

RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

JUNE 2025



WOMEN IN FIRE

Global exchange in far north Queensland

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ON THE COVER

Women in fire from across the globe gathered in far north Queensland for a 12-day training and cultural exchange.

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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Address: Response magazine, Media, Communications and Online Branch, Queensland Fire Department, GPO Box 1425, Brisbane, QLD, 4001
Editor: Jarryd Luke
 Phone: 07 3635 3314
 Email: magazine.editor@qfes.qld.gov.au
Advertising: Martyn Hewett
 Email: mkhewett@bigpond.com
Graphic Design: Dexart Graphic Design
 Email: dexartgraphicdesign@gmail.com

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KRISTEN AND ARDIE LEVEL UP

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FOREWORDS



STEVE SMITH AFSM
Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

We are approaching 12 months since we became the Queensland Fire Department, a significant milestone in our organisation's history. I would like to congratulate everyone for maintaining our core focus on keeping Queenslanders safe as we navigated these changes to our department. We have faced major operational challenges over the last 12 months, including deployments to Canada and PNG in 2024, followed by bushfires in northern and western Queensland. Already this year we have responded to the north Queensland floods, Tropical Cyclone Alfred, interstate bushfires and the recent severe flooding out west. Throughout these events we have maintained interoperability not only across QFD but with our external partners and stakeholders – we aimed to partner more naturally following the change and we are now seeing that happen in how we operate. Thank you everyone for your dedication, which is, and will remain the backbone of our department as it continues to evolve.

With severe weather season now behind us, staff and volunteers are getting prepared for the upcoming bushfire season. The continuous summer rainfall has increased already high fuel loads in many parts of the state. In north Queensland, most fuel is unavailable for mitigation burning this autumn, but conditions are more favourable in southern areas.

Key risks this season include grassland areas west of the Great Dividing Range, and forest areas that could carry fast and intense fires in elevated fire danger conditions. This includes areas burnt during the 2019-20 Black Summer fires, many of which have now recovered. AFAC, the national council for fire and emergency services, has released this year's Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for Winter, forecasting an average fire season across Queensland.

Moist conditions persist in northern areas, with limited fire activity likely, while central and southern inland areas have early grass curing and frost risk, and south-east areas are seeing gradual fuel build-up. We are collaborating with our partners, stakeholders, landholders and Indigenous land management groups on hazard reduction burns, community engagement and fire break and fire trail management. Training, exercises and season audits are underway, including a planned exercise to explore our readiness for an event like the tragic LA fires. In early May I took part in another important training opportunity, the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) Training Symposium. I was delighted to meet many RFSQ volunteer trainers who are helping build capability within their brigades. It was fantastic to see them develop their skills and shape future training for volunteers.

During National Volunteer Week, we acknowledged the contributions of our volunteers who are so crucial to supporting communities through disasters. I want to say thank you again to all our RFSQ volunteers, Fire and Rescue Scientific Officers, Chaplains, Peer Support Officers and USAR K9 Handlers. On behalf of QFD and the community, thank you for so generously giving your time to help keep Queenslanders safe. Next month we celebrate RFSQ Week from 27 July to 3 August to recognise the wonderful work of our RFSQ volunteers and the key role they play in the community. As part of the week's celebrations are the RFSQ awards in honour of those volunteers who have demonstrated an outstanding contribution to their community and RFSQ.



ADAM GREEN
Acting Chief Operating Officer

STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

As part of our continued commitment to building a high-performing and inclusive organisation, we are introducing a standardised induction and onboarding process across QFD. This initiative is designed to make the experience of starting a new role, whether as a new start or existing staff member transitioning into a new position, simpler, more consistent and more effective.

Each role within QFD will now be supported by a tailored induction and onboarding plan, incorporating both whole-of-department information and role-specific guidance, including targeted training. These plans will be provided to staff and managers once the recruitment process is complete. We anticipate induction plans for senior operational officers and corporate roles will be available this quarter, with those for technical and specialist roles to follow by the end of the quarter. Plans for the operational frontline workforce will be ready by Quarter 4.

Respect remains a fundamental value within QFD, and our Everyday Respect Framework has been developed to embed inclusive practices and drive meaningful cultural change. This framework is supported by the Everyday Respect Council, which provides strategic direction on our inclusion policies and programs. In turn, the council is supported by four Communities of Inclusion – Gender, First Nations, Living with a Disability, and Regional and Remote – which will play a vital role in advising and fostering inclusive practices across the organisation. Following a recent expression of interest and shortlisting, members of the Communities of Inclusion have now been selected and notified. An induction workshop is scheduled for early July, with their first formal meetings to be held shortly thereafter. I look forward to seeing the positive impact of their contributions in promoting and building on a culture of respect throughout QFD.

Meanwhile, work on the new QFD Albion Headquarters continues to progress on schedule, with ATG appointed as the head contractor. To date, flooring preparation is complete and the rough-in of services, wall framing and sheeting are underway. Our project team is working closely with ATG and QBuild to maintain momentum and ensure the successful delivery of this important infrastructure. We will continue to keep you informed as the project advances.

The new headquarters is purpose-designed to foster agility and collaboration, enhancing the integrated services that support our frontline operations and the communities we serve. The facility will comprise seven floors of open-plan office space, sit/stand desks, secure lockers, flexible meeting areas, a dedicated conference floor and an onsite café.

A standout feature of the new facility is the significant enhancement in IT capability. With high-speed connectivity and interactive audio-visual systems in all collaboration spaces, along with Voice Over IP (VOIP) telephony and follow-me printing, the new environment is geared to support our operations now and into the future, enabling greater efficiency, communication and performance.

These developments represent key steps in strengthening the foundations of our organisation as we continue to grow, adapt and deliver for the communities of Queensland.



OUTBACK SPIRIT SHINES THROUGH WESTERN QUEENSLAND FLOODS

On the heels of Tropical Cyclone Alfred, record-breaking rain brought severe flooding to central and south-west Queensland. The floods took a major toll on rural and remote communities, properties, livestock and wildlife.

The flooding covered a huge area more than 1000 kilometres west of Brisbane, inundating many towns from Longreach, Stonehenge, Jundah, Windorah and Adavale down to Quilpie and Thargomindah.

QFD staff including Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) swiftwater rescue crews, Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) and incident management staff deployed to conduct rescues and evacuations.

Several aircraft supported swiftwater rescue operations, damage assessments, evacuations and re-supply including fodder drops.

QFR and Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) crews completed washouts and helped communities recover as waters receded.

Good people doing good things

Brad Stockwell, Central West Zone Commander, was the Incident Controller in the Rockhampton Incident Control Centre (ICC) for the first seven days of the floods.

“This was the biggest flood event in living memory for many people across outback Queensland, with over 700,000 square kilometres involved,” Brad said.

“Record-breaking flooding inundated vast areas of land, homes and stations. Many residents were evacuated to areas of safety using air assets and community networks. The full loss of livestock in the outback is still to be calculated, but incredibly large numbers of sheep and cattle were lost, more than in 2019.

“Community members have rallied together to keep their communities involved, informed and supported.”

Brad was responsible for an area larger than the state of Victoria, spanning from Boulia in the north to Thargomindah in the south.



RFSQ crews assisted with flood clean-up in the Maryborough area, hosing down houses and public spaces covered in dirt and silt.

“Our focus was on liaising with local government and agency stakeholders to provide support to outback Queensland communities,” he said.

The coordinated response from QFD was supported by RFSQ, QFR and other agencies to facilitate planning and deploy staff and assets to affected areas.

“We overcame many challenges through genuine consultation with local landowners, local government representatives and QFD staff, using a commonsense approach,” Brad said.

“At one stage we had more than 12 air assets assigned to response and recovery operations due to the tyranny of vast distances – most of the roads and highways were closed or damaged.

“The flooding caused a breakdown of communication infrastructure and it was often hard to gain real-time information from community and staff about the event’s impact.

“It took up to three weeks for the water to subside because the land is mainly for grazing, with few runoff creeks.”

Brad said a highlight was ‘the good old outback spirit’.

“When Adavale was evacuated, QFD air assets had to wait to land due to the number of private helicopters moving people and items around the township,” he said.

“Most families have a helicopter for mustering cattle, but the QFR crews said they’d never seen so many helicopters zipping around just off the ground, supporting others.

“Outback Queensland communities are extremely resilient and proud of their townships. Many private aircraft were used to assist in the flood response and recovery, without any payment or remuneration. Just good people doing good things.

“We had outstanding support from QFR and RFSQ staff from all over the state. Thank you from the staff and community of outback Queensland.”

Saving Adavale

When they got a call to rescue someone from Adavale, Station Officer Dale McVeigh and his team didn’t know the whole town would need assistance.

“Our motorised swiftwater rescue (MSRC) team was deployed from Beenleigh Fire and Rescue Station to Charleville for six days. At this early stage of the event, we were the only rescue team in the Charleville area,” Dale said.

“Senior Firefighter Trev Meier from Ipswich Command and I were the motorised crew and we had two other swiftwater rescue firefighters, Tyson King from Beenleigh Command and Oscar Sidlo-Jones from Gold Coast Command.”



As floodwaters receded, QFD personnel continued to conduct damage assessments.

The team requested RPAS to use drones to help find the clearest route for safety.

