

RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT FEBRUARY 2026



INTO THE FLOOD
Taking on the monsoons

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FACING FLOODS IN THE NORTH



WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY AT BLACK RIVER



RECOGNISING OUR BEST



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SPOTLIGHT

20 YEARS OF LIVE FIRE

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ON THE COVER

QFR swiftwater firefighters rescued people from several vehicles in floodwater west of Townsville. Photo by Chris Magarey.

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

FOREWORDS



STEVE SMITH AFSM
Commissioner
QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

Welcome to the first edition of *Response* for 2026. You may already be aware that one of our major projects this year is the boundary review, assessing the administrative boundaries established during reform to ensure our boundaries support our day-to-day and operational objectives.

During my regional visits, I heard your feedback about inefficiencies and frustrations with the complexity resulting from these varied boundaries, and we plan to harness your insights to improve them. Thank you to everyone who provided feedback at the engagement sessions hosted by the Executive Leadership Team over the last month.

Taskforce Headway is leading this work and will gather insights, both internal and external, on the strengths and weaknesses of the boundaries and how they impact operational and administrative effectiveness. Your insights will help identify improvement options.

Other priorities this year are FTE alignment to optimise service and corporate functions, professional development of our people and delivering fit-for-purpose operational assets. These are important pieces of work and I will keep you updated as they progress.

Throughout 2026, we will be guided by our ways of working themes: safety first, back-to-basics, working together, continuous improvement and strong decision-making. At the heart of everything we do is the principle of safety first. Creating and maintaining a safe, healthy and supportive working environment is a shared responsibility that involves us all. We must all do more to embed this in our everyday actions and decisions.

Remember to speak up and report any safety concerns and always look out for the physical and mental wellbeing of yourself and those around you. Together, we can ensure safety remains our top priority and everyone goes home safe every day.

Through the ways of working themes, we will strengthen collaboration across services, break down silos and remove duplication through greater visibility and active oversight. We will continually review the way we work and make evidence-based decisions to ensure we are using our resources effectively.

These actions will strengthen our ongoing focus on the QFD pillars – role clarity, training and development, and accountability, which improve how we do things. Together, we will shape a better QFD by continuing to support everyone to understand their role. We will provide training and development to help people perform their role to the very best of their ability, and we will continue to foster a culture of accountability on people's behaviour, actions and decisions. These pillars are central to our future success and must be underpinned by a strong and effective communications and engagement approach. We will keep you updated on our progress against these pillars and other critical activities, and seek your feedback to develop improvements together. With this clear roadmap, the year ahead will be an exciting one and I look forward to seeing what we can achieve together. Thank you for your hard work and as always, stay safe.



DR REBECCA DENNING
Chief Operating Officer
STRATEGY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

It was a privilege to be appointed Chief Operating Officer in December and I am delighted to continue working with the talented and dedicated people of QFD.

I have been incredibly impressed by the supportive environment in Strategy and Corporate Services. The team is genuinely collaborative with a clear focus on supporting our frontline staff and volunteers.

Every day I see our people acting with integrity, making meaningful contributions and taking initiative to develop new and better ways of working.

One of my highlights so far has been understanding the complexity of the business and getting to know our staff and volunteers.

I had the privilege of visiting regions to understand how our work is carried out on the ground and seeing firsthand how the services we provide benefit our organisation and the community.

My key priorities are continuous improvement and ensuring people are well-supported through change. I am responsive to feedback and committed to creating opportunities for our people to be actively involved.

It's essential to ensure our people have the tools and resources they need to get the job done. This includes professional development, operational and corporate systems, technology, and assets and fleet.

Another key priority is to focus our efforts on the things that truly matter and foster genuine collaboration across services to build sustainable approaches that deliver meaningful community safety outcomes.

I also have a strong focus on integrity, based on my experience researching, preventing and addressing corruption within the Queensland public sector. Undertaking public service comes with a responsibility to act with integrity and in the public interest. Our behavioural and integrity expectations are clear.

Bringing this experience with me to QFD, I'm committed to supporting the Complaints Management Review Implementation program, which will strengthen the way QFD manages complaints. I also support the impact of our Courageous Respect Everyday program, which fosters a culture of respect at QFD.

I look forward to the year ahead and continuing to work every day alongside people who are dedicated to their roles, serving the community, and striving to achieve better outcomes for all.

FACING FLOODS IN THE NORTH

In late December, monsoons came to Queensland, drenching most of the north and north-west of the state.

After weeks of rainfall, catchments were saturated. Flooding cut roads and isolated towns. Then Tropical Cyclone Koji formed.

Acting Superintendent Doug Allom from Townsville said the monsoons happened very early in the season.

“Water temperatures in early December were what we’d normally expect to see in March, increasing the risk of monsoons and cyclones,” Doug said.

“Koji was predicted to be a category 1 but unexpectedly formed as a category 2, bringing intense rainfall and destructive winds.

“We initially pre-deployed 12 swiftwater teams and stood up three Incident Control Centres, which grew to covering 30 teams in an area stretching from the Torres Strait down to Mackay.”

Based on intelligence from Predictive Services and local knowledge, QFR pre-deployed crews and assets to high-risk areas before they were cut off.

“When the cyclone changed path, heading toward the Burdekin, Whitsundays and Mackay, we had to rapidly re-deploy and cascade our personnel to meet the changing risk profile,” Doug said.

“In 36 hours we redeployed 21 teams, cascading them down from Cooktown to the Burdekin, Whitsundays and Mackay. It took an incredible amount of work behind the scenes to cancel their accommodation bookings and make new ones.

“At the peak of the event, we had 117 personnel, 20 resources and six aircraft. We liaised with 35 Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMG) and District Disaster Management Groups (DDMG) to meet community needs.

“Essential communication lines were established with the LDMGs and DDMGs, ensuring we took a combined approach that assisted the disaster managers to facilitate community requests.”

QFR conducted 232 damage assessments during the monsoon. The township of Clermont was particularly hard hit, experiencing once-in-a-century rainfall.

“We received 20 requests for washouts in Clermont,” Doug said. “A huge downpour fell in the catchment area, cutting off the town and inundating homes. In a coordinated response through the Isaac LDMG, we worked with SES and RFSQ to help the community recover.”



When water levels receded, crews conducted damage assessments and supported clean-up efforts.



QFR swiftwater firefighters supported locals in the outback town of Winton.



Heavy rainfall and damaging winds hit the northeast tropical coast.

The team used helicopters based in Mount Isa, Julia Creek, Cairns and Townsville to carry crews, along with their inflatable boats and motorised rescue craft, to remote areas.

“We also used the aircraft for reconnaissance,” Doug said. “One key area was along the Flinders Highway in the western corridor, where a 300-kilometre section of road and rail was catastrophically destroyed.

“Aircraft made impact notes, which we provided to the Department of Transport and Main Roads and Queensland Rail so they could plan recovery efforts.

“That road is the main corridor in and out of Mount Isa so it was pretty devastating to the mining communities out there, some of which were already hanging on by a thread.

“Our relationship with the helicopter companies was invaluable. We were able to move the pilots around at the drop of a hat. We didn’t have the resources to cover every town so the helicopters helped us respond to our most remote areas.”

Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) also produced impact notes and damage assessments and supported the safety of swiftwater rescue teams.

“A lot of north Queensland communities are resilient and resourceful in times of disaster, but people were still grateful when we relocated or rescued them,” Doug said.

“We worked closely with RFSQ, especially in the preparation and recovery phase. They also supplemented our Incident Management Teams so we could keep our people on the ground.

“I want to acknowledge the frontline services and the crews who were mobilised multiple times. Thank you to the other regions who provided assets and resources, which was a huge help.”

Catchments are still saturated so there is a risk of more monsoons developing through to the end of March.

“When the waters began to recede, crews stood down, serviced their equipment and made repairs,” Doug said. “A long season is predicted so they need to be prepared to deploy again.”



QFR swiftwater firefighters, supported by aircraft, assisted the Rockhampton community when the Fitzroy River hit its peak.



