in that," Terry said.

He again oversaw years of funding to build a station for the brigade.

"Back in those days, there was less money for brigades so you had to do things yourself, raise the money and find local companies to supply things," Terry said.

"That's why blokes like me take great pride in the fire service, because we helped build it years ago. It takes a combined effort of many people to get these things done.

"I'm a bricklayer by trade and my dad was a bricklayer too. He brought me up to knuckle down and get the work done, and that's the way it was in the early days of RFSQ.

"And now look at what we have today – stations, trucks, you name it. It's great to see how RFSQ has evolved."



Charles Garwood OAM

- Charles Garwood from Tirroan Rural Fire Brigade was honoured with the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his service to the community.





TACKLING TOUGH TERRAIN

Fires across Victoria's rugged mountain ranges put our crews to the test.

On Boxing Day, a team of 30 Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) staff and volunteer members were deployed to the Grampians National Park (Gariwerd) to help our Victorian colleagues fight fires spread across more than 75,000 hectares of diverse terrain.

Moreton Bay Bushfire Mitigation Officer Christopher Randle, the strike team leader for the deployment, said in his recent memory it was one of the hardest operations of his 13-year volunteer career.

He had Remote Area Firefighting Team (RAFT) members in his crew, including himself who had worked in the Canada wildfires in 2023, but this experience did not compare to the Grampians' diverse terrain.

"Some of us have been in the RAFT program for years. So, we're kind of used to these kinds of things. For some people this was their first or second arduous deployment and they struggled. Everyone got blisters

on their feet, some of us lost toenails," said Christopher.

"We had so many different combinations down there, it went from grasslands, into open forest and swamps. The rocky outcrops were probably our biggest and most dangerous stuff," he said.

"It was hard working around so many rocks."

Three days of hard work

Christopher said it was eerie arriving in the heart of the Grampians in Halls Gap with the entire town shutdown and evacuated.

"There were people, appliances and machinery everywhere. There was smoke throughout the valley, it felt like something out of a movie.

"Halls Gap is in the bottom of the valley surrounded by mountains, so it was the most active fire edge and high-risk area.

"It took us an hour to walk back to our appliances each day. Our days started at

8am and we didn't get off the fireground until 10pm at night," he said.

"It was daylight savings down there so it was still light, and we worked as long as we could."

On their first day, the team's skills were put to the test up an 800-metre track with an almost 340-metre vertical incline.

He said the strong winds and temperatures on Boxing Day meant they spent the entire day following up the fire edge from the previous day.

"It was climbing over rocks and through burnt forests up the escarpment," Christopher said.

"So that was our trial, that's the way I sort of looked at it. If we did well there, then we'd be used for high-risk dangerous sections."

Completing the containment line

On the second day they were tasked with creating a rake hoe line down a cliff face,

which ended at the end of an overhang escarpment.

He said even with a bulldozer and a team of 20 people they were only able to clear 800 metres of land.

"It was ridiculous the terrain we were working with, but the crews did really well," he said.

It was a race against the flames on the third day as they continued the containment line down the escarpment.

"We had fire close enough where we could see flames and smell it, so that was always in the back of our minds that the fire is just there," he said.

Over the three days the team worked alongside other state firefighters, hazardous tree assessors, Parks Victoria and the Country Fire Association (CFA).

"So, majority of the time we worked with two hazardous tree assessors as they've lost so many people to fallen trees. They would be in front of us marking dangerous trees," Christopher said.

"We had three parkies with us the entire time. On the second and third day we had between six and 10 additional ones who helped us with the rake hoe lines and chopping trees.

"On the last day we worked with CFA with supplying water and the backburn."

He said it was a learning experience working alongside interstate firefighters.

"They were filming us doing rake hoe lines, so they could use it for their training videos," he said.



"They're in a similar boat to us – developing and moving forwards with their training. So, there are going to be a lot of Queenslanders in their videos. That was good to see."

Reflecting on their work

Christopher said on the third day when they stopped to rest, they looked back at the containment line intertwined in the mountain slope and everything was brought into perspective.

"Looking down the mountain overlooking the lake and Halls Gap, it sort of just brought everything together and why we were there and what this meant for that town.

"We had three days and if we didn't get it done the fire would have got past us and it would still be going now. They said it could have gotten into the 'difficults', which is what they call the mountains down there. Halls Gap may have been evacuated again."

Bonogin Valley rural firefighter Gloria Vicario said the terrain was "as tough as an old boot" and her role in the team transitioned over the three days.

"On the first day of deployment my primary tasks included identifying and extinguishing hot spots using primarily dry firefighting techniques," Gloria said.

"As the operation progressed, I transitioned to using a Pulaski tool to clear roots and vegetation, which helped facilitate the work of our rake operators and blowers.

"At the end of the third day, my vehicle was tasked with delivering meals to



emergency services personnel conducting and monitoring the backburn along the containment line and other critical areas."

Gloria said the Victorian deployment was physically demanding and required a significant level of fitness as well as awareness of navigation and communication strategies.

"Good preparation and team cohesiveness were also key to our success and an important part of every deployment I have been on," Gloria said.

"It is important to be humble and always have each other's backs for the overall success of the objective."

She said the crews' hard work and professionalism led to the overall success of the deployment.

"The moment that was most ingrained in my brain was looking up at the working line and seeing the team rapidly and meticulously working together to create one of the best containment lines I have seen."

This was the second fire in less than a year to hit the Grampians and the region again faced extreme fire danger in late January, with dry lightning starting fires on the northern and southern edges of Little Desert National Park.

On 1 February, QFD sent another 12 personnel to assist with continued firefighting operations in the Grampians, followed by another deployment on 6 February.



A HELPING HAND IN WET WEATHER

When torrential rains led to flooded roads across Queensland late last year, firefighters supported communities and rescued people from floodwaters. Severe weather in February saw Queensland Fire and Rescue swiftwater firefighters return to the north.

The South Burnett area was hit particularly hard, with Kingaroy receiving a record 149mm in one day in December.

Station Officer Bruce Groer from Kingaroy Fire and Rescue Station, who was Acting Inspector and Area Commander during the severe weather season, helped coordinate the response with the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG).

"This has been a busy season for us," Bruce said. "Kingaroy, Wondai and Proston suffered significantly, and to a lesser extent Blackbutt and Nanango.

"We experienced five or six major weather events, including storms in December that damaged roads and led to swiftwater rescues, and storms that caused wind damage and trees down in January.

