

# RESPONSE

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

APRIL 2026



## EYE OF THE STORM

STANDING WITH THE COMMUNITY

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QFR swiftwater rescue firefighters attended several incidents during the Bundaberg floods. Photo by Mark Crowe.

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# SPOTLIGHT

SUPPORTING OUR OWN PAGE 23



# FOREWORDS



**STEVE SMITH AFSM**  
COMMISSIONER  
QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

Severe weather season brought storms and flooding to many parts of Queensland but QFD stepped up, deploying more than 440 people and managing 800 weather-related calls.

In March, the Bundaberg floods revealed the community's resilience and the dedication of our staff and volunteers.

The floods were followed by Tropical Cyclone Narelle in the Far North and Cape York. Communities such as Hopevale, Lockhart River, Port Stewart and Coen suffered infrastructure damage, trees down and power outages.

Our response to the severe weather is a testament to the hard work and compassion of our personnel, whether on the ground or behind the scenes. Thank you to everyone who rose to the challenge and helped get the job done.

Even during busy times, it's important to take the time to acknowledge the fantastic work being done across the department.

As part of International Women's Day, we celebrated seven women who have made meaningful contributions to QFD and the community.

For the Closing the Gap Awards, we acknowledged five individuals and two teams who have helped build relationships with First Nations communities and share their knowledge of Country.

During Peer Support Week, we took the chance to recognise the contribution of our Peer Support Officers (PSO), including our PSO of the Year Ashley Bawden.

The Sexual Harassment Prevention Plan and updated Policy was released last month. This is an important part of our holistic approach to safety first across the department.

The plan and policy are part of our Psychosocial Safety Framework to help ensure the mental and emotional wellbeing of all staff and volunteers.

QFD has zero tolerance for sexual harassment and everyone has the right to work in a safe and respectful environment. All staff and volunteers play a role in preventing harassment by fostering a culture of respect and reporting inappropriate behaviour.

I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the plan and undertake the training so we can all maintain a safe, healthy and supportive working environment.



**KEVIN WALSH AFSM**  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
QUEENSLAND FIRE AND RESCUE

Thank you to the personnel who have kept Queenslanders safe this severe weather season, from the floods in Bundaberg to Tropical Cyclone Narelle up north.

During the Bundaberg floods, QFD completed 984 damage assessments and 65 washouts while helicopters and Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) provided support. Fire Communications Officers embedded in the Incident Control Centre helped manage crew movements, Volunteer Community Educators gave residents vital information and Peer Support Officers supported those on the frontlines.

To assist with recovery, QFR deployed swiftwater rescue firefighters and RPAS teams before Narelle made landfall.

Through it all, our crews have shown the utmost professionalism and courage, pre-deploying to affected regions and entering floodwaters to save people from terrifying situations.

So far, QFR swiftwater rescue firefighters have rescued 191 people, a phenomenal effort. You can read more about recent swiftwater rescues on page 6.

I'd also like to thank the five QFR and RFSQ personnel who deployed to South Australia to fight a large bushfire at Deep Creek National Park.

The QFD team, who were among 170 interstate personnel, spent a week in the Incident Management Team at Mount Barker, as well as the State Control Centre in Adelaide.

They assisted the SA Country Fire Service (CFS) with planning, logistics and operations for what became the largest backburn in the state's history.

QFR recently hosted Seismic Matters, a national seminar on the potential risks of earthquake in Australia and the Asia-Pacific Region.

Congratulations to the AUS-01 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) for developing this event, which brought together leading earthquake scientists and engineers.

More than 70 people from state and federal agencies engaged face-to-face and built relationships to support this unique capability.

Speakers discussed the earthquake risk in Australia, mapping earthquake-vulnerable buildings with AI, and covered the risks of New Zealand's Alpine Fault.

This seminar highlighted the importance of collaboration and innovation in preparing for seismic events, reinforcing our commitment to safeguarding communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific.



QFD crews supported recovery efforts after Tropical Cyclone Narelle.

# EYE OF THE STORM

In March, devastating floods struck Bundaberg, closely followed by Tropical Cyclone Narelle in the Far North and Cape York. Through it all, QFD and the community stood ready.

In response to storms and floods across many parts of Queensland, QFD has so far deployed more than 440 people and managed 800 weather-related calls.

During the response to Tropical Cyclone Narelle, Cairns Divisional Commander Adam Gwin was the initial Incident Controller in the Cairns Incident Control Centre (ICC), followed by Inspector Darryl Chaplain.

"Based on predictions and tracking of the cyclone, QFD quickly got swiftwater rescue firefighters and damage assessment personnel into place from Cairns to Cooktown and Coen, right into the projected path of the event," Darryl said.

"A lot of places already had roads cut so we had to fly a team of two damage assessment personnel and two State Emergency Service (SES) members into Coen."

The swift water rescue teams undertook familiarization surveys on local waterways to identify potential flash-flooding hazards and assess risk in key areas before waters rose.

"Narelle was Category 5 on the final tracking in, but it eased back into a Category 4 as it crossed the coast.

"We fully engaged in the leadup to the cyclone with Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMG) across the division. Our liaison officers embedded in each LDMG updated the community on our preparations and answered any queries for assistance.

"Our crews liaised with other agencies like Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) to establish a comms plan within communities so they could communicate once they became isolated."

Narelle made landfall just north of Cooktown and affected communities including Hopevale, Lockhart River, Port Stewart and Coen.

"QPS and the local government evacuated 11 people from Port Stewart the night before because it was so exposed to the cyclone," Darryl said.

"There was damage to infrastructure, trees down and power out, but somehow, Coen suffered remarkably little damage compared to what we were expecting.

"We got out into the communities as soon as it was safe to do so. There were a few minor swiftwater rescue incidents but luckily no one was injured or killed.

We assessed the damage and reported it back so repairs and recovery could begin as soon as possible.

"It was a highly stressful time for the affected communities, as well as the cattle properties and stations in that area."

Narelle then reached the west coast of the cape as a Category 2, causing wind and tree damage and power outages at Weipa and Aurukun, down to Kowanyama.

"The LDMGs and shires were very appreciative of our support and we received a good response from the community," Darryl said.

"Our crews were so enthusiastic to be out in the community ready to help. There's nothing worse as a first responder than being on the outside and not being able to help.

"It was an absolute credit to all the staff and volunteers who put their time in across QFD.

"This is the third time we've stood up since the December monsoons, so it's been a long season, preceded by bushfires. It's been a huge team effort across the state."

**SUPPORTING BUNDABERG'S FLOOD RECOVERY**

When severe weather struck Bundaberg, QFD mobilised a response team of staff and volunteers, completing 984 damage assessments and 65 washouts.

Helicopters and drones conducted aerial surveys of isolated properties along the Burnett River, from Paradise Dam to the river mouth, ensuring no affected areas were overlooked.

Volunteer Community Educators kept the community informed, Peer Support Officers provided mental health support, and QFD's Flexible Habitat gave responders a place to stay while leaving local accommodation available for residents in need.

Fire Communications Officers were embedded within the ICC to help maintain oversight of other critical incidents across the region.

Superintendent Neil Parker was the Incident Controller during the event.

"The Bundaberg flood response was a great team effort by QFD staff and volunteers from throughout the whole state," Neil said.

"A team of 16 people unknown to each other were united in the ICC over six days to do QFD proud. At the cyclone's height, 101 QFD personnel were working tirelessly to support positive community outcomes.



*QFR swiftwater rescue firefighters attended several incidents in Bundaberg.*

"This was achieved by partnerships, adaptability and commitment under challenging conditions. The strong working relationship between Bundaberg Regional Council and QFD and the SES was the cornerstone of effective disaster response, community safety and the transition to recovery."



**FLOOD STANDBY TURNS INTO TEACHABLE MOMENT**

While deployed to Quilpie to help respond to potential flooding, QFR swiftwater rescue firefighters took the chance to engage with local school children on water safety.

Charleville Area Commander Caine Warburton said the crews connected with the local community while monitoring conditions and preparing to act if needed.