QFR swiftwater firefighters rescued people from a vehicle trapped in floodwater near Urundangi.



Widespread heavy rainfall swept across western and northern Queensland.



QFR crews in Mount Isa preparing for the flood response.



Crews were positioned across north Queensland.



RFSQ crews cleaned up in Narangba and Bribie Island.



WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY AT BLACK RIVER

When a large scrub fire threatened homes in Black River, the community's pre-planning was key to stopping it.

The fire spread across a local property, racing up ladder fuels and pandanus clumps, soaring to well over 10 metres.

"It was an intense fire front near the back shed and close to the house," said RFSQ volunteer Geof Williams from Black River and Districts Rural Fire Brigade, Townsville.

"Firefighters went straight into action, initiating a plan to defend the property. When flames encroached on the structures, QFR resources were requested to attend.

"The homeowners had a garden hose out and were lending a hand where they could."

Several brigades managed to defend the structures, but the fire approached a second property.

"It was overgrown and had old cars, sheds with overgrown weeds and grass and ladder fuels that led directly to the house," Geof said.

The fire front picked up speed, forcing some units to pull back to safety while others held fast and pulled up the fire.

"By this time, many other brigades arrived with appliances and put in a backburn that contained the fire. Or so it seemed by that evening."

On the second day, the fire reignited across containment lines, growing in intensity as the wind and temperatures picked up.

"Property was once again under direct threat from the fire. Most of the rural appliances in the Townsville area, along with urban appliances and an aircraft, burnt off the property using wet lines.

"The backburn met up with the fire and travelled south-west and approached a property owned by the Falkenhagen family, who'd recently attended a workshop run by the Black River and District Rural Fire Brigade and as a result had fully prepared their property."

At the workshop, landowners were equipped with valuable resources and practical advice to help them prepare their properties against the risk of bushfires. As part of the session, participants received laminated maps of their properties.

These maps allowed them to mark critical features such as roads, access points, water sources and firebreaks, ensuring a clear understanding of their land's layout in the event of a fire.

"The family had a local action plan in place, fire breaks all around, manicured lawns around all structures and the homestead with ample room to defend," Geof said. "Bore water was ready to fill appliances."

The workshop also provided guidance on identifying suitable locations for helicopter landings, which could be crucial for water bombing operations.

Participants were also given a detailed breakdown of the vegetation on their properties to help them understand the

types of trees, their burning characteristics and which areas were more likely to produce intense fires.

“This family had taken the threat of fire seriously and because of their hard work and forward planning, the brigades were no longer on the back foot.

“This property was the ideal location to pull up the fire, and with just a few small burns the fire was contained. The family’s map from the workshop was a godsend for firefighters on the ground.”

Resilience over reliance

Cory Walsh from Black River and Districts Rural Fire Brigade said he decided to run the workshop after identifying high-risk bushfire locations in the local area.

“We have a great community out here at Black River where people are more than willing to help each other out in times of need, but some residents didn’t even know we existed and some thought we were at the station 24/7,” he said.

“With the help of the Bushfire Mitigation unit based in Townsville, we decided to run a community resilience workshop to help residents prepare and maintain their properties.

“We had guest speakers from the Council, Department of Natural Resources and Mines and RFSQ, including the local fire warden.

Participants were provided laminated maps of their property and we worked with each landowner to identify key areas like water points and access routes.

“We identified the different vegetation types and helped them plan mitigation on their lots. The workshop was called ‘Black River Bushfire Resilience Workshop’ to help give ownership to the community.

“We also held a Bushfire Resilience Information Night to share information with the community about the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, preparing a Bushfire Safety Plan and planned burn programs.

“The Falkenhagen family were very involved and worked on the map to show us all water sources, access points and areas where we could pull up a fire.

“I was very proud of the brigade and the community when they stopped the Black River fire. I’ve been involved in the brigade for more than 10 years and to see the community’s attitude toward us now from what it used to be is a massive morale boost.

“We’re helping the community be more resilient and that helps buy precious time for us to respond, put our own plans in place and fight these fires.”

The workshop was well attended and since the fire, other landowners have asked Cory to run another.

“I would highly recommend brigades hold such an event with their community. I was skeptical at first, but it was a very rewarding experience and it was great to see the community take initiative and lean away from being reliant on the brigade.”



RECOGNISING OUR BEST

This Australia Day, we celebrated the QFD members who have gone above and beyond to support their communities.

Four QFD members were recognised with the highest honour for firefighting personnel, the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) — Quinn Cramer, Robert Frey, Chris Gilchrist and Garry Hoonhout.

Another six were honoured with the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) — RFSQ volunteers Luke Harding, Dennis Howe, Stanley Nelson and James O’Shannessy, QFR auxiliary firefighter Charles Khan and retired QFR Station Officer Robert Paterson. Thank you to QSuper, part of Australian Retirement Trust, for their ongoing support of these awards.

At ceremonies around the state, QFD also recognised 51 staff and volunteers with the QFD Australia Day Achievement Awards, and presented four Australia Day Appreciation Certificates to people and organisations who supported the department. Thank you to QSuper, part of Australian Retirement Trust, for their ongoing support of these awards.

National and department medals, such as the Higgins and Langley Memorial Medal for QFR swifwater firefighters, honoured more than 200 personnel for remarkable efforts.

Station Officer Quinn Cramer AFSM

During her 17-year career with QFD, Quinn has made important contributions to gender equity and charity efforts.

Starting as a QFR auxiliary firefighter in 2008, she is currently Station Officer at Gladstone Fire and Rescue Station.



Quinn Cramer AFSM

“It was humbling to be recognised, knowing how many people are out there doing equally fantastic work,” Quinn said.

“It’s a great acknowledgement of the causes I’ve contributed to and I hope it draws more attention to them.”

A passionate advocate for empowering women within fire and emergency services, she has been a member of the Women and Firefighting Australasia (Wafa) board since 2017 and was elected President in 2019.

She is also a co-founder of the Frontline Women’s Network and represents women in firefighting on national advisory boards.

“Co-establishing the network with Paula Douglas was a great achievement,” Quinn said. “I’ve wanted to see it happen since 2016 but I wasn’t sure how to make it happen. To see it finally come to fruition has been amazing.

“Another highlight was co-locating the 2023 Wafa Conference with the AFAC Conference in Brisbane. There was so much great feedback from attendees who came away better connected.

“I’ve worked to empower women in emergency services by creating a safe and supportive network, a place to feel seen and heard. I’ve promoted mentoring and leadership opportunities and advocated for meaningful inclusion so women feel confident to step up, lead and thrive in the sector.”

Quinn volunteers with Bike4Burns, a charity bike ride that raises funds for the Children’s Hospital Foundation to support children suffering from burns.

“Bike4Burns is a highlight of every year, and it’s never really work to support it, it’s a passion. When I first participated in 2010 it seemed a great way to connect with other firefighters, keep fit and raise money for a good cause.

“Something changed after I rode into the Children’s Hospital and met the amazing kids the ride supports, kids like our ambassador Charlie, who’s an absolute legend. There’s nothing quite like it.

“This year is the 20th ride. I wouldn’t miss it for the world and encourage everyone to support it.”

Quinn is known for her inclusive leadership and mentorship.

“Leadership is about lifting standards and lifting people – with or without rank. It’s about using whatever position you’re in to strengthen culture, deliver outcomes that matter, leave things better than you found them and do it with courage, humility and accountability.

“People won’t always remember what you said, but they’ll remember how you made them feel.”

Station Officer Robert Frey AFSM

Robert was recognised for mentoring generations of firefighters, advancing best practice and representing the spirit of the fire service on the national and international stage.



Robert Frey AFSM

He joined QFD in 1992 and is currently the station officer at Noosa

Heads Fire and Rescue Station. He has been a lead instructor at the Live Fire Campus for more than 21 years.

“I was very grateful to receive this award,” Robert said. “I’ve had a fantastic career with QFD and to be honoured in this way is very humbling.”

In 2010, he represented Australia in the Tour of Duty Run across the US to commemorate the lives of emergency service workers lost in the September 11 attacks.