“The RPAS pilots – Station Officer Greg Stuart from Toowoomba Command and Senior Firefighter Dave Dempsey from Gold Coast Command – were allocated positions and followed us out in their own vehicle.”

After arriving in Charleville, the team went to the airport to meet Nathan Tovey from McDermott Aviation, the helicopter pilot they’d be working with.

“The ICC had requisitioned a Bell 214 helicopter that could hold 10 people and Nathan was very experienced. We made sure our gear was fully serviced and operational and bedded down for the night on call.”

At 4am, a Triple Zero (000) call came through to rescue a man in Adavale.

“We loaded our MSRC, drone support and rescue equipment into the helicopter and waited for first light because the pilot couldn’t fly until daylight due to conditions.

“When we got to Adavale we did a recon flyover of the town and it was in the centre of a sea of water covering about 25 square kilometres.

“Eventually we found a safe landing zone on the main road to Quilpie. We pulled out our equipment and the RPAS team got a drone in the air and found the easiest route for us to travel into town.”

Technical rescue headquarters in Brisbane had sent the team a satellite phone to communicate with but reception was limited.

The team provided updates to FireCom Toowoomba who ensured the Regional Fire Control Centre Maryborough was also informed.



“We had an ATC Airband radio for communicating with air traffic. I could hear all these other helicopters. Four of them had come from other properties to help. They’d already evacuated five people from rooftops.

“We took off in our craft using road signs to navigate, but despite taking every precaution and travelling slowly we hit a submerged tree and tore a small hole in the floor.

“The RPAS were out of visual range so they landed and I called the helicopters on the ATC Airband radio, gave them all callsigns and asked for help navigating to the centre of town.

“When the first helicopter went off to refuel I asked another to become our guide to the rescue job.

“They’d moved the Triple Zero caller to a house on higher ground. There were 10 other people at the house, so I left the two swiftwater rescue firefighters there to get them ready for evacuation while we took the man and his mate back with us in the MSRC and the RPAS team applied first aid.”

The crew were able to work around the small tear in their craft to continue the rescue.

While evacuating the other people from the house, Dale and his crew followed one of the helicopters to an alternative landing site they’d set up.

“It was only one-and-a-half kilometres from the centre of town. Fuel had been delivered there from surrounding areas so the helicopters could refuel. The water was still rising at about 70mm per hour so I made this site our main control point.”

Once Nathan’s helicopter was full of residents, he flew them half an hour to Quilpie. In the meantime, the team continued to evacuate the town.

“While we did this, I asked a helicopter to airlift our other two firefighters from one house to another to check if anyone was inside. The firefighters were able to search most of the town this way.

“When Nathan came back from his first run to Quilpie, he brought a Queensland Police Service Senior Constable who recorded all the names of the people evacuated.

“In total we rescued 21 people. I checked all the residents’ names with the Senior Constable and then we did a full secondary search of the town to confirm everyone was evacuated.



RFSQ crews worked hard to get Adavale and Jundah back on their feet. Volunteers from Rockhampton were deployed to Jundah daily to assist with washouts and RFSQ volunteers were airlifted into Adavale to set up washout equipment.



“We returned to our original landing site and loaded our gear to get back to Charleville by nightfall.

“We flew over the town on the way back and it was just rooftops. The team was extremely exhausted but in good spirits. We’d been on the water for five hours.

“The technical rescue headquarters in Brisbane needs to be recognised for enabling us to rapidly deploy and supply additional resources immediately. Whatever equipment I requested, I received, which helped make it a successful rescue event.

“All of a sudden, we’d gone from one rescue to the entire town.

“For everything that went wrong, something good happened. We just chose an alternative and made it work.”



In early April, three swiftwater rescue crews were deployed across flood-affected communities in the Thargomindah region. Air operations helped move the crews around while roads were cut off.



While supporting recovery at Thargomindah, QFD personnel stayed in a flexible habitat delivered by helicopter.

Layers of impact

Melissa Gough was an RFSQ sector commander in Thargomindah during recovery.

“The impact to the community is enormous, both towns and primary producers,” she said.

“Some large operations have lost nearly all stock — tens of thousands of cattle — as well as fences, machinery and even aircraft. That is alongside any impacts to their residences, sheds and staff accommodation.

“Thargomindah itself had over a metre of water through many houses on the river end of town.

“My task was multi-faceted – we needed to get a full understanding of what needed to be done so we could resource appropriately then execute.

“Along with leading the RFSQ response in Thargomindah, I was the conduit between the council and other agencies back to QFD so we could understand what their priorities were and update them on progress.

“There was also a lot of doorknocking, telling the community we were there to help and listening to their stories.”

Melissa said the biggest challenge was working out who needed assistance.

“Many were not back in town so there was a lot of canvassing camp areas and talking to people at the community evacuation centre,” she said.

“The crews had to battle mozzies and sandflies, which were vicious and unrelenting. We were also hindered by geographical distance – any equipment we needed took about two days to get to us.”

Melissa recalled when crews helped the local publican remove all the damaged carpet and furniture from their motel rooms.

“As the crews had a well-deserved water break, she thanked them and said it would have taken weeks for her to do and she couldn’t believe it was done in a day,” Melissa said.

“It meant she could focus on the pub doors being open again. The next night, the pub was filled with people, which is critical for the community socially.



The floods in Adavale as seen from the rescue helicopter.

“A Remote Area Firefighting Team (RAFT) flew into Adavale each day and returned each evening to debrief. They were the first on the ground and doing a lot of heavy lifting.

“One elderly gentleman had mentally written off his house as beyond repair, but the RAFT team went in and started clearing it out and the gentleman realised his house could be salvaged and it wasn’t so bleak.

“He sat with the team for a cuppa and a chat. He was very emotional, as were the RAFT team, but they were happy they could make such an impact.

“It shows how these events impact across so many layers – the empathy crews feel when they see the distress of homeowners, but also that enjoyment of making a difference to someone’s life on a very dark day.”

Melissa said people in Thargomindah were independent.

“When I was doorknocking many people looked overwhelmed and said, ‘No no, it’s ok, we can sort it out’. After some convincing, I would book in a time for the crew to come and help and within a few hours a task that seemed so overwhelming would be done.

“The house would be empty and washed out, allowing people to move into their next phase of recovery. When other people started asking us for help it meant we had done the right thing.

“I was asked if we would have trouble crewing over the Easter holiday and I said no, the beauty of volunteers is they come. That is what we do – if there is a need and we can help then we come.

“We miss work, we miss family events but we turn up. We had male, female, young and more mature working long hard physical days and they still joked and laughed and they will come next time someone asks. It’s amazing to see and you wonder what would happen if they stopped turning up.”



QFD crews conducted washouts and assisted with resupply operations as water receded.



Crews were on the ground in Thargomindah over Easter to help the community get back on their feet.

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CELEBRATING WOMEN IN FIRE

This year marks three decades since women joined the ranks as permanent firefighters. QFD celebrated their achievements at an International Women's Day event.

Vanessa Madge and Gilda Defelice were the first female firefighters recruited to

Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) 30 years ago and Vanessa spoke about her experiences at the event, originally scheduled for March but postponed due to Tropical Cyclone Alfred.

She originally joined as an auxiliary firefighter in 1993 but couldn't become permanent due to height and gender restrictions. She and Gilda were finally appointed in May 1995 when the restrictions were lifted.

In the years that followed, Vanessa climbed through the ranks, becoming a Senior Firefighter in 1998, Station Officer in 2018 and Acting Sunshine Coast Zone Commander in 2024.

She joined a recruitment campaign in 2000 to encourage more women to become firefighters, but it wasn't until 2018 that she found herself on a crew with two other women.

"I was drawn to the fire service because the role was fast-paced, purposeful and grounded in real-world responsibility," Vanessa said. "As a high-energy young woman, I wanted to be part of something that demanded precision, courage and accountability."

"I've never measured my career in years, but in the people, experiences and growth along the way. Reaching 30 years isn't about endurance, it's about evolution."

"I've adapted, contributed and continued to learn through changing environments and expectations. The pride, for me, comes from witnessing the organisation evolve over time and knowing I've grown alongside it."

Many of her most memorable moments came from mentoring others, fostering quiet cultural shifts and remaining a steady presence during periods of organisational change.

"There's something deeply worthwhile in seeing long-standing patterns begin to soften and in knowing that consistent, values-led participation can help shape a more inclusive and resilient environment," she said. "Those incremental shifts, though subtle, carry enduring weight."

"When I first joined, the challenges were both spoken and unspoken, overt and covert. There were few established systems to support the inclusion of women, no clear policies, inadequate facilities and limited cultural readiness."

"But beyond the practical gaps, there were entrenched norms that shaped how women were perceived and positioned."



Expectations were uneven – visibility came with pressure and missteps were often amplified.

"At times, the resistance was explicit comments, exclusions or being deliberately overlooked. At other times, it was more subtle – a quiet questioning of capability or a lack of genuine inclusion. It wasn't just about being able to do the job, it was about constantly having to prove you should be allowed to."

She said there had been clear and encouraging progress since then.

"The conversations have evolved and the structures surrounding inclusion have become more visible and intentional," she said. "There's greater awareness now of the importance of creating a workplace that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve."