"A lot of the storms have been small but very savage. The river and creek systems – Stuart River, Boyne River, Barambah Creek and Barker Creek – have been very full for about a month, causing local isolations. The two major dams – Bjelke-Petersen and Boondooma – have been spilling over.

"We don't tend to see much inundation in residential areas because we have quite hilly country and the water runs off quickly, but communities were isolated after bridges and roads were cut.

"The LDMG stood up three times and we helped coordinate operations. Our crews assisted several people to safety after their cars were stranded in creeks and floodways.

"We also helped the Kingaroy community with washouts and cleared trees from houses and driveways.

"The community was very appreciative. It's a fairly resilient community and from what I see I don't think locals dwelled on it. Most people just seem to get on with it and life goes on.

"The LDMG put out plenty of early warnings for the flooding events and people stayed off the roads, which certainly helped us. It's important for people to be aware of weather conditions and take heed of the warnings."

A daring rescue

Crews sprang into action when three teenage girls were stranded in the flooded Barron River near Mareeba.

Acting Inspector Jason Mather said the wet weather in their area came on the heels of three months of intense bushfires.

"When the rain started on 20 December, creeks and rivers quickly became fast-flowing torrents that cut roads, causeways and bridges," Jason said.

"We had three swiftwater rescues in two days – the other two were for drivers swept off flooded causeways."

Queensland Fire and Rescue Swiftwater technicians Paul Dilena, Jason Ryan and Sarah White (pictured) attended all three swiftwater incidents together, cementing a close bond and sense of achievement.

Crews were called to the Barron River incident around 5pm. First crews to arrive were permanent and auxiliary crews from Mareeba, who were soon backed up by firefighters from Atherton.



The crew who rescued three girls at Mareeba. From left to right: Station Officer Paul Dilena, Station Officer Jason Ryan and Senior Firefighter Sarah White.

"The three girls had tried to swim across the flooded river, which was 65 metres wide, to see friends living on the other side," Jason said.

"They made it about 20 metres before the force and volume of water overwhelmed them. Luckily, they were able to cling to a large tree until we developed a rescue plan.

"Downstream spotters and active Queensland Fire and Rescue Swiftwater technicians were placed along the river in case the children fell out of the tree.

"Firefighter Tracy Marcel, who had detailed knowledge of the family and community members, was a tremendous asset to help calm the children and bystanders.

"Paul, Sarah and Jason entered the water and performed a high-risk rescue of the three girls, bringing them back one by one to their distraught family.

"While they were in the tree, the teenagers were visible to many family and community members and I could feel the sense of relief when I talked with the family after the rescue. All three girls were unharmed.

"This sense of achievement was short lived because another call came in. The crews, still saturated from rain, went to help a trapped driver on a causeway."

Jason said Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) worked well together at the scene, continually considering options and contingency plans.

"I am proud of everyone working closely together to achieve something special," he said. "Our communities are relatively small and agencies are often short staffed. We have developed a strong working relationship with QAS and QPS.



"The interaction between permanent and auxiliary firefighters is amazing and there are no barriers. It's seamless. I'm proud of the crew and their efforts through a very intense and hectic period."

Due to the complexity of the rescue and its distance from main centres, Northern Region Management decided to permanently locate one of their four motorised craft in Mareeba.

"This enhances the safety of Mareeba and Atherton, where communities are often cut off by road closures on the Kuranda and Gillies ranges," Jason said.

"Permanently moving the motorised craft to this area is greatly appreciated by all crews and shows a real awareness of the special response considerations of remote communities."





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SUPPORTING THE SCOUTS

Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) members were on shift day and night at Australia’s largest scout gathering to give insights into firefighting and promote the role of volunteers in the community.

The Australian Scout Jamboree was a 10-day event where scouts set up more than 150 tent villages in the Maryborough showgrounds. Held every four years since 1934, the jamboree was delayed in 2022 by the pandemic.

RFSQ members put on a display of appliances and equipment, gave hands-on demonstrations and discussed fire safety with scouts.

Kent Mischke, Second Officer of Bidwill Rural Fire Brigade, jumped at the chance to be part of the jamboree.

“The site — hosting over 10,000 scouts, leaders and staff — functioned like a mini city with activity zones, food stations and entertainment,” Kent said. “There was ample space for scouts to set up tents in the surrounding bush.

“We operated with three-person day shifts (7am-7pm) and two-person night shifts (7pm-7am). Heavy storms with torrential downpours created mini rivers and extensive mud, which led to access issues for crews and scouts.

“A lightning strike caused a power outage that lasted two or three hours, but this didn’t faze the scouts one bit and they dug trenches to redirect the water away from tents.

“We had a great deal of interaction and positive feedback from the scouts. As part of the scout tradition of swapping badges, we distributed RFSQ stickers, keychains

and hats. This allowed us to promote the bushfire safety message while receiving heartfelt thanks for our efforts.

“My highlights were talking to scouts from all over the globe and seeing them creating friendships and having the time of their life. Their manners were just awesome to hear and they came up to us wanting high-fives and fist bumps. This jamboree will definitely be a lasting memory and I hope to go to another one.”

Brigade Support Officer Ross Argo said his office had been preparing for the event since last October.

“We had a staff member and three volunteers on site every day,” Ross said.

“The site is scattered with bushland with campsites throughout. There were many

activities for the scouts – abseiling, pole climbing and mud runs just to name a few. A large stage was erected for live acts every night.

“There was a lot of rain and the site become very muddy, which made it hard to access a lot of the camping areas.

“I found out how much scouts love badges. We were continually asked if we had RFSQ badges like the ones on our shirts, but the best we could do was stickers. QPS showed us up as they had taken the badges and logos off all their uniforms and were handing them out like lollypops.

“Given the muddy conditions, the scouts still enjoyed themselves and were easy to talk to.”





Photo from Brisbane City Council Archives.

BRISBANE'S TRAMS UP IN SMOKE

When fire swept through the Paddington Tram Depot in 1962, it destroyed 67 trams and sounded the death knell for Brisbane's tram system.

On the night of 28 September 1962, one of the largest fires in Brisbane's history burnt a fifth of Brisbane's tram fleet, causing £500,000 damage.

The Canberra Times reported that, "The two-storey depot and workshops building of galvanised iron and wood, built in 1915, was alight from end to end within 10 minutes of when the fire was noticed.

"The only men in the depot – two depot masters and a despatcher – were able to drive only three trams clear and rescue four cash boxes before power failures and fierce heat drove them from the depot."

Six fire engines and five pumps fought the blaze but were hampered by the area's low water pressure.