“Two Queensland firefighters were selected for the Tour of Duty Run – myself and Leon Colbert.

“We started in LA and ended in New York on September 11,” he said. “We ran all the way across America, including Death Valley in 50-degree heat.

“For six weeks we ran six hours a day, hand-in-hand with American firefighters, to pay our respects to the 343 career firefighters who were killed going to work.

“Before the run, a lady brought in an American fire helmet with signatures on it. Her son had worked with the New York Fire Department before September 11 and they’d gifted him the helmet. He wanted to check with me if any of the people who’d signed it had been killed in the attacks.

“When I went to the US, I got to know a local firefighter and we paired up for the run. When I checked the helmet again, I realised his father, who’d died in September 11, had signed it. We handed the helmet back to him as a sign of respect.”

In March 2011, Julia Gillard became the first female prime minister to address the US joint sitting of Congress in Washington DC. She shared the story of the Tour of Duty Run and the helmet, with Robert in attendance, proudly representing Australian emergency services.

“We have a culture of taking care of our people and making sure their day at work is enjoyable.”

– Robert Frey AFSM

“It was a career highlight and a massive honour to wear the Queensland firefighters’ uniform in that place of hallowed ground,” he said.

“When I was a junior firefighter I had extremely good mentors who instilled their knowledge into me. Once you get to a certain time in your career, it’s time to pay that back. I like to think the skills we give recruits will first and foremost help save their lives.

“We have a culture of taking care of our people and making sure their day at work is enjoyable.

“I’ve had many highlights and tragedies within the job. Sometimes there’s a good result, sometimes not. The crews I’ve worked with at station level have made this job the greatest job in the world for me.”

Robert has been the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) representative for Noosa Shire Council for more than 20 years.

He has been on many national deployments in incident management roles and has deployed in Queensland for many disasters, from Cyclone Larry to Cyclone Alfred.

“On most of the deployments I worked in incident management, but also divisional and sector command. I’ve also deployed as the QFD liaison to LDMGs.

“Deployments are a chance to go out and help other people in their time of need. It’s hard work but it’s an adventure.

“I’m lucky to have worked with great people and learnt a lot. I’m still learning every single day. The love and support of my wife and two boys has been essential to a very fulfilling career.”

Auxiliary Lieutenant Christopher Gilchrist AFSM

During his 35-year career with QFR, Chris has supported the community through operational response, fire investigation and training the next generation of firefighters.



Christopher Gilchrist AFSM

“I’ve enjoyed every moment at Warwick Fire and Rescue Station with the other auxiliary crew members,” he said.

“A highlight was becoming a Regional Fire Investigator in 2017. I was the only auxiliary on the course and one of just a few auxiliary fire investigators in the state.”

Chris has since completed more than 120 fire investigations, helping improve fire prevention strategies and support criminal prosecutions for arson-related offences.

“The rewarding side of any fire investigation is determining a cause of the fire, which can lead to recalls or convictions,” he said.

“I also gained full-time employment at Charlton Regional HQ as Support Officer for the Toowoomba and Gatton Commands. Before that, I completed a year as the Goondiwindi Command Support Officer.”

He is passionate about professional development, having worked as an instructor for auxiliary recruit courses throughout Southern Region and taking on the role of Warwick Area Training Coordinator for several years.

Chris recruited and developed hundreds of auxiliary firefighters through his day-to-day duties and by volunteering to walk the streets in south-western Queensland towns.

“As a regional trainer for 33 years, I’ve seen the struggle for smaller communities to obtain crewing at their local stations. I was given the chance of carrying out my Support Officer role at one of these stations, Dirranbandi, for a few months, and I went around the local businesses in my spare time to talk to community members.

“The seasonal work available around most small communities makes it hard for people to commit to the ongoing training required. Teachers and police officers in the smaller communities transferred regularly and council staff often worked out of town.

“Leadership to me is working closely with your crews in a professional manner while guiding them to achieve their objectives safely, especially under pressure. It’s building trust with crews by leading by example and supporting their wellbeing.”

“The rewarding side of any fire investigation is determining a cause of the fire, which can lead to recalls or convictions.”

– Christopher Gilchrist AFSM

**Rural Firefighter
Garry Hoonhout AFSM**

Since joining RFSQ in 2014, Garry has worked in several roles including secretary and deputy fire warden and is now the second officer and treasurer of Condamine Rural Fire Brigade.



Garry Hoonhout AFSM

“When I moved to Condamine, the people I worked with encouraged me to join the brigade,” Garry said. “I didn’t have an idea what it was, but the rest is history.

“Condamine is a small town – service station, pub, motel, caravan park. The population of the district, including surrounding farms, is about 300, plus transient gas workers.

“Our brigade only has about 10 people but we have good camaraderie and know we can rely on each other.”

During the Tara bushfires in 2023, Garry played a pivotal role in coordinating evacuation efforts, helping establish firebreaks and managing operational rosters.

“I contributed as much as many other people at that fire,” Garry said. “It was a large fire in difficult terrain with a lot of houses

close by. I set up rosters to manage fatigue over the weeks we worked there.

“At another large fire a few years ago, I gained experience in controlling aircraft and other assets on the ground. It was a quick intense fire that needed aerial waterbombing, so I requested the planes from Dalby and guided them to where they needed to be.”

Garry is passionate about community engagement and firefighter recruitment, acting as a mentor and role model for new recruits.

“In a small town you talk a lot with people and you can ask them about joining,” Garry said. “Our brigade is also involved with the local sports club – a lot of people are in both. The challenge is finding enough willing volunteers.”

Garry organised funding and managed the construction of a dedicated training room and essential amenities for the brigade.

“We had a shed that could fit two vehicles and not much else, so I organised the construction and finish of a training room,” he said. “Now we have a place to train, hold meetings and debrief after a fire.”

Garry also coordinated funding for equipment and resources, including a rapid response unit and specialised trailer for transporting firefighting tools and additional water supplies.

During his 11 years of service he has often sacrificed personal time and faced considerable risks without expectation of reward.

“I want to acknowledge the whole brigade,” Garry said. “This is an award for all of us.”



Staff and volunteers were recognised with Australia Day Achievement Awards at ceremonies across the state.

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BURN PROTECTS LOCAL WOODLANDS

First Nations personnel conducted an ecological burn at Yarrabah to restore the natural habitat and reduce the encroachment of nearby rainforest.

Eight rangers from the Gunggandji-Mandingalbay Yidinji Peoples Prescribed Body Corporate (GMYPPBC) conducted the burn with QFD First Nations Bushfire Mitigation Officer Joshua Spina.

The operation aimed to promote native species regeneration and preserve the area's ecological and cultural balance.

Using ground ignition methods and supported by three light attack appliances, the group safely contained the fire within its boundaries of rainforest and mangrove shrubland.

The burn achieved about 70% coverage of the target area, reducing invasive flora with low impact on natural vegetation.

"This burn was carried out to restore and maintain the natural open woodland, which was being encroached on by rainforest species due to a lack of fire," Joshua said.

"Fire plays a key role in supporting native woodland plants and maintaining biodiversity.

"RFSQ became involved through collaboration with land managers to plan and safely conduct the burn while managing risks such as weather, smoke and operational safety.

"We used spot and strip lighting techniques to demonstrate how different lighting patterns influence fire behavior, including rate of spread, flame height and intensity, and how these techniques can achieve ecological and safety outcomes."

The burn reduced rainforest encroachment and re-introduced fire as a natural process in the open woodland.

"Our mosaic burn helped control weeds, promote regeneration of native woodland species and improve habitat conditions while maintaining overall biodiversity," Joshua said.

"It was great working with the GMYPPBC rangers. Their deep local and cultural knowledge made the burn a valuable learning experience, and their passion for caring for Country ensured we achieved ecological and cultural outcomes.

"A highlight for me was seeing the rangers from GMYPPBC in action and learning from their deep knowledge of the land. Being part of the burn and contributing to fire mitigation within the Yarrabah area was incredibly rewarding.