"As part of their outreach efforts, the crews visited Quilpie's local school to teach students about water safety," Caine said. "Their interactive sessions raised awareness of the dangers of floodwaters, giving students essential skills to stay safe during emergencies.

"The students eagerly took part, asking thoughtful questions and learning practical tips to help them respond in flood situations."

The initiative reflects QFD's broader commitment to not only respond to emergencies but work proactively with communities to build resilience and preparedness.

"Flooding is a recurring challenge across Queensland and these educational efforts are critical to protecting lives," said Caine.

"The crews' engagement with the Quilpie community highlights the importance of preparedness and the invaluable role QFD plays in safeguarding Queenslanders."

Regional Community Engagement Coordinator Julianne Webster-Scott was deployed to the Bundaberg ICC as the Public Information Officer.

"QFD worked tirelessly alongside local disaster management partners to support the community," Julianne said.

"Our teams conducted damage assessments and assisted residents with washing out mud and debris. This collaborative approach was vital to helping the community recover and return to normal as quickly as possible.

"Behind the scenes, the QFD Incident Management Team worked around the clock to coordinate resources and prioritise response efforts."

QFD crews worked with local partners to clean the Hinkler Central Shopping Centre car park, helping the centre reopen and restore essential services to the community.

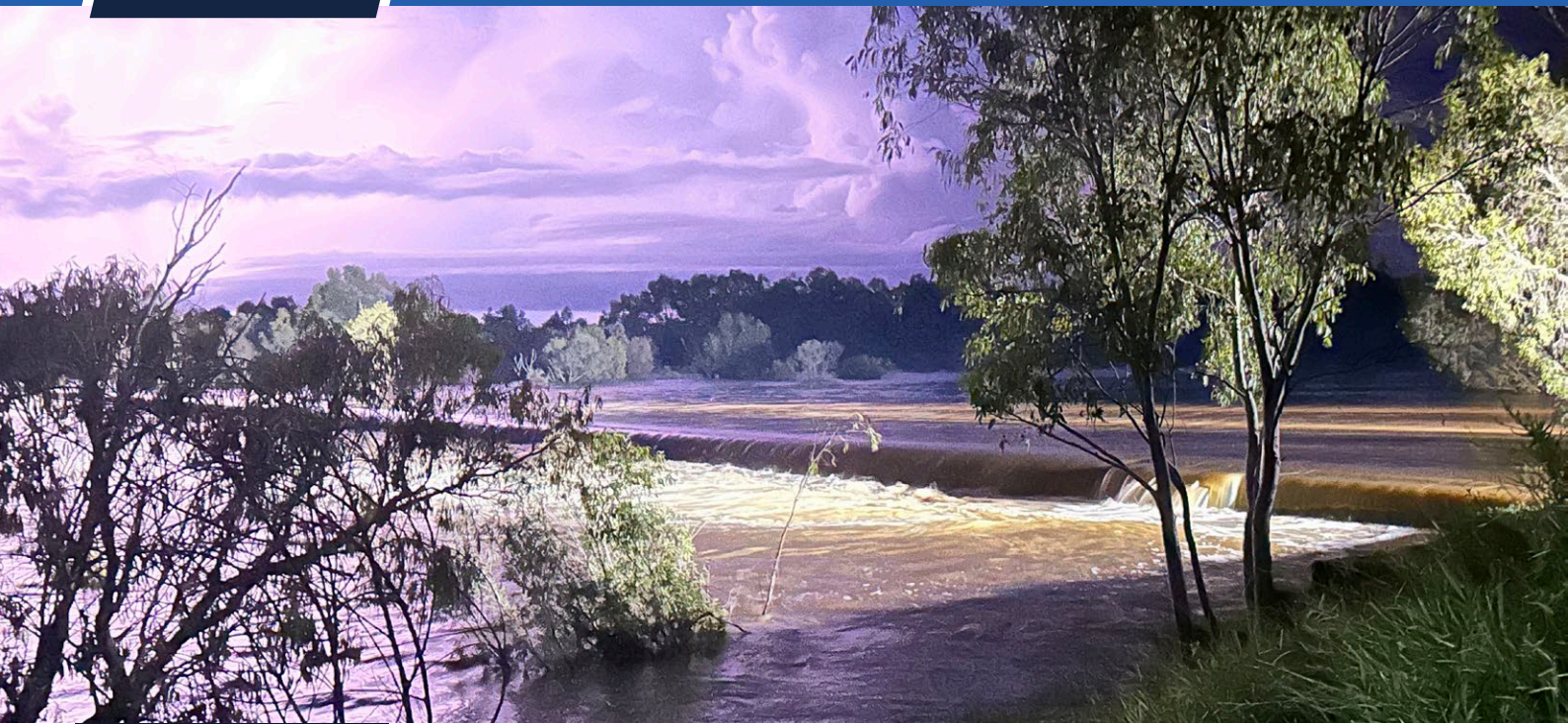
"In a heartwarming moment, Kawana Fire Communications Officers had the rare chance to visit the field and meet the responders they usually communicate with over the radio," Julianne said.

"This face-to-face interaction was a meaningful experience for all involved, further strengthening the bonds within the QFD team."

Another highlight was the successful washout of the Lake Ellen Heritage Hub Playground, an all-abilities play area.

"Restoring this beloved community space was a step toward bringing joy back to local families," Julianne said.

"The resilience and unity displayed by residents and responders alike was truly inspiring, and QFD was proud to stand alongside them in this recovery journey."



*A flooded causeway at Doomadgee.*

# RESCUES ON FLOODED ROADS

After a wet start to the year, catchments in many parts of Queensland were saturated, leading to several dramatic rescues on our roads.

When creeks and rivers rose rapidly, QFR swiftwater rescue firefighters sprang into action to save drivers from floodwaters.

At Doomadgee in the remote north-west, firefighters rescued a man from fast-flowing waters almost a kilometre wide.

He'd tried to drive across a flooded causeway but only made it 300 metres before his car was washed downstream and he was stranded on the roof.

Senior Firefighter Kyle McCormack from Mount Isa said it was his crew's fifth swiftwater rescue job in less than two weeks.

"We rescued two people from on top of a vehicle in Cloncurry, another two people stranded across a flooded river, and a group stuck in the middle of Mount Isa," Kyle said.

The local LifeFlight crew flew Kyle and fellow firefighter Nils Lister to Doomadgee, a town of about 1400

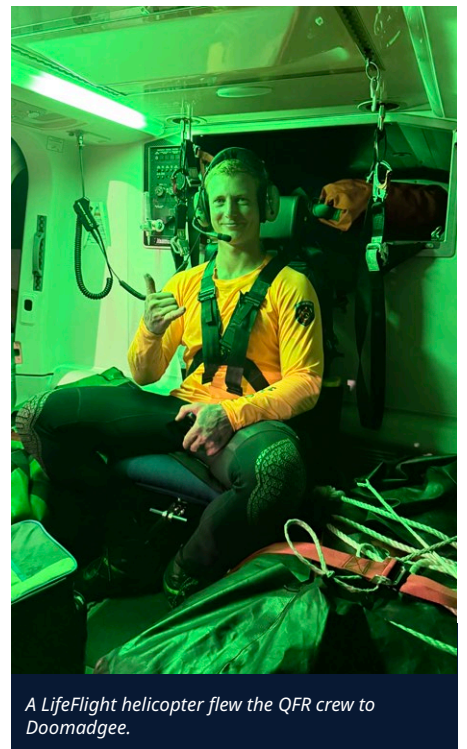
people in an Aboriginal Shire near the Northern Territory border.

"We did a flyover in the helicopter with the searchlight and couldn't see anything," Kyle said. "Once we landed we had a brief with RFSQ, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) and State Emergency Service.

"We still didn't have eyes on the casualty. We could only see his vehicle from the bank if we zoomed in with a phone. Lighting was a huge issue.

"About 300 people from town had turned up because one of their people was in trouble. It was heartwarming to see them. We asked them to turn their headlights on and it lit up the whole river. They were so happy to be helping."