Green flames

Brian Dutton, who was a junior firefighter one week out of his probationary period at the time of the fire, spoke to QFD in 2016 for the *Back to the Brass Helmet* documentary series.

"At first there was nothing visible as far as a fire, like smoke," Brian said. "However, the fire hadn't started in the top part of the building, it had started in the lower part where there was a storage area where they kept tyres for buses and volatile fuels."

The depot was built on a hill on Latrobe Terrace with the front at street level and the back supported by timber stilts up to 15 metres high, with homes on both sides. The trams sat on raised tracks so mechanics could get under them.

"That was where I first took up a position to fight the fire, which allowed me to direct water from underneath the trams, down directly into the fire below," Brian said.

"The flames were coming up into where the trams were, and I remember being underneath the trams, and ... one tram was starting to burn.

"As time passed it was two trams, three trams, four trams. The first bay was fully involved above us, and green flames were dancing across the ceiling."

The green colour was from the copper wires that powered the trams. With flames all around them, the firefighters decided it was time to get out.

"When I stood up between the trams, it was that hot that I placed my hands in my armpits and crouched down as much as I could," Brian said.

"The fire was so intense by the time the second line was taken in that the firemen on that line could not stay there.

"A day or so later I discovered molten solder had fallen onto the shoulders of my coat from the roof or the copper wires."

Like wounded bulls

Historians KD Calthorpe and K Capell wrote that, "Grease, oil and tram tickets had accumulated along the length of the 'inspection and maintenance' pits between the tram lines... the fire sped along these trails of fuel as if they were ignited slithers of gunpowder, but with more of a whoosh.

"For the firemen working at the rear of the depot the most frightening aspect of this blaze was the sight of trams thundering down towards them from the highly elevated floor of the building as it collapsed.

"Like wounded bulls, these leviathans charged out through the red flames crashing towards the backyards of houses behind the 2½ acre complex."

Firefighters tried to fight the fire from outside to protect surrounding buildings, but the water pressure was so low they couldn't reach the flames. A palm tree caught fire in a front yard across the road from radiated heat.

"We applied water to nearby shops and a house but radiated heat had made the windows in the shop so hot that when we applied water they shattered," Brian said.

"I was still there at half past midnight. At least 30 or 40 men were trying to fight the fire at that time."

According to the Courier-Mail, "A towering column of smoke, flames and sparks billowed hundreds of feet into the air. Sparks were showered over Ithaca, Red Hill and parts of Herston as the heat and gusty winds swirled them through the air.

"All roads leading to the depot were blocked by hundreds of cars. Traffic police with loud hailers continually urged people to keep



Photo from Brisbane City Council Archives.

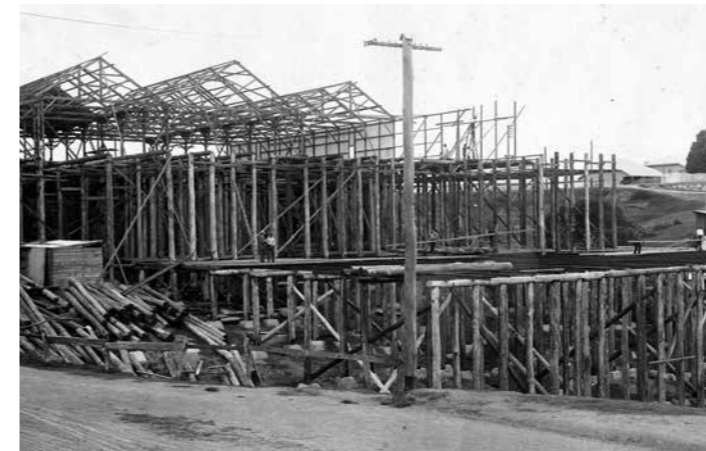


Photo from Brisbane City Council Archives.

back from the blazing building, and the threat of collapsing walls and live overhead wires.

"Overhead tram wires leading from the depot were seared through by the heat. When the wires dropped, trams were held up on either side of the depot and had to be towed away with a tractor and a tow truck."

The phoenix

Police advised the family in a neighbouring house they had to evacuate because the stilts under the depot were starting to burn.

"They had five minutes to evacuate and in that five minutes the family pulled every stick of furniture and even the curtains off the window out of the building," Brian said.

Then the police told the family they were safe to move their belongings back into the house.

"But around about that time the trams started falling off the rails. So in another five minutes they completely stripped the house again.

"We had monitors set up along the street directing water into the fire and they were there for nearly a week. Millions of gallons must have been poured into that fire.

"The fire is still quite clear to me. I learnt a heck of a lot that night. I think I learnt more from that fire than any other fire after. It's something that's logged into your brain and you never forget it."

The fire's cause was never determined. The council eventually sold the block and the Paddington Central shopping centre was built there.

Tram parts were salvaged from the ruins of the depot and used to build eight new trams bearing the symbol of a phoenix.

The tram system had grown quickly in the 20s and 30s, with almost 200 kilometres of track throughout Brisbane. However, it had gone into decline with the increased use of cars and the Paddington fire contributed to its closure seven years later.

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Photo from Brisbane City Council Archives.

PROTECTING OUR ECOSYSTEMS

QFD and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) have a long history of working together at planned burns and bushfires across Queensland.

QPWS looks after more than 1000 national parks, state forests, marine parks, five World Heritage areas and other protected areas.

Their Fire Services team manages Australia's second-largest planned burn program, conducting more than 400 planned burn activities across 530,000 hectares each year.

Within the team, Senior Ranger, Operations Brett Duke provides operational support to the regions to ensure QPWS completes the greatest number of planned burns as safely as possible.

"Planned burns are one of QPWS' most effective land management tools to manage many of Queensland's ecosystems while reducing the risk and intensity of bushfires," Brett said.

"QPWS regularly reviews its planned burn program and specific burns can be planned for months and sometimes years in advance. The priority is areas immediately adjoining high-risk residential areas and other public infrastructure,

or environmental impacts such as the endangered Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat.

"QPWS fire staff consider many factors when planning for a burn including the First Nations peoples' knowledge and aspirations, the area's fire history, the type of fire an area needs, the flora and fauna and vegetation communities, park neighbours, surrounding land uses and accessibility into the area."

Queensland's first national park, Witches Falls at Mount Tamborine, was established in 1908. National parks were initially looked after by the Forestry Department until QPWS was formed as a dedicated parks service in 1975.

"I understand that in the early days of QPWS there was less focus on fire management," Brett said. "This has definitely turned around and there is a coordinated push to get more good fire into the landscape.