"It was inspiring to see how combining cultural knowledge, ecological science and careful planning can protect the community while restoring Country."

Manager of Bushfire Mitigation Anita Dwyer said the collaboration integrated traditional and conservation fire knowledge into RFSQ and GMYPPBC'S hazard reduction programs.

"Joshua's role was to assist the GMYPPBC rangers with strategic planning, identifying ignition techniques, and risk management," Anita said.

"He helped achieve cultural and ecological outcomes for the local habitat while maintaining best-practice fire management approaches.

"RFSQ Tropical Coast District is extremely proud to support First Nations ranger groups in achieving these types of outcomes."



SUCH GREAT HEIGHTS

Firefighters and paramedics braved the heights to conduct a tower crane exercise at the construction site of the new Toowoomba hospital.

In the training scenario, the crane driver experienced a heart attack and first responders carried their equipment up the 40-metre crane to reach them.

Crews got used to working with the tight spaces and limited anchor points of the cranes, which are used at several construction sites around the city.

Six QFR rescue technicians and an inspector, along with four Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) paramedics, joined forces for the exercise.

Station Officer Mark Haddow said QFR reached out to local construction companies to see if they could put processes in place for medical emergencies involving crane drivers.

“We wanted our rescue technicians to rehearse an incident and find out what works and what doesn’t, what we can attach to, and how to navigate tight working conditions,” Mark said.

“The cranes are electrically operated so we isolated the power before the firefighters carried their equipment up the ladders.

“They had more than 100 kilograms of gear between the four of them, including ropes, harnesses, webbing, litter, descending devices and pulleys.

“The crew used anchor points to stabilise the casualty, helped the paramedics access the driver and set up high-angle rope systems.

“They worked with the paramedics to stabilise and package the casualty before lowering them to the ground.”

The firefighters collaborated with the construction companies to make sure they knew what to expect and their employees could react appropriately in a real situation.

“We also used Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) to paint a picture for the paramedics while our crews gained access to the casualty,” Mark said. “It allowed the paramedics to gauge the casualty’s condition ahead of time.

“The whole rescue took about two hours. The biggest challenge was the lack of space in the ladders, cage and cabin.

“We train to make jobs like this easier if they come up. The exercise helped us understand what’s required and build relationships with the companies so they know our capabilities and we know their emergency systems.

“I was proud to see how efficiently the crew performed the rescue – they solved the problem on the fly and worked as a team to get a good result.”



THE FIRST SHIFT FROM HELL

It was baptism by fire when one of Brisbane's most catastrophic blazes broke out the day the city's new fire station opened.

The flames started in the Benjamin Bros warehouse around 6pm. Employees were getting ready to leave when they smelled something burning and saw flames flash up the lift from the cellar.

According to the Charters Towers Times, clerks were trying to find a leak in a gas pipe and "flames suddenly shot upwards and immediately ignited a large quantity of inflammable stock in the upper storey." Benjamin Bros denied this theory.

It was 5 December 1890. The Brisbane Fire Brigade Board had formed the city's first permanent fire brigade just the year before.

The brigade had moved into the new Central Fire Station that morning and had already attended another fire at Turbot Street.

Employees broke the fire signal and called the station. One even hailed a taxi to alert the firefighters in case the signal didn't work.

"The Central Fire Brigade's hose reel came thundering along, followed at a short distance by the portable escape ladder," wrote the Brisbane Courier. "Everyone turned to watch them pass at a hand gallop, and then somebody yelled 'Look at the smoke!'"

Columns of dense black smoke rose from the roof. Firefighters attached their hoses to the plugs but the water pressure was hopelessly low.

"A few minutes later there were dense masses of smoke issuing from the upper windows," reported the Courier.

The first floor was stocked with "tobacconists' goods of all descriptions, perfumery, stationery, fancy goods, and French groceries and confections... Safes, pianos, clocks and electroplated goods."

Filling the second floor were "saddlery and ironmongery", "fancy goods, mechanical



Benjamin Bros was gutted and M'Arthur's considerably damaged by fire and water. The Benjamin Bros warehouse was re-erected in 1891.

toys, and Yankee notions and novelties of the latest kind.”

To better reach the fire, firefighters climbed onto the roof of the neighbouring building, M’Arthur and Co, while others set up short ladders on the southern side of Benjamin Bros.

Only a few minutes had passed but Benjamin Bros was already beyond saving: “A dull glare through the windows fronting on the street indicated that the entire building was doomed.”

Some of the onlookers backed away after a series of explosions, perhaps from fireworks kept in stock.

“The firemen, who had been pouring water through the broken windows of the first floor, were ordered down, and told to direct their branches through the windows and half-burned doors on the street frontage,” reported the Courier.

The firefighters on the south side kept battling the flames, standing on a narrow cornice that ran across the main frontage.

“Suddenly someone in the crowd roared, ‘The wall is falling,’ and instantly a hundred voices echoed the warning. But the firemen either did not hear it or were too intent upon their work.”

It wasn’t until a man came forward and shouted, “For God’s sake come down, men,” that the firefighters finally climbed down, only to calmly reposition their ladder and climb onto the veranda of an adjacent building.

The crowd’s attention turned to whether M’Arthur’s would also burn down. They were “appalled by a heavy, dull, dead crash, which was supposed to be the falling in of the upper floor of Benjamin’s place. A second or two later there came a second shock.

“The back and part of the side walls of Benjamin’s warehouse had fallen, and the remaining portion looked a gloomy, staggering wreck against the background of flame.”

Another crash rang out. A firefighter knocked out a window on the upper floor of M’Arthur’s, leaned out and shouted, “Send someone round, for Heaven’s sake: they are all buried under the bricks!”

Five or six firefighters had been working on the roof and upper floor of M’Arthur’s when a section of wall fell in and the middle floor buckled, sending them falling nine metres.



Brisbane Central Fire Station was opened in 1908 on the north-east corner of Ann and Edward Streets. Photo from State Library of Queensland.

According to *The Week*, “A rush was made to the windows, and while some were battering in the shutters, one man in naval uniform... scrambled from one sill to another above him and dashed through the window-frame. The men were literally buried up to their necks in debris.

“Lieutenant Major, who had only his slight official cap on his head, was severely bruised about the head and body, one brick striking him heavily on the hand.

“He also had an extremely narrow escape from a broken neck, for at the time the wall fell he was near a door which was forced against him and threw him over against the wall. Had it gone the other way he would have most probably been thrown down the two floors. Another man had the front of his trousers torn from off his legs.”

Miraculously, no one was seriously injured. The departments within M’Arthur’s were divided by a thick wall and an iron door, which prevented the fire from spreading.

“Till a late hour a large crowd of spectators were congregated in Elizabeth Street,” wrote the Courier. “Excellent order was maintained by a strong body of police, assisted by several members of the detective force.”

When the fire eventually died down, detachments from the Central and South Brisbane Brigades and volunteers from Toowong, Ithaca and New Farm stations kept watch through the night, aiming streams of water at the smoking ruins.

But the night wasn’t over for the weary brigade from Central Fire Station. They left the fire at 3am, changed into dry clothes, and received a call for several houses on fire in Kelvin Grove, the third major fire since the station had opened. They set out at once.

The brigade operated out of the Central Fire Station until 1908, when they moved into new headquarters on the corner of Ann and Wharf Streets. The station was demolished in 1950 for the construction of government offices.



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QUEENSLAND'S NEW BUSHFIRE PLAN

The revised Queensland Bushfire Plan (QBP) outlines a whole-of-government and whole-of-community plan for managing bushfire.

As the primary agency for bushfire, QFD is responsible for the development of the QBP.

The QBP was first published five years ago and an extensive review was undertaken to ensure Queensland has a contemporary plan.

As our population grows and communities expand into bushfire-prone areas, managing bushfire risk is a complex challenge.

Commissioner Steve Smith said, "The QBP brings together QFD and our many partner agencies and stakeholders to ensure bushfire management is supported by strategic direction, sound planning and collaborative leadership."

RFSQ will be at the forefront of Queensland's drive to meet these objectives but it won't be doing it alone.

