

Commissioner's message

I am pleased to present Queensland Fire and Emergency Services' (QFES) annual report for 2018–19.

The 2018–19 summer was an extraordinary one in terms of disasters. Extreme weather events have tested our capability this past year and our department has worked hard to adapt and improve to the changing needs of our communities. This report outlines how we have built a more connected and capable Queensland that is prepared for increasingly complex disasters.

The 2018–19 bushfire season, known as Operation Synergy, saw significant fire activity across the state. Between August and December 2018, more than four million hectares of land was burnt. The peak of this occurred during November and December when QFES faced an extreme event. For the first time, the state faced a combination of record high temperatures, unusual patterns of fire behaviour and a 'catastrophic' fire danger rating. Extremes such as these had not been experienced in Queensland before.

Despite these conditions, significant potential losses were prevented.

Our ability to protect people, property and the environment would not have been possible without the 3,000 volunteers and staff who worked day and night to protect lives and property, working in partnership with more than 1,200 personnel deployed from around Australia. Key to the protection of lives and homes was QFES' preparation including the support and involvement from the public, QFES' interoperability with its partners such as aerial capability, and advances in fire behaviour analysis and prediction.

As the fires subsided, Queensland was impacted heavily by a severe weather season, known as Operation Convergence, which included major flooding in Townsville and western areas of the state, resulting in damage to more than 3,000 properties and infrastructure and the loss of over 500,000 livestock. The extreme heatwaves and bushfires that occurred across Queensland, as well as the monsoon flooding, are a clear indication QFES is facing unprecedented

challenges in understanding and responding to the impacts of natural hazards in a changing climate.

In order to address this, QFES introduced a lessons management framework to enable continuous improvement through learning. New processes now provide QFES staff and volunteers the opportunity to contribute to QFES' continuous improvement. This will ensure we develop, adapt and transform to meet the needs of the workforce, stakeholders and the Queensland community. After its implementation following Operations Synergy and Convergence, there have been significant learning and improvement opportunities identified for QFES.

Strategy 2030, launched in June 2019, also reflects how QFES proposes to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities that will be present in Queensland through to 2030. This strategy is a significant step to help QFES keep pace with change, positioning the department as leaders in fire and emergency services and ensuring we remain a trusted and reliable frontline service that is also innovative, responsive and forward facing.

The frameworks and strategies delivered during this reporting period are based on communication and engagement with all our stakeholders. The QFES Engagement Strategy, approved in June 2019, delivers on our commitment to achieve outcomes through engagement with our people, partners and communities.



By using a local approach, QFES can ensure stakeholder engagement is about matters that are important to those they affect and are delivered through suitable channels at appropriate times. The strategy also values a coordinated approach including aligning engagement efforts and sharing and pooling information and resources.

Other highlights and achievements covered in the annual report include:

- » the release of the *Queensland State Disaster Management Plan 2018*. The plan describes disaster management arrangements for the effective management of disasters in Queensland. The aim of the plan is to enable Queensland to mitigate the effects of, prepare for, respond to, recover from and build resilience to disaster events
- » community safety education programs including Operation Knock Knock, bushfire safety, *If it's flooded, forget it*, photo-electric smoke alarm legislation and home fire safety
- » an increase in aviation capability to eight contracts divided between Toowoomba and Bundaberg airports
- » deployments to assist and support international and interstate agencies battling disasters including deployments to North America, Tasmania and Victoria
- » the launch of the QFES Volunteerism Strategy which aims to create contemporary volunteer models that reflect best practice, innovation and social trends across volunteerism and embed these models in the QFES culture and ethos
- » accreditation as a White Ribbon Australia workplace recognising QFES' commitment to preventing violence against women, supporting employees affected by domestic and family violence, and promoting a safe and respectful workplace for all

- » the launch of the *Emergency Management Sector Adaptation Plan for climate change*. The plan, developed by QFES in partnership with the Department of Environment and Science and the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, outlines the commitments and actions that will be taken to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate
- » incorporating climate projections into the Queensland Emergency Risk Management Framework with the publication of the *Queensland State Heatwave Risk Assessment 2019*. Released in June 2019, the assessment represents the most comprehensive analysis of future climate risk undertaken for a natural hazard risk assessment in Queensland.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the former Commissioner Katarina Carroll for her dedication and contribution to QFES over the last nearly five years. We wish her well in her role as Commissioner of the Queensland Police Service.

I thank our staff, volunteers and partners for their continuing contribution and commitment to helping create capable and connected communities and look forward to the year ahead.

Mike Wassing AFSM
Acting Commissioner
Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
10 September 2019