"We also do a lot more planned burning from aircraft now because it allows us to easily access hard-to-reach country, follow

cliff edges or changes in vegetation and make the most of good conditions."

Fire affects the distribution and diversity of many native plants and animals. Many species depend on fire for long-term survival, while others are threatened by it, so rangers have to carefully balance the timing, frequency and intensity of fire.

Planned burns for ecological purposes are patchy and less intense, providing animal refuges while minimising loss of habitats such as logs and tree hollows, promoting rapid regeneration of healthy vegetation, and creating a mosaic of burn ages over time.

Working with QFD

While QFD is the lead agency during bushfire response for fire management and protecting life and property, QPWS is responsible for managing fire within its protected areas where there is no threat to life and property.

"I have lots of great memories of the hard-working QFD members I've been in all kinds of situations with," Brett said.



"Whether it's chasing spot-overs off the steep side of the Cunningham Highway during the 2019-20 bushfire season with a Queensland Fire and Rescue crew, or desperately trying to get a backburn in with landholders and Primary Producer Brigade members at 3am during the 2023 Mt Tabor bushfire, there are any number of amazing QFD members I've been lucky enough to work with.

"It's the people who are willing to hook in and get whatever job done that stick most in my memory.

"During the Fairyland bushfire in February 2023, when it was all going to pot, I asked the character driving one of the 51 appliances 'How ya goin'?' and without hesitation he responded with a massive grin, 'If I was any better, I'd be dangerous!' Absolute champion!

"As with any relationship there are many good areas and some that can be improved. Both sides need to continue to recognise the skills, experience, knowledge, capability, motivation and resources of the other, and how these characteristics can enhance outcomes on the fireground.

"In general, the individual relationships are strong, but competing priorities can create challenges. I know both departments want to continue building our relationship and with good communication and clear understanding we will.

"I've had a whole range of experiences with QFD members – most have been really positive, but there are areas we can all get better at.

"We all have abilities and knowledge that help get the job done and I look forward to working with QFD members in the future to get the best outcome for Queensland."

Working with Traditional Owners

QPWS often works in partnership with Traditional Owners and Indigenous rangers to carry out planned burns and bushfire operations.

Queensland has more than two million hectares under formal joint management between the state and First Nations peoples.

"Under these arrangements, First Nations people are freehold landowners under the *Queensland Aboriginal Land Act 1991*," Brett said. "The state maintains responsibility for protected area outcomes consistent with the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, including fire management.

"QPWS supports Traditional Owners to undertake fire training to enhance their fire management skills to apply in managing Country.

"The application of fire to achieve a range of desired outcomes has been applied over millennia by First Nations people and has greatly influenced current biodiversity in Queensland.

"The low-intensity, patchy mosaic burning that QPWS aims to achieve in many of its burns is very much in line with what First Nations peoples' burning often aims to achieve.

"Shared knowledge and experience of First Nations peoples has informed QPWS' bioregional planned burn guidelines, which set out how to burn in various vegetation types."

All on the same team

Damian Hatfield was a ranger with QPWS for nearly seven years before becoming a Senior Systems Officer with QFD. He's been an RFSQ volunteer since 2011.

"Working as a ranger with QPWS gave me a great chance to work directly with RFSQ volunteers, particularly on the fire line at prescribed burns and wildfires," Damian said.

"Having experience as a ranger helps in my current role because I understand QPWS' organisational objectives and how they look at fire in the landscape in some ways differently to QFD.

"Sometimes QPWS organises planned burns for environmental outcomes, not just hazard reduction or bushfire mitigation, and sometimes they desire different fire behaviour.

"When it comes to bushfire management, QFD and QPWS' working relationship is great. QPWS are on the same page as us. They understand the priority is life, property and then the environment – they understand where the environment sits in a bushfire response situation.

"QPWS and QFD use the same language around fire and we have very similar training and processes, so quite often our roles are interchangeable. That makes it easy to understand what QPWS are capable of when we turn up to a fire.

"QPWS has long-term staff members who are incredibly experienced in bushfire management. When we turn up to a prescribed burn at a park, it's led by QPWS, and they're more than happy to take into account QFD outcomes.



"The same is true if we manage a level 2 bushfire on their behalf – we take their organisational objectives into account.

"For example, the White Mountains-Pentland Fire in November 2024 was a great opportunity to have an interagency Incident Management Team (IMT). As Incident Controller, I drew on my experience working with QPWS, since the fire was partly in a national park.

"We gave QPWS staff roles within the IMT such as Planning Section Lead and Deputy Operations Officer, which helped build relationships within the region.

"Combining QFD and QPWS in the IMT allowed us to embed their objectives and ours together, so we were all part of the same work processes and operating picture."

Building relationships

When Shaun Harris joined QFD at the end of last year as the Area Manager for Moreton Bay, he brought with him plenty of experience as a volunteer and staff member at QPWS.

"I had the opportunity to work across multiple management units at QPWS around south-east Queensland, finishing as a Ranger in Charge," Shaun said.

"I then worked for local government in the fire management space, which involved extensive liaising with QPWS to plan and implement mitigation and response activities.

"My current role will continue this relationship with QPWS, assisting them with RFSQ brigade support and area fire management risk profiling, delivered through Area Fire Management Groups.

"The relationship between QPWS and RFSQ is always building and the integration between our agencies is increasing during mitigation and response activities."

ADVISORY COMMITTEE DRAWS ON EXPERIENCE

Firefighter and disaster researcher Dr Barbara Ryan and Primary Producer Brigade member Col Weeks are among the volunteers appointed to the new Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee (RFSAC).

The RFSAC plays a crucial role as the principal body providing expert advice to the Chief Officer. Its advice will be instrumental in navigating challenges and making well-grounded decisions in a complex ever-evolving environment. Maintaining the committee's role as the central advisory body will be key to ensuring progress and success.

Dr Ryan is a firefighter and Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) with the Ravensbourne-Perseverance Rural Fire Brigade. Previously she was an Associate Professor in Public Relations at the University of Southern Queensland, researching disaster and emergency communications and community engagement.

Her goal in joining the RFSAC, which advises the Chief Officer RFSQ on matters related to rural fire brigades, was to help ensure brigades and communities are better prepared for disasters.

"I put my name forward because I wanted to make sure community engagement was recognised and supported," Dr Ryan said.

"Compared to other states, Queensland is really behind on community engagement. Mostly we think of it as one-way delivery of information, but other states are working with communities to take control of their own destinies and get prepared.