RFSQ Chief Officer Kaylene Jones said RFSQ worked with Queensland communities and partner agencies.

"Our arrangements are critical to enabling Queensland to meet the future challenges of bushfire," Chief Officer Jones said.

"We are entering a new era of bushfire risk, driven by shifting climate conditions, changing land use and evolving population dynamics."

Collaboration and coordination is an enduring theme in the revised QBP, which supports a strong connection to Queensland's disaster management arrangements.

Assistant Commissioner, State Operations Directorate, Matthew Bulow said, "Disaster management groups are a critical enabler for Queensland communities affected by bushfire events and provide vital support to QFD."

"This support is generated through strong relationships with our disaster management partners."

The revised plan has several changes, particularly in terms of prevention. Bushfire mitigation is now a year-round approach, not defined by a specific season, so staff and volunteers can conduct mitigation whenever an opportunity arises.

The QBP outlines Queensland's bushfire risk projections, which are influenced by our changing climate. This leads to potentially longer bushfire seasons, more bushfire fuel and overlapping fire seasons.



The plan emphasises the importance of keeping communities informed about their bushfire risk, and provides information to support critical decision-making during bushfires.

The revised plan is the culmination of collaboration across QFD, led by the Strategic Operational Planning Unit (SOPU), who facilitated consultation within QFD and externally.

SOPU Executive Manager Alex Rees said, "The review team has produced a contemporary bushfire plan for Queensland, which provides strategic direction and coordination."

"However, this complex work is not undertaken in isolation and SOPU collaborates with multiple units from across the department to produce a plan that is fit for purpose and enables Queensland to effectively manage bushfire."

RFSQ played a critical role in the plan's development with additional support from QFR, Hazard and Risk Unit and Strategic Policy Branch. A key part of the external consultation with partner agencies and stakeholders was the State Bushfire Committee, chaired by Chief Officer Jones.

A copy of the revised plan is available at disaster.qld.gov.au/plans.



THE QBP'S FIVE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR BUSHFIRE:

- minimise the threat to human life
- undertake bushfire hazard mitigation in an informed, collaborative and coordinated manner
- ensure Queensland communities understand their bushfire risk
- minimise the impact of bushfire on Queensland communities
- support healthy and resilient ecosystems.





A HELPING HAND FOR VICTORIA

When bushfires tore through Victoria in January, QFR sent Incident Management Teams to help coordinate the response.

QFR staff and volunteers put up their hands to help as Victorian emergency services worked around the clock to fight the fires, which destroyed more than 500 structures and an estimated 400,000 hectares.

Assistant Chief Officer Tim Chittenden was deployed for a week as part of the Incident Management Team at the Tallangatta Incident Control Centre (ICC). As a Deputy Incident Controller, he helped manage the Walwa River Road fire in north-eastern Victoria.

“I looked after road access, working with contractors to assess and remove hazardous trees,” Tim said. “We also started the recovery work, organising fodder drops and assessing livestock and structure losses.”

After flying into Melbourne, the team drove up to Tallangatta and stayed in Albury, NSW. They worked 12-hour shifts from 8am to 8pm.

“We travelled to the basecamp in Tallangatta for morning briefings with crews before starting in the ICC,” Tim said.

“Throughout the day we had briefings, press conferences and media events as well as managing the fire. We finished with an all-hands briefing at 6pm to start the handover to the night shift, then headed back to basecamp to debrief with crews.”

The QFR team mainly worked with staff from Forest Fire Management Victoria.

“Working with the Victorian personnel was fantastic. They’re good operators who are very experienced in that part of the world and that type of firefighting.”

- Tim Chittenden

“Working with the Victorian personnel was fantastic,” Tim said. “They’re good operators who are very experienced in that part of the world and that type of firefighting.”

“We learnt a lot from them and vice-versa. It was a great opportunity for knowledge sharing.”

“In Queensland, we don’t see fires of the scale and magnitude that they do in Victoria. It broadens your horizons and gives you more depth of experience.”

“Deployments like this also help you build professional relationships with colleagues around the country.”

A national community

Regional Community Engagement Coordinator Julianne Webster-Scott travelled to Victoria from Rockhampton to oversee the public information unit, managing media, community liaison and warnings. Like Tim, she was on day shift at the Walwa River Road Fire.

“Our team were busy with updating warnings, political visits, community meetings, media conferences and engaging with partner stakeholders to collaborate on consistent shared messaging,” Julianne said.

“Communicating critical safety information to residents remaining in high-risk zones presented significant logistical challenges. Some areas didn’t have electricity and internet, so we had to develop alternative communication methods to reach the affected community.”

“At the end of each day, we distributed a print and electronic community newsletter updating the community on the fire situation, response actions and plans and other key information to people who could pass on the information further into the affected communities.

“The community liaison officers distributed the newsletter to Tallangatta businesses and community meetings and some key community members within impacted areas, printed them out and shared them around.”

With a fire impact perimeter of about 300 kilometres and some key connection roads closed due to dangerous trees, face-to-face engagement in affected areas was more challenging.

“Our Victorian colleagues were exceptional, very welcoming and highly experienced. It felt rewarding to provide support to the team that had been working very long hours under extreme pressure protecting their communities, and to give them a well-deserved rest.

“Using local knowledge was crucial and the local people were highly knowledgeable and helpful.”

- Julianne Webster-Scott

“It was beneficial to see how other states coordinate their incident management system and a nice surprise to reconnect with a fellow Incident Management Team member from Victoria who’d come up to help us at an incident in Rockhampton.

“It feels like a national community working together to manage incidents and exchanging knowledge and experiences will ultimately enhance outcomes and positively impact the community.

“We identified some valuable takeaways that yielded high-impact results. For example, their in-house team filmed and edited video updates for the community, which were very well received and helped reduced confusion.

“The Victorian emergency services worked tirelessly and it was a privilege to be of assistance.”

Analysing the fire

Fire behaviour analysis was a crucial part of managing the fire.

Ben Twomey, Second Officer at Ocean View Rural Fire Brigade and experienced volunteer FBAN, took on the role in Tallangatta ICC.

“My job was to create views of what the fire could do if it got out of control, given the weather and the condition of fuels,” Ben said. “These views informed incident planning, public information and day-to-day operations.”

While the likelihood of the fire escaping was relatively low under the given conditions, it was essential to the threat. The Incident Controller needed to have a contingency plan in place in case the fire breached containment lines.

“My day consisted of updating potential fire spread conditions based on weather forecasts and producing fire spread predictions.”

Ben ordered weather forecasts from the Bureau of Meteorology, assisted with requests for resource planning, and arranged handovers for the night shift.

“This was my fourth ICC deployment and I’ve done three more at Victoria’s State Control Centre,” he said.

“Working with the Victorian emergency services is always really gratifying. I would regard them as some of the best in the business. They are very science- and evidence-driven and they have excellent systems, which makes it easy to use their data and tools.

“It’s always great experience to travel interstate and work on really big fires.”



Photo by Sassafras-Ferny Creek Country Fire Authority.



Photo by Sassafras-Ferny Creek Country Fire Authority.



Photo by NSW Rural Fire Service.

BRENDAN'S LIFELONG CONNECTION TO SOUTHPORT FIRE STATION

Brendan Ward has visited the Southport Fire Station every week for 36 years, starting when he was just four years old.

Brendan, who is autistic, developed an early and intense interest in fire engines.

"It was an interest that grew into a meaningful and enduring connection with the station and its staff," his sister Danielle said.

"Many autistic children have a strong fascination with how things work, including machinery and emergency services, which can be a useful entry point for learning. He retains everything he has learnt by visiting the station.

"He enjoys observing professional development sessions, watching daily routines and being part of the station's rhythm.

Sometimes Brendan helps out with informal tasks like checking equipment on the trucks. He enjoys watching shift changeovers and seeing the preparations for callouts.

"The station has become a significant part of his identity," Danielle said. "The staff's ongoing support and inclusion have boosted his self-esteem and given him a strong sense of purpose and belonging within the community.