Kyle and Nils got into their raft to reach the casualty, mindful the river was crocodile territory.



*A LifeFlight helicopter flew the QFR crew to Doomadgee.*



Swiftwater rescue firefighters performed a rescue at Doomadgee.

"After we'd rowed 100 metres, a crocodile popped up right where we'd put the boat in," Kyle said.

"Nils and I used the trees along the river as safe haven. We paddled for 50 to 100 metres before anchoring against a tree to rest. We continued this leap-frogging technique until we got so fatigued we had to take a break.

"About three-quarters of the way across, we got eyes on the casualty, who'd swum to a pocket of rock.

"At that point, we knew he was on dry land so we could take our time. It was too far for us to throw-bag across to him so we had to free-row the last 100 metres. When we reached the rock, there was a massive cheer from the crowd."

The casualty was safe and well, but they couldn't row him back and had to look for a place for the helicopter to land.

"After we found a spot, the helicopter did a soft touchdown – they put their wheels on the surface but with thrust still going so they didn't rest their weight on it," Kyle said.

The helicopter extracted the casualty to Doomadgee airport where QAS gave him a full assessment.

"All the locals had gone through a big emotional rollercoaster so they started celebrating as soon as we rescued him," Kyle said.

"It was fantastic working with the other agencies. The LifeFlight crew were very professional. I hadn't worked out of an aircraft before but their brief was thorough and I never felt unsafe.

"The Doomadgee QPS were amazing. They're in a remote area and they know what it takes to get the job done.

"The camaraderie between Nils and I was great, knowing that no matter what we'd keep each other safe. That kind of trust with someone else, I've never experienced that before in my life. The teamwork and going back to basics paid off 100%."

### SWEPT AWAY

When a woman's car was swept away by floodwaters in Hervey Bay, two bystanders dove in to rescue her and ended up getting washed away themselves.

Station Officer Bruce Williamson said the woman was stranded on one of the main roads into town at about 11pm with heavy rain still falling.

"She managed to climb out a window before the car sank," Bruce said. "Two people in a car behind decided to jump in to rescue her and all three ended up in a tree about 75 metres downstream.

"My crew had been out on day shift. We were meant to finish at 6pm but we'd responded to another incident out at Biggenden and then this job came in.

"A QPS officer managed to get eyes on the casualties and helped us locate them."

Two of the firefighters reached the casualties while four others launched a raft and negotiated over to them.

"It was hard to negotiate them out of the tree. Every branch and leaf above water had spiders on it. The casualties were absolutely covered in spiders.

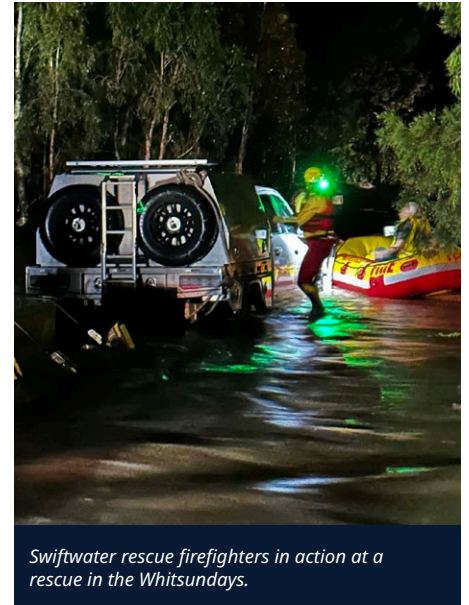
"We managed to load the woman and relocate her to waist-deep water out of the flow. Then we set up a ferry system to retrieve the others.

"QAS checked everyone out. The casualties had been in the water for about an hour and were lightly hypothermic.

"We were tired but it was a good outcome and everyone worked well together. We never even saw the car, which goes to show, if it's flooded forget it."

### RESCUE IN THE WHITSUNDAYS

When four people were caught in floodwaters near Collinsville in the Whitsundays, one ended up trapped in the car for several hours before firefighters reached them.



Swiftwater rescue firefighters in action at a rescue in the Whitsundays.

Senior Firefighter Simon Corby responded along with three other technicians from Airlie Beach. They were joined by a crew of four firefighters from Bowen in an appliance with 4x4 capability.

"The incident was about two-and-a-half hours' drive from Airlie Beach," Simon said. "There were originally four people in the vehicle but three self-rescued with the help of a private helicopter.

"We negotiated three crossings enroute to the incident. These waters and the incident scene are inhabited by crocodiles so dynamic risk assessment was essential."

When they arrived on scene they discovered a man in his 70s trapped in a ute on a sandbar.

"While he was in a relatively safe position, he was unable to self-rescue due to his age and fast-moving water all around him," Simon said.

"We formulated a rescue plan that involved using the Inflatable Work Platform (IWP) to get two rescue technicians out to the casualty and retrieve him. As a safety precaution, the remaining technicians and firefighters controlled a line secured to the IWP.

"Communication was a challenge because we had very little radio and phone reception."

The firefighters managed to reach the casualty and bring him back to dry land, where all four casualties were assessed by QAS and QPS during a hot debrief.

"Due to the prolonged travel time and dynamic conditions, it was a relief that everyone was safe and accounted for."



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# STRONG VOICES DRIVING A STRONGER SERVICE

QFD marked International Women's Day with an event at Kedron, bringing personnel together to recognise the meaningful impact women are making across the department and the communities they serve.

International Women's Day, celebrated globally on 8 March, is an opportunity to recognise the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women while continuing the important conversation around gender equality.

This year's theme, 'Balance the Scales', highlights the urgent need to ensure fair, inclusive and accessible systems that support women and girls. Equality remains the goal, but equity is the pathway to achieving it.

Within QFD, balancing the scales means acknowledging the diverse perspectives and experiences women bring to the service — whether on the frontline responding to incidents, mentoring colleagues, supporting operations or shaping the department's future.

Seven women were recognised for their outstanding contributions, demonstrating leadership, commitment and a passion for strengthening the service.



**JULIE SMITH**  
STATION OFFICER  
**CHAMPION OF  
CHANGE**

Julie Smith was recognised for her ongoing commitment to strengthening

inclusion and representation within QFD. Her work has focused on building a foundation that promotes cultural capability and supports meaningful change.

"I am incredibly grateful to receive this award," she said. "It reflects not only my own efforts, but the dedication and support from a network of like-minded individuals committed to fostering a culture of inclusion."

"While I appreciate this recognition of our progress, I acknowledge this is only the beginning of our journey towards meaningful change."

Julie's pathway into the fire service was inspired by her trade background and a desire for a career that combined teamwork, challenge and community impact.

"I wanted an active and challenging career where I could make a positive contribution to public safety."

Julie believes recognising women within QFD plays a vital role in challenging stereotypes and inspiring others.

"Recognition ensures visibility and encourages inclusivity, showing that capability and dedication transcend gender," she said.

**ELLEN (RUTH) ROSS**  
RURAL FIREFIGHTER  
**OUTSTANDING FEMALE LEADER -  
VOLUNTEER**

Ruth Ross from Wonga Beach Rural Fire Brigade was recognised for her dedication to her brigade and the strong connection she has built with fellow firefighters and the community.

Originally a farmer, Ruth said her decision to join RFSQ came after witnessing the devastating impact bushfires can have on rural communities.

"I'd seen some terrible bushfires, and the brigade was short-handed at the time," she said. "I've always felt connected to the land, and joining RFSQ just felt like a calling."

Receiving the award was a deeply meaningful moment for Ruth.

"It means so much to me. I feel very humbled and proud," she said.

One of Ruth's proudest moments centres around the legacy of a fellow firefighter who had a lasting influence on her early years in the brigade. As a tribute, the brigade named one of their trucks in his honour.

"I get a warm feeling every time I walk past the truck in the shed and see his name on it," she said.

Ruth said recognising women in the service was important in highlighting the vital role they play.

"It's a great place to be as a woman in RFSQ — you're just one of the team."

**NAOMI SCOTT**  
ACTING EXECUTIVE MANAGER,  
REGIONAL OPERATIONS  
**OUTSTANDING FEMALE LEADER - RFSQ**

Naomi Scott was recognised for her leadership and dedication to strengthening capability across RFSQ.