"While positive change takes time, I believe we're on the right trajectory. As with any long-standing institution, there's always more to learn and refine, particularly in how we create environments where everyone feels confident to contribute fully. Continued growth will come through thoughtful leadership, open dialogue and a willingness to keep listening and adapting."

"I'm especially mindful of those who treated me with respect from the beginning, without performance or hesitation, who recognised the work and met me there. The way they carried themselves influenced the culture around them, often without saying a word."

"In more recent years, I've watched the next generation step into the role, women and men alike, bringing their own strengths to the work. There's value in seeing the role handed on with capability and commitment."

Above and beyond

Vanessa Madge is just one of the incredible women within QFD serving their communities.

At the International Women's Day event, Aunty Deborah Sandy gave a Welcome to Country and Principal Scientist Dr Lulu He shared her experiences. A panel featuring a range of experts also discussed the theme of 'March forward for a gender equal future'.

Commissioner Steve Smith and Minister Anne Leahy then presented the Women in QFD Awards.

The awards recognise those who have gone above and beyond to promote the rights, interests and wellbeing of women in the department and the community.

Julie Smith

Outstanding Female Leader, QFR
Station Officer,
Workforce Development

Julie was recognised for her dedication to gender inclusion and representation for First Nations peoples in QFD.

She has contributed to the Gender Equity Advisory Group (GEAG) since 2021 as the First Nations representative and is a leadership team member and secretariat of the QFR Frontline Women's Network (FWN).

She became a Station Officer in 2024 and is currently leading a project to support women through permanent firefighter recruitment, including workshops and active recruitment strategies.

"It's an honour to have the impact of my work in diversity, equity and inclusion recognised," Julie said. "This work demands resilience and commitment, given the challenges involved in driving real change.

"Championing gender equity is a complex task and my involvement with GEAG has highlighted the progress we've made and the long road that lies ahead. Having a voice in this space fuels my passion and commitment to keep pushing forward."

Julie said stepping into a project role with the FWN was incredibly rewarding.

"It's extremely fulfilling to be an FWN leader, creating a safe space and true sense of community for the women of QFD," she said. "The network not only advocates for gender equity but works with QFD to drive real change, improve safety and develop leadership pathways for women on our frontline.

"I am proud of the work we have achieved in broadening the network to include FireCom and auxiliary firefighters.

"A key focus has been championing sustainable change for gender equity and a critical part of that is developing FWN allies. Having male champions support gendered initiatives helps break down barriers, challenge outdated norms and create a more inclusive culture for all. Working alongside our allies gives me great pride."

Last year, as part of a working group led by the FWN, Julie helped coordinate the Girls Firefighter Experience Camp.

"It was an extremely rewarding experience, providing a hands-on introduction to professional firefighting and breaking down barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field," Julie said.

"Showing young women that strength, skill and courage have no gender and that their inclusion in such a career is valued and necessary was a powerful experience. I hope QFD continues to offer this program in the future.

"With women still vastly underrepresented in firefighting, supporting their recruitment and growth within QFD is crucial."

**Tracy Glavas**

Outstanding Female Leader, RFSQ
Senior Firefighter, Mount
Hallen Rural Fire Brigade

As Second Officer of her brigade, Tracy supports training for volunteers, where she leads by example and promotes individual and collaborative growth.

Tracy is passionate about encouraging more women to join Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) –the entire leadership team and 60% of active firefighters in her brigade are women.

"Receiving this award is an incredibly humbling experience," Tracy said. "It is a recognition of the dedication and hard work that I, along with my fellow brigade members, have put into serving our community.

"I joined the brigade because I was driven by a sense of community service and a desire to make a tangible difference. The camaraderie and support within the brigade reinforced my decision, making it one of the most fulfilling commitments of my life."

Tracy has mentored and supported many people through operational and non-operational activities.

"Mentoring and training other members is one of the most rewarding aspects of my role," she said. "Watching new members grow in confidence and skill, and knowing I've played a part in their development, brings immense satisfaction."

A personal highlight was the first fire she ever fought – a stack burn that got away from the landholder.

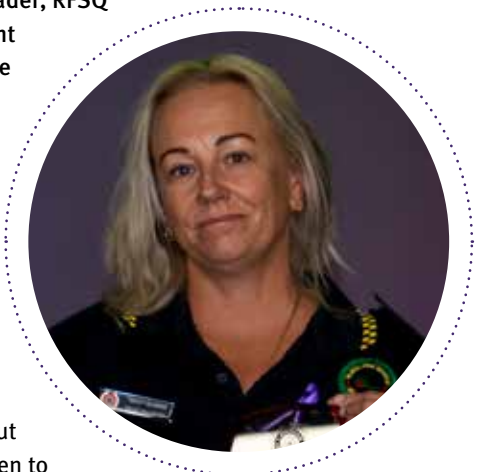
"By the time we arrived the fire had spread through a few paddocks and I was unsure about my ability as a firefighter and whether I would panic, be scared or freeze," Tracy said.

"Not only was it my first fire, it was my first time driving our appliance. After a shaky start and a lot of encouragement from the team, I left that fire knowing I'd made the right choice in joining RFSQ. The support from my team, the gratitude expressed by the landholders and the sense of accomplishment we felt remain etched in my memory."

Tracy said encouraging more women to get involved with RFSQ was crucial.

"Women bring diverse perspectives, skills and strengths," she said. "In my experience, women tend to be more cautious, ask more questions to gain clarity and think outside the box.

"Representation matters and having more women in the brigade challenges stereotypes and inspires future generations to pursue roles they may have believed were not suitable for them. A diverse and inclusive team is better equipped to address the varied needs of our community, ensuring a more comprehensive and empathetic response."



Samantha Barker

**Outstanding Female Leader, SCS
Acting Executive Manager,
Relations and Standards
Branch**

In her work, Samantha deals with sensitive issues of conduct and supports leaders by advising the best approach. She brings a gender-informed approach, understanding power dynamics in interactions and advising appropriate strategies.

As a mother of young children she works four days a week while maintaining the highest standards and work ethic.

"I feel honoured to receive this award," she said. "Given the number of phenomenal women in the department and across our directorate, I was taken aback when advised I'd been nominated.

"It has reinforced to me the importance of doing your best every day and showing up (emotionally but also physically) as well as nominating peers via the different recognition pathways in the department. I will be making sure to nominate more colleagues in the future so others can be recognised for their efforts.

"In my substantive role of Principal Advisor Workplace Standards, I assist managers in actioning complaint, conduct and underperformance matters at the lowest possible level in accordance with departmental procedures and HR best practice.

"It can be a rewarding role, especially when what might be a challenging time for a team or individual (due to a complaint or poor interpersonal dynamics) can be resolved and relationships strengthened for the future.

"Leadership is a learning journey. There is always something to learn from someone, across all interactions. Honesty goes a long way as does communication and connection."

Virginia Middleton

**Mentor of the Year
Manager, Roster
Coordination Unit, QFR**

Virginia is committed to mentoring and coaching women to succeed at QFD. She connects with women across the state and assists firefighters with their employment applications and interview techniques.

Recently, Virginia presented at coaching sessions organised by Station Officer Sheree Merryfull to help prepare candidates for the Station Officer selection process.



"I believe inclusion is important in all aspects of life," Virginia said. "Everyone should feel heard and respected and know they have a voice and their voice matters. Diversity in a workplace leads to diversity of thought and ideas and that's where we achieve our greatest innovation and positive change.

"As a mentor, I believe it's important to pass on knowledge and support anyone who is on their own path of growth and development, regardless of gender, age, race and so on. For the first 20 years of my career I relied on mentors and superiors to guide me and I have now reached an experience level that I can give back, which is such a great feeling.

"I truly believe if you hire the right people, support and empower them, you can watch them flourish and go on to achieve their career aspirations, which are often over and above your own.

"I am thrilled to be recognised in this way and am very proud to be a QFR employee. I truly work with the best people."

Paula Douglas

**Champion of Change
Inspector, Southern
Region QFR**

Paula was recognised for a variety of work, including the Frontline Women's Network, Workforce Development, the Girls Firefighter Experience Camp and a Matildas soccer event.

"It's very humbling to receive this award, knowing I was nominated by my peers," Paula said. "I appreciate that they value me in this way."

She was the driving force behind an opportunity that saw QFD personnel promoting the profession of firefighters at Matildas games in Queensland.

"I saw there was an opportunity to connect with the Matildas when they played two games on Queensland soil late last year," Paula said.

"Obviously since the Women's World Cup, the Matildas have been on this meteoric rise and have been instrumental in showcasing women in sport. It seemed like a logical alignment to promote our service at the games, bringing greater visibility of female firefighters to an audience that looks to women as pioneers in their field.

"The professionalism and enthusiasm of the QFR firefighters who engaged with the community at the games was outstanding. We work with some truly magnificent people."

Another highlight was her work on the Girls Firefighter Experience Camp.

"I remember standing in front of the QFR women and men who put their hands up to be a part of that experience and feeling an overwhelming sense of pride," Paula said.

"And it wasn't for me, it was for the job we do as firefighters, the experience the young people had just had and the people who were involved from start to finish in making it come to life.



"I want to thank the firefighters not only for the professionalism of their service, but for their own belief and personal values that significantly shaped the experiences of these young people. Everyone left that weekend with their lives significantly fuller."

Sharing stories

The keynote speaker at the International Women's Day event was diversity, equity and inclusion advocate Maureen Frank.