"A key figure in this journey was Station Officer Brian Turner, who mentored Brendan from an early age. Brian assured Brendan and his family he would always be welcome at the station. He

also shared that Brendan's presence brought a sense of calm and light-heartedness to the team, helping to balance the often stressful work environment.

"Although Brian has since passed away, his encouragement and kindness continue to have a lasting impact on Brendan, who carries Brian's badge with him everywhere he goes.

"Brendan's story is a powerful example of how shared interests and community connection can foster belonging and confidence."

Station Officer Tony Chicco said the firefighters immediately welcomed Brendan and treated him with kindness, patience and respect.

"Brian and his crew extended Brendan an open invitation to visit the station anytime he wished – a simple but powerful gesture that made him feel safe, valued and included.

"Over the years, Brendan returned time and again, finding reassurance in familiar routines, faces and the structure of station life – something especially meaningful for an autistic child.

"That initial act of inclusion grew into a 36-year relationship, a testament to the enduring bond between him and the firefighters.

"When I met Brendan 26 years ago, I was taken back by his sound knowledge of the appliances, call signs and specialty appliance capabilities.

"If a particular fire appliance is not parked in the engine bay, he will ask what happened, what went wrong and when it's coming back from the service.

"Brendan's presence enriched station life as much as the station enriched his. Crews gained perspective, empathy and pride in being a positive constant in someone's life.

"What began as a single visit became a lifelong reminder that small acts of openness can leave a legacy lasting generations."

A particularly proud moment for Brendan came in 2010, when he was officially made an 'Honorary Firefighter' in recognition of his dedication and long-standing relationship with the crew. He attended a special ceremony with the Commissioner, a highlight that reinforced just how valued he is by the Southport community.

"It was an incredibly special day for Brendan," said Tony. "It was more than a ceremony – it was the realisation of a lifelong dream. For the first time in his life, Brendan experienced what it feels like to be completely accepted, celebrated and included for who he is.

"On the day, he stood proudly among his heroes, wearing the uniform, sharing in the tradition and being recognised as part of the team. It was a moment that will stay with him forever."



Brendan with his father Dan at the station.

NEW PROGRAM FOR SENIOR OFFICERS

Eleven participants from across Queensland joined the pilot for QFR's new Senior Officer Development Program in Townsville late last year.

The program prepared them for leadership by developing their operational management and technical skills.

One of the course facilitators, Superintendent Sven Diga, said the program was part of the QFR Service Plan 2025-29.

"The Service Plan highlighted the need for tailored development opportunities to strengthen leadership capability, promote a positive organisational culture and improve operational effectiveness," Sven said.

"The program ensures the Senior Officer cohort across QFR delivers a contemporary approach to command leadership and management.

"This is the first program targeted at the Inspector level, defining the role of senior officer ranks by providing a base level of the skills, knowledge and leadership needed for broad managerial responsibilities.

"The program aligns the roles and responsibilities around a contemporary management framework. It's a comprehensive program that delivers clear and documented progression from Station Officer to Inspector and through to executive management."

Participants developed their skills in strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, team management and stakeholder engagement.

"Subject matter experts familiarised them with a systematic approach to resource management, organisational governance, policy development and financial oversight," Sven said.

The program took a hands-on approach each day, with interactive segments and scenario-based exercises to enhance technical expertise and decision-making in complex emergency situations.

"Participants came away with greater confidence in their role as a Senior Officer and a fundamental approach to command leadership and management."

A highlight for Sven was the experience and enthusiasm participants brought to the course.

"We had a diverse range of inspectors from regional and urban areas, which magnified the cohort's understanding of roles in these areas and how they service their communities.

"All components of the program will now be reviewed so we can deliver it to a broad range of Inspectors."

Another facilitator, Acting Chief Superintendent Brad Moore, said the Commissioner was passionate about professional development for all staff and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.

"This can range from external qualifications such as graduate certificates or diplomas to internal short courses, workshops or conferences," Brad said.

"The pilot program was the first of its kind, designed to provide consistent, relevant education to prepare someone to be an Inspector.

"We covered topics such as operational response, human resources, payroll, workplace health and safety, the political environment and how to navigate it, and the importance of external relationships.

"This is the first part of a series of programs that will be available for Superintendents and Chief Superintendents into the future.

"Our aim is to make the program as interactive as possible by guiding the Inspectors through their actual documents, such as payroll.

"I hope the participants gained confidence in their roles as well as a greater network of colleagues ready to support each other."

The team will use insights from the pilot to refine the program before its official launch this year.



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TRAINER OF THE YEAR

Chris Day from Narangba Rural Fire Brigade has been named RFSQ State Volunteer Trainer of the Year.

The award celebrates volunteer trainers who excel in mentoring and supporting their fellow brigade members.

When he's not volunteering, Chris works as a Station Officer with Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting Service.

"I joined RFSQ back in the mid-90s after moving to Brisbane," Chris said. "I'd previously been an urban volunteer in Victoria's Country Fire Authority and I wanted to keep volunteering."

"I feel a bit embarrassed about the award. I regard my actions as nothing beyond the standard duties expected of any trainer in service to their brigade and community."

His brigade has about 50 members and there are several urban stations nearby, so their focus is on vegetation fires and recovery operations after cyclones and storms.

"In addition to serving our local area, the brigade is frequently called upon to support other brigades across the region," Chris said.

"We maintain strong collaborative relationships with neighbouring brigades, working together on mitigation activities and community engagement events."

Chris is a passionate mentor, guiding new members through their development and promoting fire safety within the community. He finds it rewarding to see members gain new skills and understanding.

"At the brigade level, it's equally gratifying to see the team accomplish tasks that may have seemed unattainable," he said.

"Operating in an ever growing urban environment, our opportunities for training are somewhat limited, so we often conduct scenario-based exercises in the local industrial estate."

"We dispatch crews with information consistent with a standard response, and upon arrival we give them images and maps depicting the situation, so they can interpret the information and formulate plans."

"We regularly use stop/go exercises, allowing the scenario to progress before pausing at critical junctures to review actions taken and the rationale behind them. This ensures all members share a common understanding before the exercise resumes."

"We routinely conduct pre- and post-exercise briefings to establish the tone and expectations for the exercise and address any safety considerations."

"The debriefing gives trainers insight into how participants interpreted the scenario, their initial assessment and the development of their action plan. It helps members gain a clearer understanding of the exercise management and rationale."

"All participants are encouraged to contribute. The debriefings are a vital mechanism for learning through experience."

"Upskilling members to a level where they are confident in their abilities is highly rewarding. It's gratifying to know people you've assisted in their development can now participate in operations safely and effectively."

"As the brigade's training coordinator, my achievements wouldn't have been possible without the unwavering support of our officers and members. Their commitment to active participation, openness to learning and readiness to challenge themselves has made the role deeply rewarding for everyone involved."



VOLUNTEER TRAINERS OF THE YEAR

- State – Chris Day, Narangba
- Northern 1 District – Joshua Woolfe, Saunders Beach
- Northern 2 District – Gaven Bunker, Mount Isa
- Central 1 District – Darren Nelson, Calavos
- Central 2 District – Waine Scott, Cooberrrie South
- Eastern 1 District – Neil Glentworth, Closeburn
- South Eastern 2 District – Bradley Grant, Mount Alford
- South Western 1 District – Alan Payne, Freestone and District
- South Western 2 District – Maurice (Pat) Forrest, Felton Broxburn



A CLEAR VISION

QFD's new Chief Operating Officer Dr Rebecca Denning brings a wealth of experience from corrections and public sector integrity to her role.

Rebecca's focus so far has been on realigning the organisational structure of Strategy and Corporate Services (SCS), establishing a renewed focus on governance, risk and reporting frameworks, and improving the ways services are enabled across QFD.

"My personal and professional values align with QFD's vision of working together to create safer communities," Rebecca said. "SCS plays an essential role by supporting QFR, RFSQ and State Operations Services to deliver outstanding operational outcomes for Queensland."