Naomi's journey with the service has always been shaped by her deep respect for the volunteers who dedicate their time to protecting their communities.

"That commitment motivates me to keep contributing and help strengthen the capability that supports them in the work they do," she said.

While Naomi has experienced many highlights throughout her career, she said the moments she values most are seeing others succeed.

"Knowing I've played even a small role in strengthening our service and helping ensure our volunteers return home safely to their families is something I will always be proud of," she said.

For women considering a career in emergency services, Naomi encourages them to have confidence in their abilities and embrace new opportunities.

"My advice is to back yourself and believe in what you're capable of," she said.

"Take opportunities when they come, keep learning and surround yourself with people who support you. Sometimes stepping outside your comfort zone is where you discover what you're truly capable of achieving."



**AMIE TAYLOR**  
STATION OFFICER  
**OUTSTANDING FEMALE LEADER - QFR**

Throughout her career with QFR, Amie has worked across

a range of roles including operational firefighting, fire behaviour analysis and her current position within Predictive Services.

A significant milestone in Amie's career was representing QFD at the Australian Women-in-Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) in Far North Queensland.

During the program she led a large-scale cultural burn, combining operational expertise with a deep respect for cultural knowledge and connection to Country.

The relationships and insights gained through the exchange have continued to benefit QFD, strengthening collaboration and supporting new approaches within State Operations.

Amie is known for recognising potential in others and encouraging them to take the next step in their development. Her mentorship often extends beyond technical skills, helping colleagues build confidence and navigate their professional journey.

Her dedication to supporting others and strengthening team capability was recognised in 2025 when she received the Commissioner's Award for Excellence.

Through her leadership and commitment to inclusion, Amie continues to make a lasting contribution to the growth and capability of the QFD workforce.



**JANE HOUSTON**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
STRATEGY  
**OUTSTANDING FEMALE LEADER - QFD**

Jane Houston was recognised for her commitment to mentoring colleagues and fostering a supportive and collaborative workplace across QFD.

Throughout her career, Jane said the moments she values most are not defined by a single achievement but by the collective efforts of teams working together.

"It's the many small moments when people come together, lean in to support each other and focus on getting the job done," she said.

"Watching people work side by side, regardless of rank or title, to deliver outcomes is something I'm always proud to be part of."

Jane believes recognising women within QFD plays an important role in creating a more balanced and inclusive workforce.

"To balance the scales, we need to take deliberate action," she said. "You can't be what you can't see."

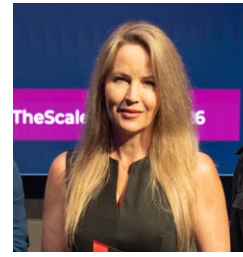
"The department offers some fantastic opportunities to learn, grow and connect with other women."

"Taking part in those spaces helps build confidence, skills and knowledge that can support your career journey."

Through her mentorship and leadership, Jane continues to encourage others to step forward, build their capability and contribute to a stronger and more inclusive organisation.

*"Watching people work side by side, regardless of rank or title, to deliver outcomes is something I'm always proud to be part of."*

*- Jane Houston, Executive Director, Strategy*



**SAMANTHA MCLEOD**  
EXECUTIVE MANAGER,  
GOVERNANCE,  
RISK AND PERFORMANCE  
**MENTOR OF THE YEAR - QFD**

Sam McLeod was recognised for her outstanding mentorship and helping strengthen governance and decision-making across QFD. She supports teams to better understand how risk, assurance and sound governance practices contribute to effective decision-making.

Her work helps ensure the department's planning and operational decisions are informed by a clear understanding of risk, supporting the broader objectives of the QFD Strategic Plan.

Sam actively mentors staff working in risk, assurance and portfolio performance roles, helping them build the skills and confidence needed to contribute to high-level discussions and decision-making processes.

By encouraging open dialogue and thoughtful analysis, Sam creates opportunities for emerging professionals — particularly women in governance and assurance roles — to develop their expertise.

Even in high-pressure environments, she maintains a steady and respectful approach that encourages open communication and trust. This creates a workplace culture where people feel comfortable raising concerns, discussing risks and working collaboratively to find solutions.

Assistant Chief Officer Peta Miller-Rose was highly commended in the awards for her outstanding work as a role model, leader and mentor, and for her contribution to projects such as the Girls Firefighter Experience Camp, the Australian Women in Fire Training Exchange and the Gender Equity Advisory Group.

While International Women's Day provides an opportunity to recognise achievements, the work of building an inclusive and equitable workplace continues every day.

Across QFD, women continue to lead, mentor, innovate and inspire. Their contributions strengthen the service and help shape a future where opportunity is balanced, and every member of the workforce can thrive.

# SCIENCE MEETS PARLIAMENT

In March, our Principal Scientist Dr Lulu He represented QFD at the Science Meets Parliament event in Canberra.

Science Meets Parliament gave scientists the chance to build meaningful connections with Australian parliamentarians. Lulu He was paired with Zoe McKenzie MP for a one-on-one meeting.

"From a child raised in poverty and the only one in her family who went to university, to a scientist engaging with the Parliament of Australia, I know I've come a long way," Lulu said.

"I learnt from this event that science and policy are interconnected. Science helps make informed policies to build a prosperous and resilient nation. A good thing about science is that it is true, whether or not you believe it."

The two-day program included speakers such as the Minister for Industry and Innovation Senator Tim Ayres, CSIRO CEO Doug Hilton AO and Australia's Chief Scientist Professor Tony Haymet.

"We talked about how bushfires will become worse with climate change and population growth.

"David also gave me insightful advice on career and how to support policy development using science. As I am from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, we talked a lot about multiculturalism."

Another highlight for Lulu was meeting with her mentor Sue Barrell AO, a retired Chief Scientist from the Bureau of Meteorology.

"We've been catching up online for a year to talk about applied science and how it can be used to support organisational goals," Lulu said. "Seeing her in person made this trip more meaningful.

"Coming back from Canberra, I've decided to do two things I've been wanting to do for a long time to help



"One of the sessions I liked most was 'A day in the life of a policy advisor' where three advisors shared their work and life over the past 24 hours, how they managed time and met people's expectations," Lulu said.

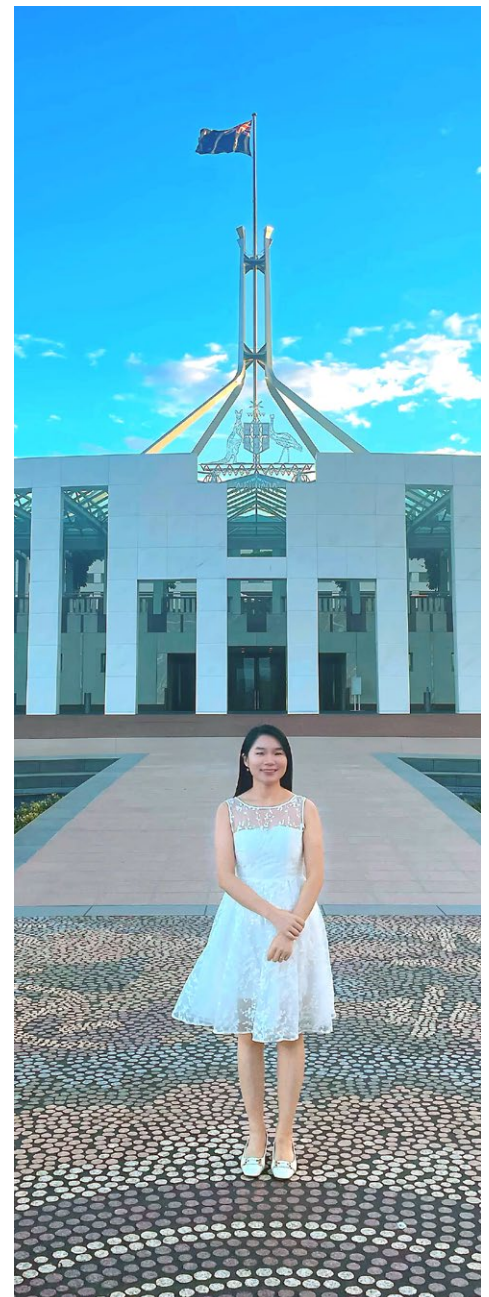
She also caught up with David Smith MP during a gala dinner.