"Inclusion has been a big part of my world since I was a kid, but I probably didn't realise it growing up in Toowoomba," Maureen said. "I came from an immigrant family – my father was born in India of Persian origin, my mother was born in Ireland."

"I remember as a kid realising we didn't quite fit. I learnt very quickly to have two lives, two faces. A face for my life at home with my family and a face for outside in the community."

"The biggest feminist in my family was my dad. For him it was all about economic security for women. Having two daughters, he wanted us to be able to financially support ourselves because his mum had been widowed young."

"I had twin daughters as a single parent, and one of my daughters has cerebral palsy. The thing that's taught me most about inclusion is having a child with a disability."

"She was diagnosed as not being able to walk or talk at the age of two. But she defied the odds – she walked when she was two and talked when she was three."



"As a mum, some days I got it completely wrong and some days I got it right. But when you care about someone, you wake up the next day and try a new approach."

"To me, inclusion is about how to get the best out of someone and how they can get the best out of you. It's about basic respect. It doesn't matter what your difference is, because we're all a little bit unique and different."

"It's about embracing that difference and getting courageously curious to find out where someone is coming from."

However, Maureen said the journey to being truly inclusive and respecting everyone wasn't easy.

"For an organisation, inclusion means people feel like they truly belong, are accepted and their uniqueness is truly valued. That means every employee and every volunteer has a real voice and the communities we serve have a real voice."

"Inclusion is a little more complicated than we think, and even with the best of intentions we all get it wrong."

Maureen said exclusion happened in many subtle ways in organisations.

"It's about who gets invited, who gets access to information, who gets involved in formal discussions, who's the brunt of the joke. It's those little things."

"The research shows every single time there is a subtle act of exclusion, it reduces someone's productivity by about 25%."

"One very simple thing you can do is show your humanness and vulnerability by telling people some stories about you, because when you do that, people tell you stories about themselves."

"Sharing a story enables us to start to have conversations about our individualism, and that is at the heart of respect and getting the best out of each other."



Our Women in QFD Awards recipients with Commissioner Smith and Minister Ann Leahy.

GLOBAL EXCHANGE IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

International fire practitioners, most of whom were First Nations women, gathered in Cairns for a 12-day training exchange, the first of its kind in Australia.

When First Nations fire professionals Chloe Swiney, Kylee Clubb and Alex Lacey travelled to California for a training exchange in 2022, they were so inspired by the experience they decided to bring it to Australia.

Since 2015, the Women-in-Fire Training Exchange (WTREX) has been improving firefighting skills and amplifying the role of First Nations women in fire management.

Queensland was proud to host the first-ever WTREX event in Australia, with 38 attendees from overseas and Australia, including Queensland, NSW, Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia. Attendees were a mix of rural firefighters, urban firefighters, park rangers and Indigenous rangers.

The program integrated Indigenous fire practices that have been used for tens of thousands of years.

Attendees learnt about flora and fauna identification and traditional weaving and held discussions on traditional fire knowledge, women in leadership and the incident command system.

They participated in live fire training across Queensland's diverse ecosystems, including Undara Volcanic National Park, the Tablelands and Yarrabah.

Commissioner Steve Smith said the program helped deepen global understanding of Indigenous fire practices.

"It is essential that we continue to build a global network that empowers women and Indigenous people in fire management, ensuring the sharing of knowledge for future generations," Commissioner Smith said.

QPWS Deputy Director General Ben Klaassen said traditional fire management and other ancient practices were woven into the program.

"Each element of the AUS WTREX program reflects the deep connection between Australia's First Nations peoples and Country, giving participants a unique opportunity to experience some of the oldest continuous living fire and land management practices in the world," Mr Klaassen said.

The program was jointly delivered by QFD and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), with support from the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), WTREX and Fire Networks. Research partners Natural Hazards Research Australia and National Indigenous Disaster Resilience also supported the event and will produce a research paper on it next year.

Safe space

Chloe Swiney, First Nations Bushfire Mitigation Officer for the Savannah District, said the team ensured Traditional Owners were included in every day of the program.

"We wanted them to share as much as they wanted and teach these women as much as they could," Chloe said. "We were all exchanging knowledge and sharing it in a safe place."

"We wanted to build up our attendees because a lot of women, especially Indigenous women, don't get experiences like this."

"The ultimate goal is to have more women in fire spaces, with a network of women behind us who encourage us and push us forward. This is the first exchange but hopefully not the last."

As the Project Manager, Chloe put in countless hours of planning since 2022 to make the program a reality, from creating a working group to budgeting, developing the program and collaborating with other areas within QFD and QPWS.

The team wanted to expose attendees to several different landscapes and Traditional Owner groups, from the basalt savannah country of Undara Volcanic National Park to the rainforest of the Atherton Tablelands and coastal Yarrabah.

"Australia has so many different ecosystems and it was amazing to show three of them and the very different ways we manage fire in each," Chloe said. "Every single landscape needs fire at certain times and in certain amounts."



“At Undara it had rained recently so it wasn’t too dry, which was ideal for cool burns. Alex is from that country and told us the story of the area and the lava tubes.

“At the Tablelands, conditions were perfect for more hazard reduction burns and cultural burns. Once we got down to Yarrabah the weather was too wet to burn so we practised flora and fauna identification.”

Attendees also practised bushfire mapping and familiarised themselves with RFSQ fire trucks and the aircraft QPWS uses for incendiary drops.

“We held smoking ceremonies in each place so the Traditional Owners could welcome us to country and share stories about the area and how they used fire,” Chloe said.

“We held yarning circles with Traditional Owners and some of the Elders told stories from their country. It was really special that they felt comfortable with us being there.

“We also had a weaving workshop in the Tablelands where local weavers showed everyone how to use native grasses from the area.

“At the end of the day we’d sit around a fire and do a debrief and check in on how everyone was feeling. We weren’t just going out and lighting fires – we were doing it for a purpose.”

Chloe said she hoped attendees came away with an appreciation of far north Queensland’s landscapes and the role of fire in them.

“They all learnt new techniques they can take home and share with their brigades or ranger groups,” she said.

“We’ve created a network of women and Indigenous women in fire and built some long-lasting friendships.

“Commissioner Smith and RFSQ Chief Officer Kaylene Jones attended the final day and it was really special for them to see the impacts the program made.

“It felt great that we were able to create such a safe space, which I hope to recreate in future when working with other firefighters.”

Chloe is now supporting some attendees from the exchange to host WTREX in other parts of Australia.

Empowering women

Kylee Clubb, RFSQ Bushfire Mitigation Officer and volunteer, said the exchange was an incredible experience.

“We wanted a whole heap of women from all over the world to come to far north Queensland and participate in the exchange up on Ewamian Country and Yidinji Country,” Kylee said.

“It’s been absolutely amazing to have women from all over the world and encourage Indigenous women to upskill and be in these spaces.

“Working in collaboration with QPWS and QFD and Traditional Owner groups absolutely made it worthwhile bringing WTREX back to Australia.

“It’s a fantastic way to engage with other Indigenous women from around the world. This is the first time we’ve ever had a program like this. I’m really honoured to be part of it and to share this space with these women.”

Knowledge exchange

Alex Lacey, a QPWS Ranger at Undara Volcanic National Park, worked with Kylee and Chloe to bring WTREX to Australia.

“I’m an Ewamian woman working on Ewamian country,” Alex said. “I wanted to bring WTREX back to Australia because I found it so empowering to be surrounded by other Indigenous women, exchanging knowledge and sharing the passion we all have for fire.

“I feel very privileged to share this country and show people how we burn in a landscape like this. Fire has always been a tool Indigenous people have used to look after country.



“It’s very special that we’ve found cultural heritage within the lava tubes [at Undara Volcanic National Park]. It was occupied by my ancestors who used to walk on this land.

“Protecting these places with good fire is very important so they’re not damaged and future generations can see them.”

A growing network

WTREX Director Lenya Quinn-Davidson helped establish the program in north California back in 2015.

“There was a lot of interest and momentum so the program grew across California and across the US and then in 2023 it grew into

an international program,” Lenya said. “We’ve had people from more than 35 countries participate.”

WTREX alumnae have spearheaded events in South Africa, Canada, Portugal and Mexico.

“We’re building a global network of leaders in fire and of empowered women and allies who want to support a different vision of fire and a different culture in fire management,” Lenya said.

“We will continue to build this network of amazing people and continue to shift the whole way we do business in fire, whether we’re in a remote corner of Kenya

or California. The learning and sharing that happens at these WTREX events is incomparable.

“WTREX is for everyone, not just for women. We have a focus on women and under-represented folks in fire, but we really want men involved in this work too. We want everyone involved – we all need to be in this together, making these big transformations together.”



“We’ve created a network of women and Indigenous women in fire and built some long-lasting friendships.”

- Chloe Swiney





"The ultimate goal is to have more women in fire spaces, with a network of women behind us who encourage us and push us forward."
- Chloe Swiney



TAKE IT TO EXTREMES



Vehicle shown with optional accessories, modifications and conversions. Specifications, features and finishes shown are subject to change and will vary on production model.

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SUPPORTING OUR SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURS

When the biggest floods on record hit the NSW coast, QFD staff and volunteers travelled south to assist.