"We make the community safer when we bring people together and play our part. Ensuring our people are safe, supported and confident in their role is essential. I look forward to maturing our ways of working to make QFD more effective and sustainable."

Rebecca was previously a Deputy Commissioner at Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), where she led transformational change to improve service delivery and outcomes.

"During my time at QCS, the organisation was focused on the final stages of building Queensland's newest prison, the Lockyer Valley Correctional Centre," she said.

"It was a challenging time because we were also managing the highest number of prisoners. We reviewed our ways of working to ensure the safety of the workforce, prisoners, offenders being managed in the community, and the public.

"This involved significant collaboration across the criminal justice system to ensure all elements of the system worked optimally.

"My experience in QCS informs how I approach my work in QFD – how our services work together, how we interact with our partners and stakeholders, and how this affects community safety outcomes.

"When we identify better ways to work together, those benefits translate into



real outcomes for communities across Queensland. I feel privileged to play a part in that."

Rebecca has held senior executive positions at the Crime and Corruption Commission and Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence in Policy and Security.

"My doctorate was in the area of youth crime and examined the effectiveness of interventions delivered by the state aimed at reducing reoffending in very high-risk young people," she said.

"My research has centered on terrorism and international security, organised crime, corruption, policing and law reform.

"The ARC Centre of Excellence, established in 2007 with start-up funding of \$26 million, is the first of its kind in Australia. The centre conducts research to help policymakers, police and security leaders better understand how to reduce threats

to Australia and our security and crime vulnerabilities.

"This research strengthens communities and enhances Australia's security role in the Asia-Pacific region and globally."

Rebecca said leadership took on different meanings in different circumstances.

"It's about aligning strategy, performance, ensuring resources are properly targeted, and fostering a clear vision," she said.

"In the public sector, leadership also involves understanding the external operating environment and working within and across boundaries to find innovative ways to better support the community.

"It's important to lead with integrity and transparency, demonstrate courage and always be willing to learn. For me, it's vital to recognise people's and teams' strengths and support people in their professional development throughout their careers."

LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY

QFD's Community Insights Survey measures how prepared Queenslanders are for emergencies and their perceptions of our department.

First launched about 18 years ago as the 'Households survey', the Community Insights Survey helps guide QFD's communication and response strategies.

There was no survey in 2024 due to the transition from QFES to QFD, but the survey was reinstated in 2025 with 2100 participants.

Principal Program Officer (Research and Innovation) Michael Carroll said the survey covered topics such as perceptions of risk and preparedness, smoke alarms and perceptions of QFD.

"The survey provides data for QFD's performance management in line with the Strategic Plan and the Report on Government Services," Michael said.

"Insights from the survey help inform community education and engagement strategies and investment, guide strategic planning, and provide supporting evidence to business cases."

Key findings

For Queenslanders, the top risk concerns are storms (82 per cent rate these as likely) and heatwaves (71 per cent), followed by cyclones, storm surges and floods.

Queenslanders feel most prepared for storms, heatwaves and cyclones and least prepared for tsunamis and acts of terrorism. People in regional Queensland tend to perceive more risk (and be more prepared) than those in metropolitan areas.

On average, Queenslanders feel quite prepared, but actual level of preparedness, measured by how many activities they've completed within their household, is significantly lower.

Only 36 per cent of Queenslanders claimed to have experienced a local emergency or disaster in the last 12 months, despite flooding events and Tropical Cyclone Alfred.

More than half (56 per cent) are concerned about the impacts of climate change, and 81 per cent are aware of the fire risk posed by lithium-ion batteries.

Most Queenslanders (72 per cent) are aware of smoke alarms legislation, and 52 per cent already have their smoke alarms tested or maintained. Of those who don't have interconnected smoke alarms, two thirds (67 per cent) are likely to install them in the next 12 months.

Among QFD's services, Queenslanders saw fire and hazard response as the most important, followed by road crash rescue, and search and rescue.

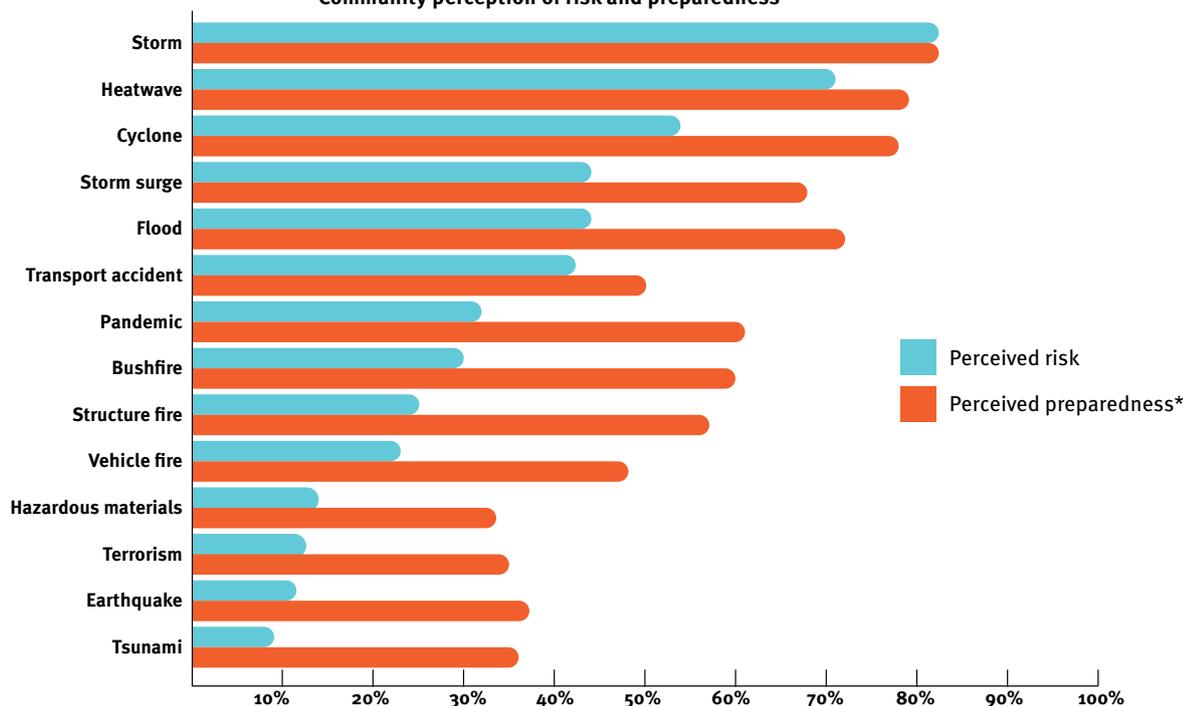
In regional areas in particular, people place high importance on QFD's community programs such as education in schools and recruitment events. People who'd received services from QFD were very satisfied with them.

One in three (35 per cent) Queenslanders received warnings and alerts from QFD in the last year and 72 per cent took the suggested action.

The survey also showed that 89 per cent of Queenslanders believe they are responsible for disaster preparation, presenting an opportunity for QFD to support self-reliance.

You can view current and previous Community Insights Surveys on the Gateway and QFD website.

Community perception of risk and preparedness



*of those who responded 'slightly likely or very likely' for perceived risk.

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20 YEARS OF LIVE FIRE

Firefighters gathered at the Live Fire Campus (LFC) to farewell Senior Instructor Steve 'Lumpy' Lohmann on his final day of instructing after 20 years.

The team gave Steve a warm send-off when he moved on from LFC to take up an Acting Inspector role.

Inspector Richard Gorey said, "Steve has been a great advocate for LFC and his presence will be missed.

"The team gave him a hearty send-off and suffice to say there were a few watery eyes in the crowd.

"In his instructional career, Steve has mentored more than 800 recruits and helped develop most of our current instructor group. We wish Steve well in his next chapter in the fire service."

A Bundjalung man originally hailing from the Gold Coast, Steve joined QFD in 1988, spurred on by a love for teamwork and helping the community.

"I played football and was in the surf club and I saw the fire service as a career where I could enjoy working in a team," Steve said.

He started instructing at LFC in 2005, intrigued by the potential to help improve the way firefighters worked.