"David Smith and I talked about how fire science can help make informed decisions and policies to build strong and resilient communities," she said.

turn my experience into real impacts for the department.

"The first is to initiate a QFD Fire Science Fortnightly Newsletter. Fire Science should be generalised and readily applicable to support planning and operations. I will aim for simplified and non-overloading communication.

"The other thing is, I've been volunteering at schools to talk about bushfire science with students and they ask many questions, which inspired



me to write a series of bushfire science books for kids."

"At his National Press Club Speech, Senator Tim Ayres said, 'Fragmentation is what holds us back. Resilience cannot be built in isolation. Science can make Australia stronger and more resilient.'

"For QFD, science is not something we can bypass if we want to deliver outstanding services and develop policies that have positive, profound influence on society in the future.

"It was my honour to represent QFD and engage with parliamentarians. I'm proud I've accelerated QFD's scientific profile nationally. When I introduced myself, I was proud to say, 'Hi, I'm Lulu, I work at QFD.'"

# ANSWERING THE CALL

Ryan Stanton has learnt a lot since joining Firecom in Rockhampton.

Early last year, Ryan Stanton became a Fire Communications Officer (FCO).

He is passionate about fire communications and previously worked in a similar role for an allied emergency service.

"When I did my dispatch training for that agency, I listened to QFD's radio and it really resonated with me, how regimented it was," Ryan said. "That drew me into applying as soon as I saw positions advertised for my local Firecom."

There's a lot more to being an FCO than simply answering Triple Zero (000) calls.

"We handle the incident all the way until the very end, which could be as simple as a 'Fire Extinguished, Code 4', or days later after Fire Investigation Officers complete their inquiries," Ryan said.

"Every day that incident is on our board we need to remain up to date with it so if something does happen, we are fully aware of what it is or what it could turn into.

"But when an incident first starts, especially something like a road traffic crash with entrapments or a structure fire, the duties of an FCO really ramp up.

"After we drop the chimes at station or complete our Firecall on radio or send out pages for auxiliary or rural crews, we liaise with agencies such as Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service and Ergon for their attendance.

"Sometimes we support firefighters when they do senior firefighter or station officer assessments. We deploy with them and take word-back over radio while they train."

FCOs also sit in Incident Command Centres as Firecom liaison during incidents, including for tropical cyclones Koji and Alfred.

"We only get to hear what's happening, but it's really rewarding when the word-back from crews confirms the information we obtained from callers helped rescue someone trapped in floodwaters," Ryan said.

"That feeling at the end of the day when the next shift comes in and takes over, when you can stop, take a breath and realise you potentially saved a life is a great feeling. It makes me come back and do the job after the end of each shift."

Everything FCOs record into the Computer-Aided Dispatch system (CAD) generates data that can be used in different ways.

"When we create an incident in CAD, basic information about it is added to the QFD Current Warnings and Incidents page for the public to see," Ryan said.

"The information that we obtain and add into CAD regarding permits also feeds and updates the Permit to Burn map. This information allows the public to see if there are any permitted burns in their area when they see or smell smoke,

which in turn can help reduce 000 calls and unnecessary responding of crews."

"All data that gets added into CAD can also be pulled for internal reports, most of it in real time. We can show if a premise requires a washout, if a damage assessment has been completed, if structures have been lost or damaged, and how many people have been rescued or evacuated."

Ryan said FCOs had to be calm under pressure.

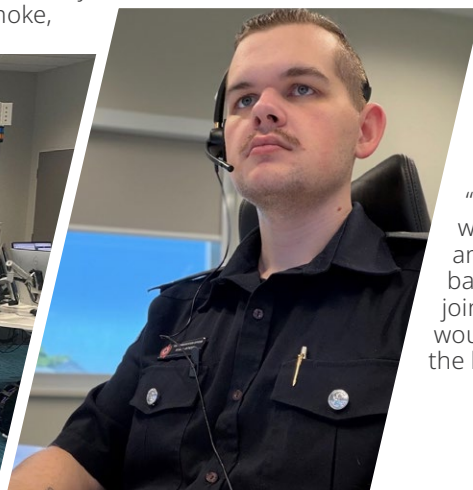
"When we answer a 000 call, the caller might be experiencing one of the worst days of their life and can be extremely heightened," Ryan said. "Sometimes just trying to get them to take a breath so we can get the vital information can be challenging.

"It can hit a little harder when you find out a call you've taken or been a part of has had someone pass away during it. Thankfully FESSN and peer support reaches out to FCOs, which can help during those times.

"I think the biggest thing an FCO needs is resilience. The stuff we hear during an emergency can be traumatic. Even the amount of incidents we deal with might make us stressed. Another quality of a good FCO is humility. Realising we might make mistakes or that another FCO might have a better plan is so important.

"Working as an FCO within QFD has been wonderful. Getting the chance to work with such great people – not just the other FCOs but the urban firefighters and the wonderful RFSQ volunteers – has been an amazing experience.

"If you know anyone who would love to join an amazing team and give back to the community, joining QFD as an FCO would be a great choice and the best agency to join."



# THE GROUND BENEATH OUR FEET

QFD hosted a first-of-its-kind seminar, *Seismic Matters*, on the potential risks of earthquake in Australia and the Asia-Pacific.

The *Seismic Matters* seminar brought together more than 70 leading earthquake scientists and engineers from state and federal agencies. The seminar was held in the auditorium at the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy and was developed by QFD's AUS-01 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART).

Station Officer Paul Dunn, who coordinated the event, said it was an opportunity for agencies to engage face-to-face and build relationships to support this capability.

"The earthquake risk to Australia is unlikely but it's important to be prepared," said Paul.

"We're on the edge of the Ring of Fire, the most earthquake-prone region in the world. This 40,000-kilometre belt around the Pacific Ocean is home to 75% of the world's active volcanoes and 90% of its earthquakes. The biggest risk sits in New Zealand due to its population density and infrastructure."

## Forum participants

- QFR ELT, corporate staff and AUS-01 DART/USAR
- National Emergency Management Agency
- Royal Australian Airforce
- Australian Medical Assistance Team
- Australian Federal Police and Pacific Police Support Group
- QLD Health
- QAS
- QPS Disaster Victim Identification Unit
- DFAT Humanitarian Logistics Capability contractor
- AUS-02 NSW USAR team management

When he opened the forum, Commissioner Steve Smith discussed his technical rescue experience in Christchurch after the 6.3-magnitude earthquake in 2011.

"The Commissioner spoke about the key role AUS-01 DART plays in the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) global network," Paul said.

"He discussed how all the forum attendees help ensure QFD and AUS-01 are prepared and equipped to respond to earthquakes in Australia and around the world."

Three speakers shared their expertise at the forum. The first was Dr Trevor Allen, Earthquake Hazard Lead at Geoscience Australia.

"Dr Allen focused on the earthquake risk within Australia, particularly Queensland," Paul said. "He explained the history of earthquakes, particular areas of concern and potential impacts on buildings and infrastructure, especially unreinforced masonry buildings."

Matt Dyer, QFD Executive Manager, Hazard and Risk Unit spoke about his work mapping Australia's earthquake-vulnerable buildings with AI and remote sensing.

"Matt and his team are using AI to assess earthquake risks to buildings using Google imagery and seismic research to crossmatch the information and provide a heatmap," Paul said. "Previously this could only be done by a person physically assessing every building."

Dr Jan Kupec, a New Zealand Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Geotechnical Specialist, presented on the Alpine Fault and other disasters New Zealand is expecting. Over the last 8000 years, the Alpine Fault has produced 27 earthquakes and there is a 75% chance another will occur in the next 50 years, with an 80% chance it will be magnitude 8+.