In late May, a slow-moving low-pressure system brought massive flooding to the Hunter Region and mid-north coast. Five people lost their lives and about 10,000 properties were damaged, with about 1000 buildings deemed uninhabitable.

QFD crews were eager to help, returning the favour after NSW emergency services provided support during the recent Queensland floods.

Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) swiftwater rescue personnel resupplied medicine and food, conducted welfare checks and evacuated residents. Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) personnel also headed to Port Macquarie to assist with washouts.

Reconnecting communities

Inspector Mark Crowe led a QFR swiftwater rescue strike team to support the community of Kempsey.

"The town suffered significant flooding in the main street, with water up to a metre high through businesses," Mark said. "It affected many people's lives and shut down the town's commerce."

"There were a lot of road closures and isolated communities, including vulnerable people who needed to be rescued, evacuated or resupplied."

Mark's strike team consisted of five individual teams from the Greater Brisbane and Southern regions, using Ford Ranger Emergency Response Vehicles and Motorised Swiftwater Rescue Craft (MSRC).

They were later joined by a sixth crew from Brisbane with a high-clearance vehicle.

"We worked out of the State Emergency Service (SES) headquarters in Kempsey alongside the SES, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), Fire and Rescue NSW and Fire Rescue Victoria," Mark said.

"When we arrived there were 150 outstanding jobs and the SES assigned us any that required a boat or swiftwater rescue team. We ended up completing more than 60 jobs."

"In the first two days people were still driving into floodwater and crews conducted several rescues, including one in the main street. We also completed medical resupplies for chemotherapy and pain relief medications."

"Not having local knowledge was a challenge but we overcame it by linking up with services like NSW RFS and putting a local with our crews. They did a great job guiding us along submerged roads. Our interagency relationships worked really well."

Mark recalled the time a farmer approached crews and told them he'd used his tractor to rescue an older man from floodwater.

"The farmer had placed the man safely on the other side of the waterway, but the man had wandered off," Mark said. "The farmer thought he might have dementia."

"We sent three crews to scour the waterway for the man and found him trying to get back into his flooded car. The crews got him out of the water and he showed signs of memory loss, so they made sure he had someone to care for him."

"The crews did some outstanding work in the community. When they conducted welfare checks they were often the first people residents had seen."

"We play a vital part in reconnecting the community once the water recedes. One elderly man was isolated by floodwaters in a remote area after receiving a cancer diagnosis. He was lonely and broke down in front of our crews."

"They reported it up and we escorted a local religious group out to provide emotional support."

The QFR team used interoperable radio channels with the NSW and Victorian teams for seamless communications.





“Before we deployed, the operational communications unit reprogrammed our Government Wireless Network radios to be compatible,” Mark said.

Eventually the crews’ welfare checks morphed into food resupplies for stock.

“We fed six working dogs chained up on a property that was isolated for several days,” Mark said. “Heavy-lift helicopters then took on most of the resupply for stock and local shops.

“We also serviced the isolated communities of Crescent Head, South West Rocks, Hat Head and Smithtown.

“Each day we checked if we could access them. Once the water dropped enough we used our high-clearance vehicle to transport essential workers and hospital patients.

“The crews did an excellent job and everyone had a sense of accomplishment from the deployment. They did really meaningful work.”

Sheer devastation

Daniel Sandeman, Acting Area Manager, Scenic Rim RFSQ said the flood’s effects on local communities were immeasurable.

“They may still have their house, but they’ve lost their homes,” Daniel said. “While the communities are resilient and everyone was grateful we were there, you could see in their eyes the sheer devastation the floods caused.

“Our deployment of 17 RFSQ personnel drove down to NSW in six vehicles and stayed at base camp in Port Macquarie, sleeping on stretchers in an indoor stadium. We spent most of our time working in Kempsey and Taree.



“As Strike Team Leader, my main responsibility was looking after our crews and ensuring everyone’s safety. I also liaised with our NSW SES and RFS counterparts to find out what areas needed washouts, damage assessments and community engagement.

“I remember one moment when an elderly lady tried to give us a donation for assisting her. When we declined and said she should give it to a local charity, she broke down.

“Every person was so thankful we were there. Most didn’t realise we’d come down from Queensland to assist. We just keep telling everyone we were repaying the favour from when NSW came up to help us out.

“RFSQ volunteers are a key component of our communities and the backbone of our organisation. I am very grateful for the team that went down. We all worked hard and got in and got the job done.”



FROM VICTIM TO CYBER SECURITY CHAMPION

When her identity – and life savings – were stolen 10 years ago, Gabriela Guiu-Sorsa (pictured far left) turned the trauma into a quest to keep others safe online.

Gabriela joined QFD almost two years ago as Principal Advisor, Information Security because she felt aligned with the department's mission of protecting communities.

"I run incident-response exercises, brief the executive on cyber risk, mentor teams across ICT and champion cyber security," Gabriela said.

"A lot of people think it's very technical and complex, which deters them from learning more, so I encourage them to actually have those discussions and break down those barriers."

Gabriela's identity was stolen while she was managing operations for cruise ships.

"I actually don't come from an IT background," she said. "I handled security and crisis management, medivacs, embarkation and disembarkation.

"There was limited internet onboard so I relied on free Wi-Fi networks at ports. I

made an online payment without realising the Wi-Fi was a fake network someone had set up.

"A threat actor was sitting on the network, capturing my credentials and using them to hijack my identity and empty my account.

"I was weeks away from returning home to my birth country of Romania and buying my first home with my life savings. The loss was personal, financial and deeply unsettling.

"I only found out when I was trying to contact the bank. They told me there was no money in the account and I almost fainted. It was such a shock.

"The bank believed I was the culprit because, since I was on a maritime crew travelling to different countries every day, my account looked very odd. They didn't have controls in place like they have today, such as notifying you if someone takes large amounts of money from your account.

"Back then a lot of people didn't know about financial fraud and online scams. I don't think cyber security was even a popular term."

Containment

Gabriela tried to limit the damage by locking her cards, freezing her accounts and changing her passwords.

"Speed is everything when you're trying to contain a fraud," she said. "It's exactly like a fire spread.

"I had to provide proof I was the victim, that I'd actually visited all those countries and not just sent my credit card to someone. I had to supply the bank with my passport stamps and visas.

"What saved me was a transaction I'd made in the Falkland Islands, which only had one post office and one EFTPOS machine. While I was using that machine, someone else made multiple withdrawals from an ATM in Miami.

“I was able to prove with a receipt that I had the card with me in the Falkland Islands, which prompted the bank to start the investigation properly.

“I had to learn digital forensics – imaging my laptop, tracing logs and documenting artefacts for the bank’s fraud team.

“Then I had to work on restitution. It took me three or four months to get my funds restored because the bank hadn’t done their due diligence by checking the culprit’s identity.

“I learnt about chain of custody, evidence handling and the power of meticulous documentation, which obviously I apply in my current role.

“Things are very different now. Recently I had a threat to my bank account where someone tried to withdraw funds up to 10 times a day. I have multi-factor authentication enabled as well as alerts, so they couldn’t gain access. It was easy to interrupt them and stop the bleed.”

A change in direction

Gabriela kept working on cruise ships and eventually moved to Australia but was made redundant during the Covid pandemic.

“I’d always wanted to learn more about cyber security, so I took this as my opportunity and studied computer forensics and incident response at TAFE,” she said.

“I had a lot of transferable skills but it was very challenging, especially in a domain dominated by men. I had quite a diverse class and as young professionals trying to forge their careers, they had some challenges finding their first roles.

“I founded a global community called Cyber Security Champions of Tomorrow, whose mission is to bridge the gap between

the students and academia and provide education and mentorship. We started with 15 people in my class and now we’ve helped more than 2300 people.

“It grew organically because people saw the value of collaboration and mentoring as we grow the future workforce in cyber security.”

Supporting first responders

Gabriela brought all these experiences to her information security role at QFD.

“I’ve learnt that with trauma, if you have a growth mindset you can turn it into a positive story,” she said. “And that’s how everything turned out for me. I managed to turn a victim story into a defender’s mission.

“Every control gap closed and every awareness session delivered means someone else avoids what I went through.

“Helping first responders stay operational when seconds count is the ultimate payoff. QFD’s mandate is life safety. If a ransomware attack stalls dispatch systems or corrupts incident data, response time — and lives — are at risk.

“Cyber security preserves the integrity, availability and trustworthiness of the information that drives every fireground decision. In short: secure data, secure response, safer Queensland.

“For an organisation like QFD, threat actors may want to disrupt our services. We also hold information about communities and the public trusts us to keep that information secure.

“I’d like to acknowledge the Commissioner for his support and advocacy for the information security team.

“We still have a long way to go to achieve business resilience from a cyber security perspective and having advocates in the community to champion it is important. Cyber security is about culture because none of us is as smart as all of us as a collective force.

“Since I joined, cyber security has become a much more inclusive space where diversity is celebrated, and I encourage everyone to consider cyber security as a possible career.”

Gabriela was recently awarded the Australian Computer Emergency Response Teams Kyle Maher Award for leading with empathy and showing commitment to mentoring the next generation of cyber security professionals.

For more information, search ‘Cyber information security’ on the Gateway.