"I want to make sure this is considered in any decisions that affect why volunteers might sign up to support community engagement."

Dr Ryan completed her PhD on how people look for information when their community experiences a disaster.

"I was looking at what people do when they first learn they might be affected by a disaster," Dr Ryan said.

"There were some differences across hazards, but mainly people hear from other

people that something's going to happen and then they look for confirmation. Often this confirmation is visual – they look out the window or turn on the TV. For bushfire people often ring other people in their district."

As part of her research, Dr Ryan read through submissions to the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires Royal Commission.

"The stories people told about the bushfires showed the better connected into community people are, the better prepared they'll be," she said.

"I thought one way to connect with community would be to join my local fire brigade. I graduated in May 2017 and joined RFSQ four months later.

"Since then I've worked directly with communities to get them to lead their own destiny. As an RFSQ volunteer with PR skills, it seemed a no-brainer to become a VCE.

"I find public meetings are only a starting point – they provide an opening to do so much more. The secret is to really look at your community and find out who they are and what type of information they need."

Dr Ryan also worked on a Natural Hazards Research Australia project with QUT and Macquarie University where she studied the devastating impact of the 2022 floods in Queensland and Northern NSW.

"We interviewed many survivors and the takeaway was that the way emergency services, other agencies and the mud army deal with survivors can often make the recovery more traumatic than the flood.

"As an RFSQ volunteer, now I know if I go around with a crew doing cleanouts, it's good for one of us to sit down with the homeowner and be empathetic and listen. People just want it to be recognised that they've been through a big thing.

"Enthusiasm doesn't have a place in cleanup. We really have to tune into what the owners want and remember their brains are completely scrambled for three weeks after the event.

"The mud army can sometimes come in and throw everything out, when a lot of stuff can be cleaned up and reused. One lady we interviewed had jewellery thrown away.

"You have to take it slow and remember the person isn't making great decisions and probably won't for a while until they're on a more even keel.

"Queensland used to be behind in terms of community engagement, but under the banner of QFES and QFD it's been developing in a good way.

"We need to get better at recruiting RFSQ members who can support community engagement, which is much more than just turning up at the local agricultural show. We need to be having active conversations with communities and getting more people involved."

Looking out for Primary Producer Brigades

For more than half a century, Col Weeks has been fighting fires in and around Bajool in central Queensland.

"I went to my first fire when I was nine years old," Col said. "My father thought I was old enough to swing a wet sugar bag.

"In the late 1950s, the whole family was involved in fighting fires, especially in Primary Producer Brigades (PPB). That family involvement continues today.

"Our brigade was established in 1962 and was known as the Bajool South Ulam Bush Fire Brigade. In 1974 I attended my first meeting and became a member.

"I learnt about firefighting from older members in the brigade. There really was no formal training like we have today."

By day a schoolteacher and principal, Col continued to fight fires over the years, embracing the concept of mate helping mate, particularly during major fires such as at Rockhampton and Mount Morgan in 2009.

"I have enjoyed my time with RFSQ and truly value the friendship and camaraderie I have experienced with many likeminded volunteers," Col said.

"As RFSQ volunteers, providing our services and empathy to our communities in difficult times gives us a sense of achievement.



"As a VCE, I engage with my own community by delivering current information about our brigade and how community members can help themselves and our brigade when emergencies occur. Our VCEs also attend several functions each year throughout the wider district to keep people informed about fire activities and other emergencies.

"Our brigades are often the first and only emergency service in our small towns and surrounding district."

Something Col will always remember is the 2013 flood at Bajool.

"It was the second highest flood recorded in oral history of the area," he said. "The community responded quickly and evacuated to a safe area.

"The recovery phase that followed involved many community volunteers, rural fire brigades and the Local Disaster Management Group. Within three weeks, Bajool was up and running thanks to volunteers. It showed how resilient our small communities can be."

When the call went out for volunteers to join the RFSAC, Col jumped at the chance.

"As members of the committee, we've developed a mutual respect for each other and are all prepared to work collaboratively to provide our best considered advice to the Chief Officer," he said.

"Our aim is to improve working conditions for our volunteers, whether it's through our training programs, delivering a modern fleet within timelines, providing PPE, efficient brigade management guidelines, or simple procedures to enable brigades to serve communities quickly and efficiently."

Col was recently appointed Chair of the Primary Producer Brigades Working Group (PPBWG), instigated by the RFSAC.

"The aim of the PPBWG is to give a better understanding of how these brigades operate and ascertain how RFSQ can better support them," Col said. "PPBs cover a large area of the state with minimal equipment from RFSQ.

"The working group will report to the RFSAC on issues that specifically affect PPBs and provide guidance and possible generic solutions to address the different style of operations in PPBs.

"The PPBWG will look at the distribution of PPBs across Queensland and their operational needs, which vary somewhat from other brigades. Membership levels, equipment supplied and funding will be part of our deliberations.

"The PPBWG will also consider basic training programs that meet the needs of PPBs and how the training will be delivered. Further considerations will include how we encourage and deliver more advanced training to interested volunteers.

"Members of PPBs, in the main, are landholders, family or staff employed on properties. They respond as a group to any incidents that occur in their area, whether it's fire, flood, accident or any other disturbance.

"PPB members are keen to help each other in time of need. Usually, if equipment such as graders is required, it's provided by members, often free of charge. PPB members are very community-minded and prepared to help keep their community safe."



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FIREFIGHTER'S CREATIVE FLAIR

From music and performance to operating carnival rides, Melissa Macfarlane brings a wealth of creative experience to her role as a Senior Firefighter.

Growing up, Melissa was always an arts child, singing and dancing and playing musical instruments.

"I thoroughly believed my adult working life would be along those same lines. I'd been playing since I was 10 years old and I still play in a community jazz band called New Groove Jazz Ensemble.

"I began a Pop Music and Performance degree, envisioning it would lead me into the music industry. However, it almost felt like a chore and I wasn't enjoying playing as much as I used to, so I didn't pursue it any further after studying. I prefer to enjoy playing without the other side of it all."

In addition to her love of music, Melissa worked as a 'carnie' on show rides around Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast from age 16 to 29.

"I thoroughly enjoyed being outside, always travelling to different venues and schools," Melissa said.

"It was similar to my role as a firefighter – I had a great small working team and my day was always filled with laughter no matter how much work had to be done. Plus, I really enjoyed bringing joy to so many people and their children."