AUS-01 played a key role in the response to the Christchurch earthquake in 2011.

"Dr Kupec talked about what this means for future USAR operations and described case studies of geotechnical USAR work in New Zealand," Paul said.

"He said these catastrophic events are not a matter of if but when. Dr Kupec then spoke of case studies for the risks and hazards associated with landslides.

"The presenters were all outstanding. My personal highlight was hearing feedback from attendees and seeing the interaction between all the agencies. There aren't many occasions where all the players in the DART space are in the same room.

"For many it was the first time putting a face to a name after many years of communicating. The networking I saw between different departments and agencies was fantastic."

AUS-01 are currently conducting USAR first responder training in the Pacific Island region, primarily Fiji and Vanuatu.

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# FIGHTING FIRES DOWN SOUTH

Five QFD personnel helped fight a bushfire in South Australia that involved the largest backburn operation in the state's history.

When a fire tore through Deep Creek National Park on the Fleurieu Peninsula, five QFD personnel deployed to help out. The fire burnt about 4500 hectares in 10 days.

On average, 100 trucks and 500 firefighters worked each day. Aircraft supported them with more than 1000 water drops.

Luckily, residents in Deep Creek had thoroughly prepared their properties, which helped firefighters defend their homes.

The QFR and RFSQ staff and volunteers spent a week working in an Incident Management Team (IMT) in Mount Barker, as well as the State Control Centre in Adelaide. They played a vital role in planning, logistics and operations, working alongside the SA Country Fire Service (CFS).

The QFD team were among 170 interstate personnel deployed from Queensland, ACT, Victoria, Western Australia and NSW.

Acting Inspector Dan Skellern said the IMT welcomed them with open arms.

"They appreciated the support and integrated us into their team," Dan said. "You really forgot what badge was on the side of our uniform."

"CFS were an extremely community-minded and professional organisation, seamlessly linking in with other departments and partner agencies. Regardless of which agency people were from, they owned their role in combatting the fire."

"The main challenge was trying to learn their language and figure out their way of doing business. To make purchases on their behalf, we needed to understand their procurement requirements and governance practices."

Acting Chief Superintendent Simon Evans was the National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC) Deployment Manager.



"One of the most interesting parts of my role was that I didn't work for QFD or CFS," said Simon. "I was independent of both and reported to the NRSC."

"The challenge was to remain independent from QFD and follow NRSC protocols, particularly in relation to cost recovery and avoiding any perceived conflict of interest."

"You need a lot of diplomacy and negotiating skills to work between an organisation under the pump and several other jurisdictions. There's a balancing act of trying to keep everyone happy."

"It can be hard when the jurisdiction asks for resources and other states put a lot of time and effort into sending them, only for them to be cancelled at the last minute, usually due to a decrease in fire activity."

Simon said working with CFS was fantastic.

"They are a highly professional outfit and they genuinely appreciated us coming down to support," he said.

"My advice for deployments is to do anything that is asked of you within reason. If operations are winding up and they need some rental cars returned, food picked up or trucks washed, put your hand up and offer to help."

Acting Inspector Tim Molloy said he was impressed by how well volunteers and staff worked together.

"The way CFS managed their fleet at the staging area was fantastic to observe," Tim said.

"Their vehicles are much larger than Queensland's rural appliances, with their main responding vehicles holding 2000, 3000 or 4000 litres of water."

"It was great to see the management of the staging area throughout the incident, from feeding crews to setting up tents and portable habitats."

"Deployments allow QFD personnel to maintain our IMT skills in unfamiliar environments and help build our own skillsets within QFD."



# SAVING A TOWN UNDER SIEGE

QFR crews crossed the border to help the New South Wales (NSW) Rural Fire Service (RFS) stop a raging fire from overwhelming the town of Boggabilla, just south of Goondiwindi.



A crew of auxiliary firefighters led by Acting Inspector Steven Lohmann traveled across the border to support NSW firefighters with a fast-moving fire in Boggabilla.

"The fire ran south along the Macintyre River and west toward the town," Steven said.

"It hadn't rained since late last year and there was a lot of fuel load. The fire was crowning and moving really quickly along a two-kilometre fire front.

"It was quite confronting. I was on taskforces to the bushfires in NSW and Victoria in 2019, and this was just as intense.

"If the fire had hit the western side of town, we would have lost most of Boggabilla."

As part of a mutual aid agreement with NSW RFS, QFD auxiliary firefighters at Goondiwindi Fire and Rescue Station often respond to road

crashes and structure fires in and around Boggabilla, a small town of about 500 people.

The closest NSW auxiliary station is in Moree, more than 100 kilometres away.

"Every week we go over the border to help out," Steven said. "At the Boggabilla fire, we were called in to protect houses along Brown Street near the river.

"The fire came right up to the street. NSW RFS were still resourcing the job."

When the fire headed for the town's water treatment plant, some of the auxiliary firefighters split off to protect it.

"Otherwise, Boggabilla would have lost water, and the fire would have gone straight into town," Steven said.

NSW RFS gave the Queensland firefighters a water tanker and cut a fire break with heavy machinery.

"They called in two aircraft to drop water at the other end of the fire to stop it heading toward Goondiwindi," Steven said.

"Police from Queensland and NSW evacuated people along Brown Street just in case."

After two hours of intense work, the firefighters managed to stop the fire from reaching the plant and crossing the street into town.

"It's always good to work with our NSW colleagues," Steven said. "While they were in control of the incident, we set up our own sector to protect structures, and together we made a plan and worked hand-in-hand.

"Each of us learn from how the other does business. We pick up things that could be good for our own operations.

"To blend two organisations is sometimes a bit of a jigsaw puzzle, but we find the right pieces and work well together."

# AIR SUPPORT FOR VICTORIA

Two QFD airbase managers deployed to Victoria to help battle fires under challenging conditions.



Because the aviation firefighting community is so small, I almost felt like I was at home in Queensland with many familiar faces.

"It was good to see how other states manage airbases. I'm now working on how I can implement some of the learnings from this deployment at QFD."



Airbase managers Scot Perrie and Ben Turnbull from QFD Air Operations travelled to Victoria for five days, where they briefed airbase crews and coordinated flight following arrangements, taskings, logistics and complaints management.

Scot was sent to Albury and Corryong Airbase, managing aircraft at the Walwa fires, which burnt around 121,000 hectares.

"The Airbase Manager (ABM) is responsible for establishing and managing an airbase and providing support services for aerial operations missions," Scot said.

"At Albury and Corryong I looked after nine aircraft, refueling arrangements and ground staff. An airbase of that size has many complexities and moving parts.

"It's important to not lose your situational awareness around a busy airbase and ensure the aircraft are monitored and supported."

Every 30 minutes, the airbase team touched base with each aircraft deployed.

"Collaborating with Victoria was fantastic," Scot said. "We worked with many agencies including the Country Fire Authority, Forest Fire Management Victoria, NSW RFS, ACT RFS and VIC SES. The uniform worn doesn't make a difference. We received very positive feedback from the teams we worked with.

"Deployments are a vital part of maintaining the effectiveness, readiness and resilience of QFD Air Operations staff while providing critical support to communities in need. They also contribute to the continuous improvement of our emergency response capabilities."

Ben Turnbull managed the Colac Airbase that assisted with the Otways and Gellibrand fires.

"I managed up to 13 aircraft from small observation and air attack platforms to large waterbombing aircraft including Blackhawks and Erikson Skyranes," Ben said.

"It was a fantastic opportunity to use my skills to help in another state.

Victorian personnel were relieved to get support from north of the border.

"Working with the Victorians was a great experience because our goals were the same – to help crews on the ground and the community through safe and effective aerial support," Ben said.

"The Air Operations Manager said he'd have Queenslanders back anytime because our ways of working and training had us ready to do the job from day one.

"Being deployed to other jurisdictions is vital for not only the amazing personal experience it brought, but the professional development opportunity as well.

"I learnt a lot from working at a remote airbase with limited resources and I'll pass on those lessons to other ABMs as QFD Air Operations grows into the future."