Stay safe online

- Never use open Wi-Fi for anything sensitive.
- Enable multi-factor authentication everywhere – stolen credentials are useless without the second factor.
- Monitor accounts daily and set up alerts. Speed is everything in fraud containment.
- Document everything – screenshots, timestamps, support calls. Paper trails accelerate recovery.





VITAL TRAINING FOR FIJI

Queensland Fire and Rescue staff travelled to Fiji to upskill firefighters across the island nation in swiftwater rescue and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR).

Based at Suva Fire Station, the team facilitated two USAR courses and two swiftwater rescue courses over three weeks in May and June.

QFD signed a five-year MoU with the National Fire Authority (NFA) of Fiji last year to support community safety and emergency response. The training was part of a joint partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Superintendent Corrie Benson said the Vanuatu earthquake last year prompted the decision to focus on USAR training.

“NFA is preparing themselves not only to protect their own community but to respond to places like Vanuatu,” Corrie said. “They want to assist their Pacific partners. QFR deployed to Vanuatu after the earthquake but NFA weren’t able to, so we’re building that capability over the next five years.

“There are 25 fire stations in Fiji and we trained representatives from all 25 so they can deliver the training to all 700 firefighters across the country.”

The USAR course combined theory and practice over five days, covering topics such as safety, risk assessment, marking systems, personal protective equipment and working as a USAR team member.

“It included a range of scenarios where the firefighters had to rescue people from

collapsed buildings,” Corrie said. “Some scenarios were casualties trapped inside buildings so the teams had to shore up the building and make it safe before crawling and tunneling their way to the casualty. It involved a lot of rope work and team building to give them real-life experience.”

The swiftwater course ran over two days, with the first day focused on the risks associated with water rescues and the concept of Yell, Reach, Throw and Wade. Day two put the participants through their paces with practical exercises in the water.

QFR supplied NFA with equipment including a USAR equipment cache, which consisted of hand tools like hammers and crowbars, battery-powered cutting tools, powered drills and saws and other items.

The team also delivered swiftwater rescue equipment including inflatable work

platforms, personal flotation devices, helmets and throw bags.

“It’s a unique experience to come across to Fiji and deliver training that can assist the community and firefighters in safely carrying out their duties,” Corrie said. “With added skills they can provide a more effective and streamlined response.

“The participants were enthusiastic and grateful for the opportunity. They could see the real benefit, so it was a pleasure every day working with them. The whole project from the inception has been great.

“It’s really valuable to share those skills and provide as much information as we can to other countries in the Pacific so they can be more independent and resilient when responding to natural disasters.”



BIKE 4 BURNS GOES OFF-ROAD

Almost 40 riders across the emergency services pedalled 500 kilometres along Queensland's rail trails to raise funds for burns research.

This year, Bike 4 Burns ditched the bitumen in favour of gravel roads, riding for seven days from the Burnett region down to Kedron.

By 2024, the team topped \$1 million in total funds raised for the Children's Hospital Foundation (CHF) and this year they've already raised more than \$75,000, smashing their target of \$60,000.

Bike 4 Burns President Rick Chambers said the committee welcomed several new members this year and took the opportunity to build on its legacy for the future, with their 20th ride coming up in 2026.

"We revitalised the ride this year with a new concept – a full off-road event, right off the beaten track," Rick said. "It had a good response, with at least 10 more riders than last year.

"There wasn't much reprieve – we had to keep pedalling to keep moving and it was hard-going. Even though people found it tough, they really enjoyed the challenge and were raving about it at the end.

"Next year we'll probably ride on the road again to celebrate our 20th anniversary, but we'll look at going off-road again in the future."

The team was delighted to have a wider range of riders this year, including several from the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and State Emergency Service (SES).

"We've even had some members join the SES just so they can ride, that's how committed they are," Rick said.

"There were hands on backs pushing people uphill to help them get over the line. Even one of my awesome teammates carried me and my bike across a creek.

"We kept thinking what we were going through was nothing compared to what the kids go through if they get burnt and have to endure rehab.

"We're trying to help alleviate that pain. When we go to a house fire and a child is burnt we don't have that option, so this is how we help.

"The funds we raise aren't just for Queensland – the CHF is world-renowned for burn treatments and rehab, so it not only goes to the kids but the community as well.

"One of our riders was a young adult who got burnt and she reached out and wanted to ride with us. Her treatment through months of rehab would have been informed by CHF's research.

"It was satisfying to see how much people enjoyed the ride. They were so enthusiastic and the harder it got the more the camaraderie peaked."

Committee member Kaylene Neal said the riders really had to concentrate on what was in front of them.

"There was a lot of mental work this time," she said. "We often rode on small tracks and you had to keep your eyes on the road in case there was a rock or pile of sand ahead.

"We passed a lot of old rail bridges but we couldn't ride on them – instead we crossed the creeks on very steep, two-foot-wide pieces of concrete.

"On one day, halfway through a 15-kilometre stockman's route, we got to a running creek and we had to take our shoes off and walk across carrying our bikes.

"There was lot of teamwork and encouragement to get people through. A lot of times when it got challenging, you'd hear someone say, 'We're doing it for the kids'. That was a common catchcry. Even if people were struggling or in pain they'd say, 'We're doing it for the kids, keep going'."



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Relationship Manager

M: 0409 752 260
E: jim.odonnell@tynansadvice.com.au

Andrew McQuarrie –CFP®, MAppFin FM SA Fin
P: 0402 275 929

E: andrew.mcquarrie@tynansadvice.com.au
T: +61 7 3085 3000 | W: www.tynansadvice.com.au

SHARING DISASTER MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS

At this year's Queensland Disaster Management Conference in Brisbane, QFD personnel shared insights into different facets of disaster management, from tsunami modelling to bushfires and the Brisbane Olympics.

The conference brought together local government leaders, emergency services, industry experts and community representatives to strengthen disaster resilience across the state.

The event was presented by the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) in collaboration with QFD, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Reconstruction Authority and the Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management.

A key theme was the bedding down of Queensland's disaster reforms across the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements, given the intensity of operations in 2024-25, including Tropical Cyclone Alfred and the western Queensland floods.

Speakers emphasised the importance of 'trusting the science' to understand, plan for and communicate climate and disaster risks effectively.

Dr Jane Sexton, QFD Director of State Intelligence, Predictions and Planning, took part in a standout session with Emma Catlin, a Disaster Response Specialist at Gladstone Regional Council. The pair discussed a project involving advanced tsunami modelling for the Gladstone coastline, home to the critical Port of Gladstone.

The collaboration between QFD, Gladstone Regional Council and Commonwealth science agency Geoscience Australia demonstrated how state agencies can work closely with councils to deepen understanding of hazard and risk.

The science-based insights gained from the project are directly informing evacuation planning and enhancing community safety in the face of rare but potentially devastating tsunamis.

In another session, QFD Chief Fire Officer John Cawcutt and Redland City Council

Disaster Management Unit's Mike Tate shared lived experience and strategic perspectives on bushfires.

Their discussion underscored the complex challenges of prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and rebuilding as Queensland faces longer and more intense bushfire seasons.

The session reinforced that disasters often leave lasting impacts on communities. In a room full to the brim, the audience engaged in an interactive conversation about bushfire recovery that included fire ecology, evolving concepts of adaptation and the role of managed retreat in a climate-challenged world.

QFD State Operations Assistant Commissioner Matt Bulow joined a panel

with senior QPS and QAS representatives to discuss preparations for major events, including the 2032 Brisbane Olympics.

The session offered a fascinating glimpse into the extensive planning and coordination required to ensure public safety at such large-scale events – and how quickly the clock is counting down to the Brisbane Olympics.

The conference reinforced the power of collaboration, science and innovation in navigating the challenges of an increasingly volatile climate. The conference nurtured a confidence that together, we are ready to meet the future – stronger and more prepared.



QFD's display at the 2025 LGAQ Disaster Management Conference



Key themes for QFD

Several key messages resonated throughout the conference with specific relevance for QFD:

- Disaster response requires all agencies to be agile and responsive.
- Strong relationships across all levels of Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements are essential and must be nurtured outside of crisis times.
- Disasters can change lives forever, with cascading effects that extend beyond the immediate event.
- Communities that prepare well recover better.
- In disaster decision-making, an imperfect decision made promptly may be better than a perfect decision delayed.



THE GREAT WHEELBARROW RACE

A Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) team participated in this year's Great Wheelbarrow Race, a 140-kilometre journey over three days from Mareeba to Chillagoe.

The race is a tribute to miners in the late 19th century who travelled around the region with their possessions in a wheelbarrow when work and transportation were hard to come by.

The road through the cattle country between Mareeba and Chillagoe was named Wheelbarrow Way in their honour.

Firefighter Jared Hohns, who works at both Mareeba and Atherton fire and rescue stations, said as a kid he used to watch his dad compete in the race.

"That experience stuck with me and since then I've competed 11 times – solo, in duos, trios and teams. I've even raced twice with my dad, which was pretty special.

"I've organised a QFD team four times and in 2023 we set a new services record, taking it off the army!

"This year, our team consisted of 10 runners – seven firefighters, plus one of their sons, an ambulance officer and a police officer, with three support members.

"There were just under 50 teams, so around 500 runners, plus about 200 supporters.

That's nearly 700 people all convoying through remote towns. It makes for an electric atmosphere and a weekend to remember!