After school, Melissa worked in marketing for EB Games and then in a print and copy role at Officeworks.

"I enjoyed the creative side of printing – bringing people's ideas and dreams to life on paper or canvas. But after some time, I got bored of that."

Deciding on a big life change, Melissa applied for QFD, Queensland Police Service and the Australian Defence Force.

"QFD offered me a permanent position first and I've never looked back," she said. "The roles we have are so varied and always expanding. When I find myself in a lull, looking to pursue something new, there are avenues to explore and new skills to follow."

Melissa holds BA Hazmat and Tango qualifications and is a presenter with the Road Attitudes and Action Planning program. She is also a Peer Support Officer for Greater Brisbane Region and a member of the Frontline Women's Network.

"I've always worked in team environments, which gives me a great advantage at bringing a team together and working toward a common goal," she said. "My previous roles were all person focused – finding out about individuals, what strengths they bring and how they can best support and be supported in a team dynamic.

"It's really important to have people who look at the world a little differently, to help problem solve in a way others might not have considered."

Melissa is also a mentor for UNIQ You, a not-for-profit organisation that encourages girls to pursue pathways into industries currently under-represented by women. She mentors

girls in high school to empower them to make confident career choices.

"I really enjoy providing these young women an opportunity to ask questions," she said. "They're always coming up with something new to ask, or a new perspective.

"That helps me grow, learn about the new people coming through the service and better understand where they're coming from. I really get as much out of those sessions as the young women do.

"The options you have in QFD to pursue careers, interests, passion and hobbies is endless. The girls don't know what we do beyond what they see on social media or TV shows, so they're surprised we have an entire scientific stream, for example, or that we work with drones.

"You can see the moment they start to realise, 'Actually, maybe I could do this'. Which is amazing, because they really can. They just need the opportunity to talk to someone, ask questions and realise there is so much more there."





Twenty firefighters completed the week-long FFF training course in November.

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE FIGHT FIRE FASCINATION

The Fight Fire Fascination program has expanded in the past year, with sessions delivered across the state and 20 new practitioners joining the ranks.

Young people are often fascinated by fire. It tends to be a passing phase that a few well-chosen words from an adult nip in the bud. However, some young people develop an unhealthy obsession with fire, which is why Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) was set up in 1996.

The program covers young people aged three to 17 and is delivered by firefighters who have volunteered to be specially trained and give up their off-duty time. In 2024, FFF practitioners completed 34 cases and travelled 14,400 kilometres across the state.

The FFF Lite program allows a practitioner and an observer to travel to remote locations and First Nations communities and deliver a shortened form of the program over two days.

A special experience

Long-standing FFF practitioner, trainer and divisional coordinator Joe Foster applies his

background in education to his work with the program.

“My previous life was in education, so I joined QFD with a strong belief in the importance of fire safety prevention strategies,” Joe said.

“I see programs like FFF and Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) as pivotal opportunities to engage with our community, particularly our young people, to help eliminate or minimise the chances of firefighters responding to emergencies.

“Often a parent or caregiver will reach out for help after witnessing an increase in a young person’s interest in fire play or experimentation. This may occur in the home, parks and bushlands or at school, alone or with a group of peers.

“Young people use creative ways to find fire-lighting materials and will attempt to burn just about anything. When experimentation continues, that’s when

we encounter the use of aerosols and flammable liquids or materials to produce dangerous explosive devices.”

Joe said building rapport is the most important part of FFF.

“We want to avoid being seen as an authoritative figure, rather someone who cares and wants to impart fire safety education,” he said.

“Fortunately, for most young people, firefighters are viewed as friendly, helpful and trustworthy, so many of the barriers are down before we walk through the door. But not all cases are easy – some take more time and that’s why we complete three home visits with each young person.

“Our goal is to make the home safe and bring the young person on our ‘team’.”

Challenges include difficult behaviour, rowdy siblings, an overwhelmed parent or a lively family pet.

“Being invited into a family’s home to provide help is a very special experience,” Joe said. “To watch a young person commit to the program and be willing to participate during each visit is very rewarding.

“Often parents or caregivers will tell us other areas of the young person’s life are improving, like their behaviour, friendships or sporting activities.

“It’s always very rewarding to share this success during the celebratory visit to a fire station, where we officially complete the program. There we hear from parents or caregivers about how thankful they are for the program.”

No judgement

The FFF team welcomed 20 new practitioners after they completed a week-long residential training course in November. The program currently has more than 60 practitioners and 120 observers.

Firefighter Jeff O’Connor said the training was fantastic.

“The atmosphere was very nurturing and comfortable,” Jeff said. “We spent a great deal of time with all the trainers, who each had a different perspective on how to approach FFF.

“One piece of advice was that you’re not a counsellor, you’re there to educate about fire safety.

“No one’s ever really put their trust in these kids, given them the time of day or thought

they could achieve much. Just listening to them is probably more than most adults have done within their short lifetime.



Types of FFF cases

- Five-year-old continuing to light fires in bedroom after reprimand
- Seven-year-old using lighters and a magnifying glass
- Nine-year-old repeatedly lighting toilet paper
- Ten-year-old trying to burn down a house
- Thirteen-year-old trying to set fire to a toilet block
- Fourteen-year-old lighting fires in the school grounds
- Fifteen-year-old lighting grass fires



“You’re not there to judge. Some of these kids have had a horrendous background. One boy I’m observing at the moment lives in a boys’ home and has changed hands from caseworker to caseworker, which makes it very hard for him to trust anyone, let alone the system.

“Kids are very switched on and are a better judge of character than most adults. You have to be 100% honest with them or they’ll see through it.

“Going into these kinds of settings, which I didn’t know much about before, is humbling. You realise not everyone gets a fair start in life. Some of these kids just want someone to listen to them and believe in them.

“Even if you’re telling them not to do something, they think, ‘He cares enough to tell me that’.

“They have a fascination with fire itself, which a lot of fires can relate to, but there’s a healthy and unhealthy way to do it. If you share some stories, their guard starts to come down, and they think, ‘He’s trusted me with his stories, I’ll share a story’.

“They realise they could have really hurt someone they love. They don’t light fires out of angst – they do it out of fascination, boredom or peer pressure.

“When parents tell you their child has stopped playing with matches after your visits, it makes it feel worthwhile.”

If you know of a child who may benefit from the FFF program, please encourage their parent or carer to complete the form at fire.qld.gov.au/safety-education/programs/fight-fire-fascination-request.



After completing his training, Jeff O’Connor is now a probationary practitioner.



FFF training is a residential course offered every two years.