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# CLOSING THE GAP

This Closing the Gap Day, we celebrated QFD personnel who have helped build relationships with First Nations communities, shared their expertise in cultural burning and strengthened Indigenous representation within QFD.

The Closing the Gap initiative aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, and this year the QFD Closing the Gap Awards recognised five personnel and two teams who have worked hard to achieve this.



## THE MEANING OF LEADERSHIP

Vincent Schriber, a proud Gunggangji tribal leader of Yarrabah, was recognised for outstanding leadership and mentorship within the Yarrabah Rural Fire Brigade, which he joined in 2011 when they needed a new First Officer.

"The brigade had no one to lead it so I put my hand up," Vincent said.

"Growing up in community and among my Elders, the gap was very wide for me. My grandparents and mum and dad needed a pass to travel or leave Yarrabah.

"Even in RFSQ there was stigma. If you were Aboriginal you might be at the back of the line for a deployment. Now the gap is starting to close and we're joining together as one. The deployment experience now is deadly.

"The last deployment I went on was to Cardwell and we all worked together in unity. That was an eye opener for me. I took a young trainee with me and I was proud when he and the other brigade members wanted to do more."

Vincent is known for his calm presence, sound judgement and ability to lead by example.

"I'm a fifth generation of kings and queens," he said. "My grandfathers and father were tribal kings and my grandmother was the only queen. The leadership I show in rural fire, that's where it comes from."

About 45 minutes from Cairns, Yarrabah is the biggest Indigenous community in Queensland, covering 270 square kilometres of land and sea.

"We get up every day looking out at the ocean and to the west is the mountain with green luscious trees and waterfalls."

Vincent places the needs of the Yarrabah community first, whether responding to incidents, supporting brigade members or mentoring the next generation.

He works with two local ranger groups to take schoolkids on excursions, teach them about cultural burning and inspire them to join RFSQ.

"I enjoy going out in the community and helping protect properties or check on houses," he said. "When QFR get called out to a house fire it takes one-and-a-half hours to get here.

"My crew and I do what we can to save the house before QFR arrives. When we go home we feel proud we've done something for our community and ourselves."

Area Manager Justin Smith said, "Vince's leadership reflects a deep and genuine commitment to strengthening outcomes for his community. His work embodies the true spirit of Closing the Gap by supporting safer, stronger and more resilient communities."

Vincent acknowledged his peers in RFSQ who inspired him to stay on as First Officer.

"Without their guidance and friendship I could have walked away, but now I feel

like I'm in a safe space, which is why I think Closing the Gap is successful in RFSQ at the moment," he said.

"If I can Close the Gap in my area, with my knowledge of Country and my experience in fire, along with other RFSQ and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) members, it will make us a better unit."

## CHANGEMAKER



As the Chair of the First Nations Community of Inclusion, Julie Smith has played a pivotal role in fostering cultural understanding, respect and reconciliation across QFD.

"I'm proud of having a professional platform as a First Nations woman, allowing me to influence positive change in a challenging field," Julie said.

"The Community of Inclusion is finalising our work plan to present to the Everyday Respect Council (ERC), focusing on education, cultural visibility and inclusion based on our research and consultation.

"We've submitted several recommendations to the ERC. Examples include expanding the use of First Nations artwork across physical and digital platforms, establishing clear professional development pathways

and exploring accountability measures for leaders to enhance cultural capability."

Julie has been a tireless advocate for addressing systemic barriers and inequities faced by First Nations peoples.

She has helped improve access to education and training opportunities, create culturally safe workplaces, and support mental health and wellbeing for First Nations people within QFD.

"Advocating for cultural understanding is crucial because education plays a significant role in the fostering of awareness and appreciation of Indigenous cultures," Julie said.

"Collaboration with First Nations voices and communities helps represent their perspectives and knowledge, which is essential for improving our land management practices and service delivery within the community.

"I feel privileged to advocate for my community to create an environment that fosters resilience and enables our workforce to thrive."

**LOOKING AT COUNTRY DIFFERENTLY**

Trinity Georgetown was recognised for sharing expertise in cultural burning and traditional fire management practices, strengthening partnerships between Traditional Owners and communities and enhancing cultural capability, inclusion and land management practices in QFD.

Trinity wears many hats as a Lama Lama Traditional Owner, Cultural Fire Management Project Officer with NQ



Dry Tropics, and RFSQ volunteer. In every role, he shares his expertise in cultural burning and fosters respect for Indigenous practices.

"I joined RFSQ about four years ago when I started at NQ Dry Tropics," he said. "I worked with Uncle Eddie Smallwood from our brigade on a project about cultural fire in grazing landscapes. I can't do my NQ Dry Tropics work without RFSQ and vice versa.

"I don't just teach Traditional Owners, but landholders, RFSQ volunteers and others. I don't want to exclude anyone. My goal is to help people who conduct burns to see Country through a cultural lens.

"I've taught RFSQ volunteers who have been burning before I was born, and I've changed their whole perspective on fires. In the past, burning has been about protecting assets and people first, and then the environment.

"I teach people to look at Country holistically. There's more to it than just lighting a cool burn. I see farmers' and graziers' eyes open when we show them more economic and safer ways than cutting up the land with dozers and using fuels."

Trinity's work with Traditional Owner organisations like Firesticks Alliance empowers communities through capacity building, supports self-determination, and ensures Indigenous voices are central to land management decisions.

"I've built up my fire practitioner skills with Firesticks Alliance and I'm lead for this region now," he said. "First and foremost I'm a blackfella and I'll always wear it loud and proud.

"Capacity building for Traditional Owners is my first priority. I really enjoy teaching that old way our people passed on. We're all custodians of this country and we have to take care of it all as one."

**TRUE PARTNERSHIP**

Shane Hopton (picture above, far right) was recognised for strengthening partnerships with First Nations communities through community-led engagement, shared governance and culturally respectful practices as part of the Office in the Field initiative.

Office in the Field embeds organisational presence directly within First Nations communities to co-design services, projects and responses that reflect local priorities, culture and governance.

"What I am most proud of in my work with First Nations people is the transition from 'consulting' to true partnership," Shane said.

"Early in my career, I focused on outcomes. Now I focus on the integrity of the process. I am proud of the moments where I've stepped back to ensure Traditional Owners have the space to lead, ensuring services aren't just delivered for a community, but are owned and driven by them.

"However, the most meaningful achievement is the trust earned over time. Trust isn't granted by a contract; it's built through showing up, listening more than talking, and respecting cultural protocols even when they don't align with a corporate timeline.

"Being invited back to a community because they feel heard and respected is the ultimate measure of success. It signifies that our work has contributed to self-determination and helped bridge the gap between Western systems and the enduring wisdom of the world's oldest living cultures."

Office in the Field moves away from centralised, top-down consultation toward a model of presence and partnership.

**Closing the Gap  
Award winners**

**Individual**

- **Trinity Georgetown**, Rural Firefighter, Gudjuda Rural Fire Brigade (RFB)
- **Edward (Eddie) Smallwood**, First Officer, Gudjuda RFB
- **Vincent Schrieber**, First Officer, Yarrabah RFB
- **Julie Smith**, Station Officer, Beenleigh Division
- **Shane Hopton**, Executive Manager District Coordination

**Team**

- **Auxiliary Firefighter Development Unit**, State Capability Directorate
- **Partnerships**
- **Australian Women in Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) Working Group**, QFD and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Assistant Chief Officer Tony Hazell said, "Uncle Eddie has guided the establishment and development of the Gudjuda Rural Fire Brigade since 2018. The brigade gives QFD a unique chance to work with this First Nations community in a sustainable partnership resulting in mutual respect and recognition."

"Eddie has helped establish and train the brigade and the Dry Tropics Traditional Owner Management Group, collaboratively addressing the challenges of mitigation across the landscape on Bindal Country."

"The opportunities enabled through Uncle Eddie's leadership are enduring and constantly evolving."