"Imagine jumping off a moving bus, grabbing a wheelbarrow from a teammate in a relay, then sprinting as fast as you can before handing it off again – over 140 kilometres in three days.

"But honestly, it's not as bad as it sounds. It's one of the best team-bonding experiences out there and the feeling you get crossing each finish line is unreal. We did it with determination, team spirit and a lot of heart."

Jared said a big highlight was bringing in new runners.

"This year, we had six first-timers on our team, which is pretty rare. Watching them laugh, sing, struggle, bond and push through to the finish line of each leg – seeing that runner's high kick in – is exactly why I keep coming back after 11 years. It brings me right back to the excitement of my very first race.

"Thanks to incredible support from our community, family and friends, we've raised just over \$4,100 for the Friends of the Hospital Foundation, which improves the quality and accessibility of healthcare in our region for everyone," Jared said.

"The foundation wants all Far North Queenslanders – from mums and bubs to veterans and everybody in between – to enjoy a full range of quality healthcare services close to home. This includes vital services such as health and mental well-being, to cardiac, paediatrics, cancer care and more.

"Every step (and push) we took was for a cause we deeply believe in, and we're proud to know these funds will go toward supporting vital health and equipment services in our region.

"We came first in the corporate services category and third overall, with a time of 7 hours, 24 minutes and 29 seconds.

"We want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who supported us and hope we have done Queensland Fire and Rescue proud!"



BREAKING NEW GROUND

Jaidah Spencer, QFD's first female apprentice, has now become the department's first female mechanic.

Jaidah was employed as a QFD apprentice in July 2021, developing her skills in the Northern Region Workshop in Townsville.

She was one of seven apprentices – one in each region – learning how to service and maintain fire trucks as well as specialist firefighting equipment and systems.

After completing her four-year apprenticeship, she received a Certificate III in Heavy Commercial Vehicle Mechanical Technology and took on a permanent position as a Heavy Vehicle Mechanic.

"It's a big achievement and I'm excited about it," Jaidah said. "My Workshop Supervisor Rob Poulter taught me all about the fire trucks and hydraulic equipment.

"Rob has been with QFD for more than 12 years and I've learnt a lot from him. Every truck is different and every pump has something different to it as well."

Jaidah is a qualified Holmatro technician for hydraulic equipment such as pumps and jaws of life and has gained her Heavy Rigid (HR) and forklift licences. She works on small motors like generators as well as servicing cars and trucks.

"With Holmatro in particular, everything I've learnt has been very interesting and awesome to learn through QFD. It was also very interesting to learn how to test and fix leaks in the hydraulic pumps."

Jaidah's brother first inspired her to become a mechanic.

"He has a disability and he's always wanted to be a mechanic," she said. "I wanted to do a trade but wasn't sure what I wanted

to do yet. When my brother started talking, everything was about cars. That's when I thought I would give light and heavy mechanical a go.

"When I was in year 10, I did 12 months' work experience non-paid, and in year 11 I did work experience on a mine site. That's when I decided to go into the heavy vehicle trade."

The workshop has a small team – Jaidah and Rob are the only mechanics, plus a contractor and admin worker.

"We have manuals to refer to, but it's mainly fault finding," she said. "You have in the back of your mind that these kinds of tools can't fail at a job. You have to make sure everything's at working pressure. It's very time-consuming.

"All our hydraulic pumps and jaws of life go up to about 10,000 PSI (pounds per square inch). You don't want that to blow or hurt firefighters or anyone else.

"The most rewarding part of my job is being able to learn something new each day with the support of my supervisor, who calls me the lady tradie."

Reflecting on her appointment, Rob said, "I have worked side-by-side with Jaidah, giving her encouragement, support and belief in her ability, understanding her deficiencies and building trust and on occasions 'throwing her in the deep end' with positive results.

"Jaidah has earned her position with the Northern Region Workshop team."





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KRISTEN AND ARDIE LEVEL UP

After years of training and hard work, Volunteer Canine Handler Kristen Vautin and her dog Ardie have become the newest members of QFD's Canine Urban Search and Rescue (K9 USAR) team.

Growing up in America skiing and snowboarding, Kristen always aspired to train an avalanche rescue dog.

"On a family trip back to America, we were skiing at Palisades Tahoe, which has a pretty massive avalanche dog program," she said. "We got off the lift and just behind us was a black lab and his handler.

"The lab got off, rolled around in the snow with joy and sprinted to catch up with his handler for training. I thought to myself, 'I need to be doing that with a dog'. That night I got online to figure out what I could do in Queensland and I came across the K9 USAR team.

"When I heard back about the once-yearly intake, it was the day after I got back from America so it felt like it had all lined up perfectly. I have two older border collies, both way outside the ideal age, so I signed up without a dog for intake day, jet lagged and all."

Kristen volunteered as a helper on the team for a year before adopting Ardie, travelling to Brisbane from the Sunshine Coast for six- to eight-hour training days.

"While a massive time commitment, I was really grateful to have started without a dog," she said. "This allowed me to be fully present at training and take in so much about the world of USAR.

"I asked heaps of questions and learnt so much that the long days were well worth it. The team was always really welcoming and patient with all my questions. It was a great place to be around with a group of passionate dog people."

In September 2023, Kristen adopted Ardie from a government breeding program and they did their USAR intake less than a month later.

"Ardie left the government program when he was about seven months old because he was born with a pretty large overbite, so his two bottom canines were puncturing a hole into the top palette and had to be removed."

Kristen is a full-time pet dog trainer and runs her own dog services business on the Sunshine Coast.

"I love working with so many different kinds of dogs," she said. "It's super fun to watch the dogs work and try to get inside their head to problem solve. It complements my work with the USAR team as I appreciate dogs' likes and dislikes and how to build motivation.

"Belgian Malinois like Ardie really don't like doing things in halves, and Ardie lives up to that – if he is goofy, he is intensely goofy and when he is working, he is laser focused. Even when he's sleeping, I've had to check he's still breathing as he is really committed to the sleep.

"He is a really fun dog to work with as play is the biggest motivator for him. USAR is well suited for him as it is just a big game of hide-and-seek.

"He may not be the most innately talented dog on the team, but he and I both enjoy

working hard in deep practice, increasing difficulty and improving bit by bit."

Kristen said reaching certification was a personal highlight for her and Ardie.

"It was a pretty special moment to get your coveralls and your dog's official harness," she said. "Coming from an ultramarathon running background, I have learnt to love the process no matter what goal I'm chasing.

"When I first had Ardie, he didn't bark at all so I had to teach him to bark to show me where the human scent was coming from. Our first day having him bark at a victim was a massive deal!

"I love that there are standards for us to reach above certification. We still have goals to pass our Advanced Assessment in two or three years, and I'm looking forward to sitting another assessment this July for the Queensland Readiness Test."



+ 2019-20 BUSHFIRE AWARDS

Assistant Commissioner Mark Stuart made his way to Dalby in May to present prestigious awards in recognition of commitment and unwavering support to community during the 2019-20 bushfires emergency.

Congratulations to (left to right) Lieutenant Dave Kucks, Lieutenant James Minchin and Firefighter Josh Murphy on receiving the National Emergency Medals and National Medal.



+ GEMFIELDS GETS READY FOR BUSHFIRE SEASON

The Central Highlands Community Engagement Working Group came together to hold community gatherings in the Gemfields.

Emergency services and fellow stakeholders visited Rubyvale and Sapphire to bring the community together with a barbeque and discuss the 2025 fire season, mitigation plans and preparedness.

A key attraction was mapping the area so residents could see their property's vicinity to risks and potential buffer zones.

The services had some great conversations with the community about mitigation and preparedness activities and the upcoming season.



+ TRAINING HEATS UP IN BUNDABERG

Bundaberg was the site of a multi-agency training exercise that brought together personnel from QFD, Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Police Service (QPS) in a hands-on scenario.

Organised by Acting Station Officer Stuart Jack, who led the risk assessment and planning, the exercise aimed to strengthen inter-agency coordination and operational readiness.

Several QFD crews participated, alongside the Acting Area Commander in the role of Operational Senior Officer, gaining valuable experience in a realistic, high-stakes environment.

The scenario featured complex elements including multiple casualties and QPS invoking a Public Safety Preservation Act, encouraging teams to work through 'what if' situations in real time.

This inclusive and practical exercise was a strong example of effective teamwork and preparation across emergency services.



+ SWIFTWATER TRAINING IN CAIRNS

Cairns Division swiftwater personnel took the opportunity to hone their skills in preparation for the next wet season, with training days on the Barron River.



+ WELLBEING AND WORKFORCE TRAINING FOR TIN CAN BAY AND RAINBOW BEACH

Auxiliary firefighters from Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach came together for an insightful training night that focused not just on operational readiness but personal wellbeing and community engagement.

The evening featured a visit from psychologist Dan, who spoke candidly about the importance of mental health and self-care as first responders.

Dan provided practical strategies to help manage stress, including breathing exercises, grounding techniques and tools for maintaining mental resilience in high-pressure environments. His down-to-earth approach and genuine insight sparked meaningful conversation among crews and reinforced the message that looking after yourself is just as important as looking after others.

Also joining the session was the Regional Community Engagement Coordinator, who led an interactive workshop on auxiliary recruitment.

Crews explored what makes their communities unique and how to communicate effectively across different groups. They started developing tailored recruitment plans to attract new members.