"In those days, houses were mostly big old Queenslanders and once they caught fire there was no internal attack pipeline, but thanks to changes in building and construction, plus smoke detectors, we were getting to fires earlier.

"Our old way of firefighting wasn't working for us, but the Swedish fire service had the answer. A team from QFD went to Sweden to learn about their method of compartment fire training and we started it at QFD.

"We went from the old adage of 'surround and drown' to studying what fire actually does and updating our methodology of firefighting. It was a major change in direction.

"In the past we used a big hose we couldn't turn on and off – we just flooded a place – and now we apply enough water to extinguish the fire and leave something for fire investigators to determine what started the fire. We're always evolving."

Since 2005, there have been many changes at LFC.

"Live fire is all about moving forward," Steve said. "I believe tradition is important for an organisation but it can also stifle your progress – it's a double-edged sword.

"When I started at live fire, it was like an apprenticeship. We've now formalised the process, creating a clear career path for anyone who wants to become an instructor.

"In the old days we just did a bit of this and a bit of that. Now we have a much clearer structure that aligns with the national training framework.

"After 20 years of development, our live fire campus is leading within Australasia. Other fire services come to us all the time to learn about what we do.

"One of our challenges now is a generation coming through who haven't done a lot of manual work. Some recruits have never seen a socket set or shifting spanner, so we introduced a small tools course.

"My send-off was a tearjerker. People came up to me and said, 'You inspired me with your training and I wouldn't be where I was today without you.' They've named a training cell after me – Lumpy's Corner.

"Plenty of people have helped me on my way and I try to give back. Live fire was my big passion. I miss getting my hands on the tools."

Steve is now the Acting Command Inspector at Goondwindi, trading the beach for the bush.

"It has its challenges, managing a command with six stations. The farthest is three-and-a-half hours away.

"The auxiliary firefighters have been a little starved for training, which I'm planning to change. Some techniques they use are 10 or 15 years old. That's one of my goals, to bring everything forward."



+ TOOWOOMBA REGIONAL COUNCIL VISITS CHARLTON HQ

Representatives from Toowoomba Regional Council visited Charlton HQ this week for an insightful briefing delivered by QFD.

The session explored public warning processes and gave an intelligence overview highlighting how regional responses are coordinated during critical events.

The visit offered a behind-the-scenes look at emergency management operations, showcasing the preparedness measures in place to support the Toowoomba Region.



+ FAREWELL TO A SPECIAL FIRE TRUCK

All good things must come to an end, and recently Gympie South Rural Fire Brigade retired its beloved 52 appliance due to age. But this was no ordinary fire truck – it was the Doug Ellis Truck, a vehicle that holds a special place in the hearts of the brigade and the community.

Named in honour of Kevin Douglas Ellis (Doug), a dedicated volunteer and respected leader, the truck has been a symbol of his legacy for 17 years.

Doug joined the McIntosh Creek Rural Fire Brigade in 1987, serving in various leadership roles and continuing his service when the brigade merged to form Gympie South Rural Fire Brigade. Known for his quiet strength, humour and unwavering commitment, Doug was a pillar of support during emergencies and a source of inspiration for all who served alongside him.

In 2008, as Doug faced a terminal illness, the brigade received a new medium attack appliance and sought approval to name it in his honour. A quiet ceremony was held at the fire shed, where Doug proudly witnessed the dedication of the truck that would carry his name. Sadly, Doug passed away later that year, but his legacy lived on through the truck's service.

Over the years, the Doug Ellis Truck has been a reliable and hardworking member of the brigade, attending countless callouts, serving as Santa's sleigh, and embodying the spirit of its namesake. Now, as the time has come to retire this mighty appliance, its story, photos and plaque will be displayed at the fire shed to ensure its legacy lives on.

We thank the Doug Ellis Truck for its years of service and wish it safe travels on its next journey. Vale, Doug Ellis – you will always be remembered.



+ WALLAVILLE RURAL FIRE BRIGADE CELEBRATES 65TH ANNIVERSARY

Firefighters, family, friends and local dignitaries came together at the Wallaville station to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the brigade.

The brigade were handed over the keys to their new medium attack firefighting appliance. They cooked up a barbecue lunch for all to enjoy and the Bundaberg Burnett Area Office brought a cake.

+ ARTEP GRADUATION IN ROMA

On 14 December, we proudly recognised our latest ARTEP graduates in Roma after five weekends of dedicated training.

We extend our thanks to trainers Lieutenant David Jones, Captain John Rosenthal and Lieutenant Phill Starling for their guidance throughout the program.

Congratulations to all graduates and welcome to the QFD family.





+ SHARING FIRE SAFETY TIPS OVER COFFEE

Crews from Cleveland Fire and Rescue Station connected with the community at a Wellington Point café as part of the 'Chat to a Firefighter' initiative.

With their banner on display, firefighters answered questions about home fire safety, smoke alarms and recruitment while locals enjoyed their morning coffee.

These casual meet-and-greet sessions provide a welcoming space for the community to approach their local station, gain valuable fire safety advice and learn more about the vital work of QFD.



+ FINAL STRETCH FOR RECRUIT COURSE 178

In their last week of training before taking their place on the frontlines of firefighting, Recruit Course 178 honed their skills in Road Crash Rescue (RCR).

The training program equipped the future firefighters with the knowledge, skills and resilience needed to tackle the challenges of the job.

From mastering fire suppression techniques to learning life-saving rescue operations, the recruits have demonstrated exceptional commitment and teamwork throughout their journey.

Their training in RCR is a critical component of their preparation, as they will play a vital role in responding to road incidents and providing emergency assistance in times of need.

We extend our congratulations and gratitude to the recruit course for their dedication and hard work.

+ DOG SAVES FAMILY IN WYNNUM HOUSE FIRE

A family in Brisbane's bayside owes their lives to their pet dog, who alerted them to a major house fire in the early hours of Monday morning.

The blaze broke out just after 2am at a two-storey timber home on Pine Street, Wynnum, which was undergoing renovations and not fitted with smoke alarms.

Thick black smoke had already filled the home when the dog's warning gave the family just enough time to escape safely.

Station Officer Keith Hansen, one of the first responders on the scene, confirmed the house was completely destroyed, the neighbouring property was partially damaged and two others sustained minor damage. Thankfully, no injuries were reported.

This incident highlights the importance of having working smoke alarms installed in every home. Smoke alarms provide early warning in the event of a fire, giving families precious time to evacuate safely.

QFD commends the quick actions of the family's furry friend and reminds the community to ensure their homes are equipped with smoke alarms to prevent tragedies like this.



+ ARTEP GRADUATION IN CHARLTON

We're pleased to celebrate the successful completion of the ARTEP program at Toowoomba Charlton.

Thank you to ARTEP instructors Lieutenant David Kucks and Auxiliary Firefighter Noel Hancock for their dedication and support throughout the program.

Congratulations to the graduates (pictured below, left to right) Daniel Folkers, Donna McLean and Damon Postema.





1. A QFR crew from Annerley stopped by a local park to engage with the community and some potential future firefighters.
2. New QFR auxiliary firefighters brushed up on their knowledge during a skills weekend at Caloundra.
3. A new mural in Speewah, near Mareeba, stands as a public tribute to the tireless work of firefighters.
4. In 2025, Energy Queensland handed over equipment worth \$75,000 including wildfire simulation tables to help RFSQ brigades educate their communities and respond to incidents.
5. QFR firefighters visited kids at Townsville University Hospital to spread Christmas cheer.
6. Crews across QFR and RFSQ connected with their communities over the holidays.
7. QFR's cricket team went up against Fire and Rescue NSW at Wolston Park Centenary Cricket Club.
8. The crew at Cairns South got a special surprise when young Kaiden and his mum Praveena donated some coffee vouchers. Praveena encourages her kids to pick a local charity, club or public service to deliver a gift to each year.





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9. Auxiliary QFR personnel from the Scenic Rim, Ipswich East and Ipswich West commands participated in vertical rescue training at Mount French.

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