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OUR SUPERSTAR SCIENTISTS

Dr Lulu He, Principal Scientist and manager of the Vegetation Hazard Mapping Team, was recently named a Superstar of STEM. *Response* sat down with Dr He and her team to talk about how their work helps improve our understanding of bushfire.

The Superstars of STEM program aims to inspire young women and non-binary people to pursue a career in STEM by elevating the profile of relatable role models. The program will give Dr He advanced communications training, mentoring and opportunities to speak on stage and screen.

“Bushfire is a real risk for Australian communities,” Dr He said. “Among the factors that influence bushfires – weather, fuel and topography – fuel is the main influence that can be altered by fire managers.”

Dr He is a true believer of ‘tomorrow’s risk is being built today’ and ‘prevention is better than cure’, the two principles guiding disaster risk reduction.

“Vegetation mapping helps understand fuel characteristics and is critical to informing land use planning and building decisions to ensure communities are resilient to bushfire risk,” she said.

As Principal Scientist, Dr He provides scientific leadership to the team, participating in fieldwork across the state and modelling vegetation structure and fuel parameters to inform Bushfire Prone Area (BPA) mapping.

“I engage stakeholders, analyse field data and write scientific reports and peer-reviewed articles,” she said.

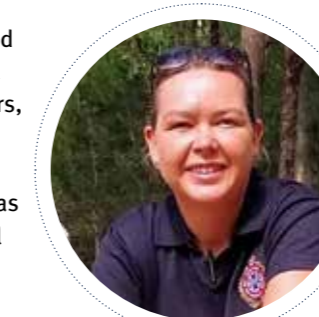
Dr He has spent more than 10 years researching natural hazards and disaster risk reduction. Before joining QFD, she worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Adelaide, where she coordinated several remote sensing and bushfire behaviour research projects. In 2018 she won a PhD fellowship as a residential researcher at United Nations University in Helsinki.

Tina, the team’s Senior Program Officer, coordinates fieldwork and engagement with state and local government agencies, contractors, landowners and managers. She started as a volunteer firefighter on the Gold Coast in 2002 and has extensive experience in practical land and fire management, fire operations and frontline and project management.

Arianne is the team’s Senior Fire Ecologist, a specialist in collecting and validating vegetation and bushfire hazard data. She collaborates with stakeholders and partners to ensure the team’s science products are fit-for-purpose.



Dr Lulu He



Tina Saren



Arianne Allen



Rachel Mebberson

Arianne has volunteered with Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) for eight years and previously worked in the Natural Areas team with Logan City Council, as a Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) Ranger and as a bush regenerator for contracting companies.

Rachel is the team’s Spatial Analyst and Project Manager. She comes from a background of field ecology and research, involving a wide range of projects across Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia. She works with stakeholders to facilitate data sharing, conducts fieldwork and manages consultants.

Tina said, “During our 2024 fieldwork program, we collected field data in Central Queensland and Darling Downs. We measure vegetation cover and height at strata layers, and record information about bark, growth form and species.”

Stakeholders are invited to participate in measuring vegetation characteristics and, once the maps are produced, to conduct reliability assessments at sites they are familiar with.

“It’s so great to spend the day with practitioners in the bush, measuring vegetation and sharing the value of our products with them,” Arianne said. “Their engagement with the field methodology gives them confidence and a greater understanding of our work.”

Rachel said, “The on-ground data, alongside remote-sensing data, are fed into machine learning models to produce maps for the larger geographical areas. These maps can be used to inform decision making for land use planning.”

Dr He said, “Completing fieldwork is a hard-won success. There is extensive preparation required before heading to the field and data consolidation tasks to be done after the fieldwork.

“I am incredibly proud of everyone in the team. The way we pull together as a team, the way we deliver on every project, be it fieldwork or office tasks, and the way we care for each other, truly make a difference and guarantee we deliver quality outputs.”

The team is now planning their next fieldwork program in Far North Queensland and Cape York, in collaboration with RFSQ regional offices, councils and QPWS.

+BRAVING THE WEATHER IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE

In line with this year's National Science Week theme of 'Inspiring Australia', Ven Daidone from the Predictive Services Unit braved the chance of rain to illuminate the minds of young people at the STEM Inspiring Australia Mini Science Fair at Emu Park south of Yeppoon.

Ven conducted demonstrations on Wiltronics (a fine fuel moisture metre), fuel hazard assessment, bushfire preparedness and information and warnings.

Ven said, "The day went well considering the wet weather, with more than 150 people turning up. All in all it was a positive day for QFD."



+ SUPPORTING TOowoomba's DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Since 2013 Toowoomba has been a designated refugee and humanitarian settlement area. This strategy has contributed to 15,500 people in Toowoomba speaking a language other than English at home.

Toowoomba has a long history of successful collaboration and partnerships at different levels of government, settlement services, NGOs and the diverse community who have provided support to the ever-increasing multicultural groups.

Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) has partnered with some of these providers to help new arrivals learn about fire safety in their new homes in Australia.

Senior Firefighter Steven Artiemiew did a great job working with Kurdish Kamanji and Kinyarwanda interpreting services to deliver fire safety education at Toowoomba TAFE.

The teachers have invited QFR back during 2025 to work more closely with the students and further help break down the barriers and provide quality fire education. They are even using QFD's Fire Escape Planner in their English lesson syllabus.

+TORQUAY STATION OPENS ITS DOORS

Participants of Fraser Coast Local Personalised Services, a provider of support and services to people living with a disability, had an unforgettable visit to the Hervey Bay Fire and Rescue Station in Torquay.

From the moment they stepped through the station's door, the participants were immersed in the world of firefighting. They had the chance to try on breathing apparatus, hold the powerful jaws of life and explore the inner workings of fire trucks and cutting-edge equipment.

The excitement reached its peak when the station's alarm sounded mid-visit. Everyone watched in awe as the crew sprang into action, jumping into their truck and racing off with sirens blaring. While the sudden emergency cut the session short, it added an unforgettable sense of realism to the day.

Participants left with a deep appreciation for the bravery and dedication of firefighters, buzzing with excitement from the hands-on experience.



FIRE AND RESCUE

+ AUXILIARY FIREFIGHTER GRADUATES

Ten firefighters from Winton, Barcardine, Moura, Springsure, Boyne Island, Emu Park and Yeppoon gathered in Yeppoon at the end of last year.

The graduates spent two weeks soaking up the ins and outs of firefighting, including shipping standpipes, testing equipment and operating breathing apparatus. A big congratulations to the Course Dux Carl Lewis from Barcardine.