The night was a great blend of connection, learning and forward thinking, demonstrating the value of supporting our people while building a sustainable future for local stations.



+ BIDWILL RURAL FIRE BRIGADE SCHOOL VISIT

Bidwill Rural Fire Brigade visited Year 5 students at St Helens State School in May for an engaging session on natural disasters, with a special focus on bushfires.

Crew members spoke with students about the impact bushfires can have on communities and the important steps people and communities can take to reduce risk and prepare effectively.

After the discussion, students got a close-up look at the brigade's fire truck and enjoyed a live demonstration of the fire hose – an exciting and memorable way to wrap up the visit.

It was a great opportunity to educate and inspire the next generation about fire safety and resilience.



+ ENGAGEMENT IN THE SOUTH-WEST

Across south-west Queensland, QFD staff and volunteers are making a difference where it matters most – in the heart of their local communities.

At rural events and shows they have engaged with residents and provided preparedness and prevention education in a fun and interactive way.

From sharing life-saving tips to showcasing the incredible capabilities of our teams, these events allow people to see firsthand the tools, equipment and dedicated individuals who stand ready to support them before, during and after an emergency.

There's something special about these moments – the chance to connect, learn and build resilience together. At the heart of it all is a shared commitment to ensure every community has the knowledge and resources they need to stay safe.



+ EMPOWERING VOLUNTEERS AT FRASER COAST AND COOLOOLA

Volunteer Community Educators (VCE) from across the Fraser Coast Cooloola Rural Fire Service Queensland Area came together for an insightful workshop focused on community engagement and bushfire preparedness.

Hosted by the Bushfire Mitigation Unit in collaboration with the Regional Community Engagement Coordinator, the workshop gave VCEs essential tools and techniques for engaging with communities.

From understanding their local communities to delivering meaningful preparedness messages, participants were guided through the fundamentals of effective engagement.

The day was hands-on with a burn table demonstration and familiarisation with the VCE trailer, open discussions and plenty of opportunities to share. The collaborative atmosphere sparked new energy and confidence among VCEs, reinforcing the crucial role they play in educating and empowering communities.

This workshop marked a strong step forward in preparing for the season ahead and strengthening community resilience through informed, proactive engagement.



+ CELEBRATING CAPTAIN GARY DICKS

For more than three decades, Captain Gary Dicks has stood as a pillar of strength in the Tara community, dedicating his career to protecting lives and property with QFD.

Through some of the most complex and challenging incidents, Gary led with unwavering courage, commitment and expertise, earning the respect and admiration of his colleagues and the community he served so selflessly.

His knowledge, leadership and compassionate approach have shaped the department, mentored countless firefighters and reinforced the core values of dedication and service.

After more than 30 years of service, Gary has officially retired, leaving behind a legacy that will never be forgotten. His impact extends far beyond the fireground, woven into the lives of those he protected, guided and inspired.

Thank you, Gary, for being an invaluable part of QFD. We wish you all the best in this new chapter of your life – one filled with health, happiness and well-deserved relaxation.



+ FIRE SAFETY IN ACTION AT CHENREZIG INSTITUTE

Firefighters from Mooloolah Fire and Rescue Station and Eudlo Rural Fire Brigade had the opportunity to collaborate with Chenrezig Institute – a Buddhist centre and retreat – for a live-fire simulation and evacuation drill.

The full-size simulation provided essential hands-on training for the institute's fire response team and assisted their sangha (community) to experience and understand the steps to take during a fire emergency.



+ RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS RECONNECT

Not even the gloomy weather could dampen the spirits of our resilient retired firefighters, who made the trip to the Toowoomba Fire Museum for a special morning tea gathering.

These regular get-togethers are more than just a catch-up – they are a celebration of careers, camaraderie and shared memories. It was fantastic to see the crew from Highfields Fire and Rescue Station stop by to join in, making the occasion even more special.

Staying connected beyond service is vital and events like this provide the perfect opportunity for our retirees to continue supporting each other, share stories and reflect on their incredible contributions to the community.

A big thank you to everyone who attended. We look forward to more gatherings that honour the dedication and legacy of our firefighting family.



+ HAZMAT TRAINING AT JCU

Firefighters conducted a joint exercise with James Cook University (JCU) Nguma-bada Campus in May to maintain their operational skills and knowledge in hazmat incidents.

The exercise, which involved fire trucks from Cairns, Smithfield and Port Douglas, helped improve firefighters' ability to liaise with outside agencies, test communication equipment and plans and test various hazmat-specific equipment.

The exercise consisted of three fire trucks and a hazmat support unit responding to reports of a chemical spill in JCU's 'Ideas LAB'.

Initial reports advised of one unconscious casualty within the building that crews had to rescue. Once the rescue had been conducted, the incident then shifted to containment of the product.

Firefighters used both Level 3B splash suits and Level 3A fully encapsulated suits to refresh their knowledge in using these levels of personal protective equipment.

Once they performed the rescues and contained the spill, crews were directed through a technical decontamination corridor.

The exercise was hugely beneficial for all involved to test their response and readiness for potential hazmat incidents in the region. It also allowed the firefighters to strengthen their relationship with JCU and provide insight into QFD's capabilities.

This makes for a more resilient community that is actively working together to provide a high-quality response in emergency situations.

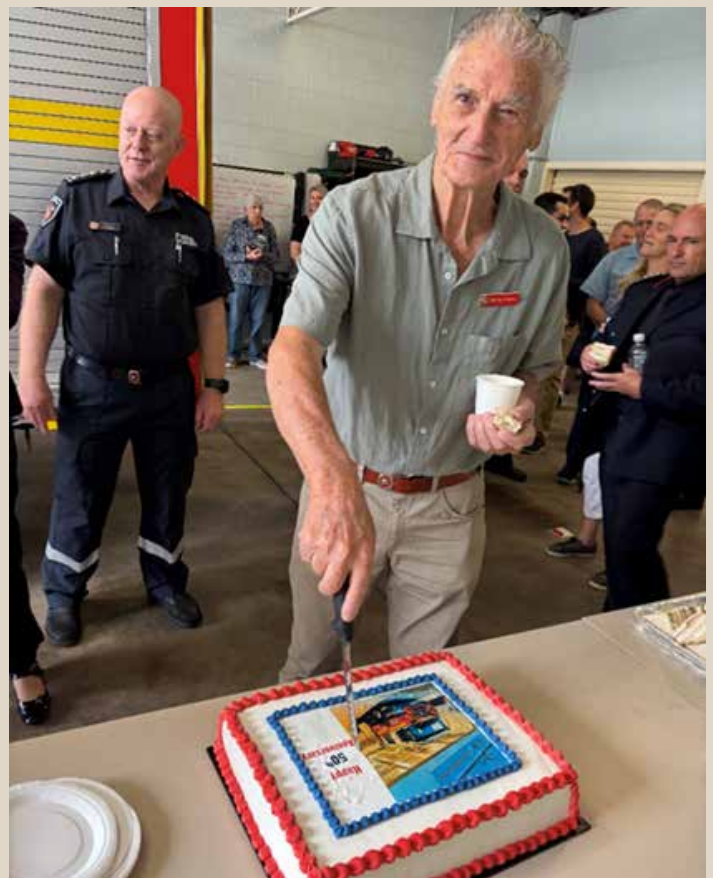


+ BUDERIM STATION'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

On 17 May, Buderim Fire and Rescue Station proudly marked its 50th anniversary of dedicated service to the Buderim community and beyond. The anniversary event brought together generations of firefighters and their families.

Among those in attendance were three of the station's captains, including Buderim's first Captain, Bryan O'Neill, and current Captain Jon Karas, who has served as an auxiliary firefighter at the station for more than 30 years.

The event was not only a celebration of the station's history, but a heartfelt thank you to those who have served and continue to serve to keep Buderim safe.





1. Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers upskilled ahead of bushfire season by completing their Airbase Operator Course in Cloncurry.
2. Queensland Fire and Rescue squads played against the Australian Army in Anzac Cup matches at People First Stadium, home of the Gold Coast Suns.
3. When four-year-old Kohen met the crew from Pimpama Fire and Rescue Station at a traffic crash, he asked all the questions he'd ever wanted to ask them and later visited their station with his family to say thank you.
4. Guanaba Rural Fire Brigade came together for a training session on fast-moving grass fires, vehicle rollovers with potential casualties, and structures under bushfire threat.
5. Queensland Fire and Rescue instructors from across the state worked on trucks, trains and buses at a heavy vehicle road crash rescue workshop.



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6. Three-year-old Kodi visited Coolum Fire and Rescue Station to live his dream of becoming a firefighter, donning safety gear before testing out a hose and earning his fire safety certificate.
7. Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers from Kogan, Bennett, The Ridge, Tolmah and Wilkie Creek conducted a hazard reduction burn on 35 hectares of scrub on the Western Downs.
8. At a scenario training session, Delaneys Creek Rural Fire Brigade practised incident arrival, evaluating fire and its conditions, radio communications, and managing crews and trucks on the fireground.
9. At a house fire in Waterford West, Queensland Fire and Rescue crews found Angel unconscious in the smoke. They carried her out, revived her by administering oxygen and reunited her with her family.
10. Roma auxiliary crews conducted familiarisation training at Roma Airport to prepare for responding to incidents at the aerodrome.

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