+ CHARTERS TOWERS DRILL NIGHTS

Charters Towers Fire and Rescue Station conducted several drill night information sessions in December, opening the station to members of the community interested in becoming an auxiliary firefighter.

As part of their drill, the crew demonstrated a building search and rescue activity using breathing apparatus and a thermal imaging camera.

The crew shared their knowledge and experience to help visitors make an informed decision on their future career. Many of the visitors have now started the recruitment process.



+BRIBIE FUN DAY

Bribie Island Kids Education Support (BIKES) were delighted to have a visit from local auxiliary firefighter crews at their Family Fun Day at Melsa Park, Bongaree.

BIKES is a charity of St Vincent de Paul Society with the aim that no child in the community will be disadvantaged in their education and development due to financial circumstances.

This year BIKES has provided \$57,000 worth of assistance to 184 children including uniforms and shoes, textbooks and stationery, school camps and excursions, specialist medical costs, school fees and resource levies, swimming lessons and other sporting activities.



+ FIRIES BRING A SMILE

Charlton, Drayton and Kitchener Street fire and rescue stations, along with Southern Region Headquarters in Charlton, contributed to a collection of children's toys, books and games delivered to St Vincent's Hospital Toowoomba on Christmas Day.

We hope this brought a smile to the kids' faces and, in a small way, made up for spending Christmas in hospital.



+ TREAD ON TRAFFICKING

The 'Gun Crew' from Coolum Fire and Rescue Station undertook a Herculean effort to raise money for Destiny Rescue by participating in the Tread on Trafficking national fundraising initiative.

A weekend of action, purpose and celebration helped fund the rescue and restoration of young lives from the grip of exploitation. People across the country participated by walking, running, jumping on the treadmill or, for those silly enough, climbing stairs.

Tara Hutchison and Pete Watson from Coolum Beach Fire and Rescue were joined by on- and off-duty firefighters, family and friends and community members in their attempt to traverse 50,000 steps of the Coolum Third Bay stairs.

There are 102 stairs from top to bottom, so the team of two aimed to complete more than 40 laps up and down each day.

There was pain, laughs aplenty and copious quantities of water, Hydrolyte and Deep Heat, but the knowledge that it costs \$1,800 to rescue a child from sexual exploitation and trafficking and \$10,000 to fund a raid on human traffickers was motivation enough to 'go hard'.

The result far exceeded expectations. Tara and Pete completed 51,000 steps and the total for all Coolum participants was 100,368 steps. Most importantly, they raised more than \$2,500 for Destiny Rescue.

The total money raised nationally for the weekend was more than \$112,000 to rescue 62 children and equip them to stay free.

+ TRAINING WITH FLASHOVER CELL

The Flashover Portable Training Cell previously located in Townsville has been transported down to Mackay to allow permanent and auxiliary firefighters in Mackay and Walkerston to undertake training.

The cell will be moved to Proserpine in February for Airlie Beach and Proserpine staff training before returning to the Northern Region Emergency Services Complex in Townsville.



+ BUILDING RESILIENCE WITH MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

Central Region hosted its annual Peer Support Officer (PSO) two-day workshop in October 2024 in Rockhampton.

"We increased the number of PSOs within Central Region and Mackay and it was a fantastic opportunity for PSOs to connect with each other over the two days," said Mental Health Manager Jatinder Kaur.

New PSOs from Rural Fire Service Queensland, Queensland Fire and Rescue, FireCom and the State Emergency Service attended the workshop.

Program Managers Tania Raghavan and Bonita Lousich delivered the training, along with external counsellors Helen Madell and Norm Feeney.

The workshop was a great professional development and networking opportunity for the PSOs.



+ WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING WORKSHOP

The Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) Frontline Women's Network is fulfilling a project secondment to enhance gender inclusion projects within the service.

As part of this initiative a Women in Firefighting Workshop was held in Townsville in January.

Staff from Townsville and Brisbane welcomed community members to the Northern Region Emergency Services Complex in Mount St John.

They discussed their role as operational firefighters and gave firsthand insights into what it takes to be a firefighter.

Attendees also heard Harriet Brown from KaMana Community provide advice on performance mindset and nutrition.



+ SANTA'S SPECIAL DELIVERY WITH MAKE-A-WISH

Severe thunderstorms, minor flooding and heavy rainfall couldn't stop Santa or local auxiliary firefighters from delivering joy in the small town of Mooloolah on the Sunshine Coast.

Thanks to Make-A-Wish Foundation and Senior Firefighter Catherine Duchock, Santa traded his sleigh for a lift on 485A to a special Christmas celebration for Jacob and his family.

Jacob received a gift bag from the Queensland Fire and Rescue crew because he's always been fascinated with fire trucks and firefighters.

It was an incredible honour to be invited to this intimate family gathering and put a smile on Jacob's face as his family watched on.

Thank you to the Make-A-Wish volunteers, Inspector Shane McGrail and the crew for delivering Santa and making Jacob's wish come true.





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1. QFD crews worked alongside Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to bring a large bushfire under control on North Stradbroke Island.
2. Commissioner Stephen Smith visited staff and volunteer members in central Queensland to hear about their work with local communities.
3. Queensland Fire and Rescue crews from Roma Street practised using a suction drill to draw water from the Brisbane River and supply it to an aerial platform to fight fires.
4. Firefighters from Gladstone Fire and Rescue Station paid a visit to the Gladstone Hospital's children's ward on Christmas Eve to spread a little Christmas cheer.
5. Queensland Fire and Rescue crews attended a truck rollover and chemical spill on the Gateway Motorway at Kuraby, working for several hours to make the area safe and clean up the spill.

6. Queensland Fire and Rescue and Rural Fire Service Queensland firefighters were part of the festivities as Ipswich kicked off the holiday season in style.
7. Commissioner Stephen Smith visited Fire and Rescue Victoria in December to exchange knowledge and experiences.
8. Drayton Fire and Rescue Station was officially opened in Toowoomba, housing permanent and auxiliary firefighters with a three-bay appliance room, duty office, training room and recreation facilities.
9. Bike for Burns will ride from Eidsvold to QFD headquarters at Kedron in May to raise funds for the Children's Hospital Foundation.
10. AUS-1 Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) dog Bolt sadly passed away in January. Bolt and his handler Kara were a greatly valued team and Bolt will be sadly missed by the USAR team and his family.
11. In early February, two teams deployed to Victoria to help fight raging bushfires.

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