*The Partnerships Award went to the Australian Women in Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) Working Group, QFD and QPWS for delivering the AUS WTREX program. AUS WTREX advanced inclusive and culturally informed fire management while empowering women and strengthening partnerships and community resilience across the fire sector.*

The initiative maintains a consistent and accessible local office and the team runs participatory design sessions led by community representatives to shape services.

"In our sessions, we move beyond just 'gathering feedback' to a model where community representatives act as the primary facilitators and decision-makers within governance," Shane said.

"Work is owned and driven by the community, rather than delivered for them and the benefits – economic, environmental or cultural – are kept directly within the community."

"For engagement to be successful, it must be grounded on Country, where the real-time needs and leadership of Traditional Owners can take precedence."

"Unlike simple consultation, a genuine partnership empowers communities to lead decision-making processes on their own Country."

**EMPOWERING TRADITIONAL OWNERS**

Uncle Eddie Smallwood was recognised for strengthening partnerships between Traditional Owners and QFD through cultural burning leadership, mentoring across the community and sharing Indigenous knowledge.

His leadership of the Gudjuda Reference Group and his work as a Bindal Traditional Owner help preserve and promote the cultural and environmental heritage of First Nations peoples.

Through cultural burning practices, marine conservation and educational programs, he honours the deep connection between Traditional Owners and their Country.

His efforts to integrate cultural knowledge with modern science, and his participation in global initiatives like the Chitwan Declaration, highlight his commitment to truth-telling.



Uncle Eddie's work supports self-determination by empowering Traditional Owners to lead land and sea management efforts, such as cultural burns and environmental conservation, while mentoring new rangers to take ownership of their Country.

By fostering partnerships with organisations like RFSQ, QPWS, James Cook University, Australian Institute of Marine Science and WWF Australia, he promotes decision-making that aligns with Indigenous perspectives.



*The Auxiliary Firefighter Development Unit within the State Capability Directorate received the Closing the Gap Team Award for developing and delivering the Cherbourg Auxiliary Recruit Course, creating a culturally responsive training model that strengthens capability and operational confidence for Indigenous and remote auxiliary firefighters.*



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# SUPPORTING OUR OWN

Ashley Bawden has been named the Olga Wilson Peer Support Officer of the Year for his leadership and dedication to supporting others' wellbeing.

QFD recently marked Peer Support Week, recognising the important contribution of Peer Support Officers (PSOs) and the critical role they play in supporting the wellbeing of personnel across the organisation.

Across the state, 167 active PSOs form part of the QFD Peer Support Program, providing support to colleagues in both operational and non-operational environments.

Over the past year, PSOs responded to more than 1,000 critical incidents and supported thousands of personnel through follow-up care, in addition to assisting individuals outside of incident response and delivering local presentations to raise awareness of support services.

As peers, they provide a trusted and approachable source of support — offering a listening ear, practical guidance and connection to further services when needed.

This year, 15 PSOs from across Queensland were nominated for the Olga Wilson Peer Support Officer of the Year Award, which honours the legacy of Olga Wilson and her contribution to supporting firefighters and their families.

Congratulations to all nominees, and to Ashley Bawden, Senior Firefighter at Hendra and Auxiliary Captain at Nambour, who was named the 2025 recipient.

Ashley was recognised for his leadership and dedication to supporting the wellbeing of firefighters, particularly in his role as Peer Support Coordinator for the Sunshine Coast Division.

"PSOs provide an outlet for members who may be experiencing difficult and challenging circumstances," Ashley said.

"It provides an option outside of their immediate support network for conversation and compassion in a trusting and confidential environment."

For Ashley, the recognition was less about individual achievement and



Ashley Bawden (third from left) received the Olga Wilson Peer Support Officer of the Year Award.

more about the broader impact of the program.

"The role isn't about me — it's about supporting members when they need it," he said.

"It's nice to be recognised, and I'm honoured, but there are so many peer supporters across Queensland who are equally deserving.

"What's most important is that this recognition helps shine a light on the Peer Support Program and the role it plays in supporting mental health and wellbeing."

In his role, Ashley works closely with crews and leadership to coordinate support following critical incidents, while also contributing to training, mentoring and ongoing wellbeing initiatives.

He said his motivation comes from the opportunity to make a difference and support others to have long, healthy and fulfilling careers.

"Seeing the positive impact that simply having someone who cares can have is a big driver," he said.

"We all deserve to be happy and supported, and if I can play a small part in that, it's worth it."

Ashley has also been a strong advocate for normalising conversations around mental health, encouraging open and supportive environments across teams.

"Simply talking about mental health more frequently helps to normalise it," he said.

## Regional award winners

- **Ashley Bawden**, Nambour
- **Andrew Harvey**, Maryborough Division
- **Melissa Griffith**, Wide Bay Burnett
- **Robert Coghlan**, Wide Bay Burnett
- **Petina Gledhill**, Brisbane Metro
- **Shane Coote**, Brisbane Metro
- **Graham King**, Brisbane Metro
- **Melissa Webb**, Brisbane Metro
- **Daniel McAlister**, Cairns
- **Lyn Roveglia**, Townsville
- **Scott Cross**, Townsville
- **Adam Andrewartha**, Beenleigh Division
- **Jodee Squire**, Beenleigh Division
- **William Hovell**, Toowoomba Division
- **Megan Strong**, Toowoomba Division

"We want people to feel comfortable discussing challenges and reaching out for support."

Reflecting on his time in the role, Ashley said the most rewarding part has been the people.

"Having people trust you with their stories, and being able to support them through difficult times, is incredibly meaningful," he said.

For those who may be hesitant to seek support, his message is clear.

"Just do it," he said. "Recognise when you need support and act early. There is always someone who can help — you just need to take that first step."

The next PSO course will be delivered in Brisbane from 30 August to 4 September 2026.

## ➔ Find support

**Confidential counselling services are available to all volunteers, staff and immediate family members.** If you feel you could benefit from support, go to [fire.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people](https://fire.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people) to locate your preferred counsellor or contact the 24/7 on-call counsellor on **1800 805 980** (calls returned within two hours).



**ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY AT CARAVAN EXPOS**



QFD hosted a stall at the Let's Go Gold Coast Caravan and Outdoor Expo to promote the changes to smoke alarm legislation.

More than 13,000 people came along to the People First Stadium in Cararra to explore the latest caravan and motorhome equipment.

QFD used the New Station Crewing Model (NSCM) to attend the expo across all three days without affecting appliance availability. It proved to be a cost-effective and sustainable model for this type of large-scale engagement.

The expo is part of a state-wide initiative between QFD and Caravanning Queensland to deliver the new smoke alarm message to caravan and motorhome owners before the legislation comes into effect in 2027.

The legislation applies to registered caravans and motorhomes, making these expos a great opportunity to get the message out early to keep Queenslanders safe.

Crews were proactive, clear in the message and represented QFD professionally throughout. Wooden spoons were effective ice breakers and caravan safety checklists supported meaningful conversations. QFD also included checklists in welcome packs to extend messaging beyond the event.

QFD will continue attending state-wide caravan expos throughout the year.

**THE ORIGINAL BLAZER BEAR**

Ken Evernden AFSM received the Commissioner's Meritorious Service Award for his dedicated service to the community as a firefighter and volunteer community educator.

Ken served for 29 years as a professional firefighter after joining the South Coast Fire Brigade Board.



He was the first 'Blazer Bear' while still employed.

After his retirement, Ken continued to serve as a Senior Fire Education volunteer for 22 years, assisting the department with community engagements to teach elderly people about fire safety in the home. He finally hung up the Blazer Bear costume in 2024. Well done Blazer.



**HONOURING 25 YEARS OF SERVICE**

Cambooya Rural Fire Brigade was proud to honour Garry Greer for an incredible 25 years of service as Fire Warden and Deputy Fire Warden.

Garry has been a steadfast leader in fire mitigation and a dedicated protector of the community. Thank you Garry for your leadership, commitment and unwavering service.



**ALBERT'S CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY**



QFD recognised the incredible service of Albert Dunnett at a special morning tea.

RFSQ Gladstone Area Manager Kim Polzin presented Albert with the Queensland Fire Medal and First Clasp, acknowledging his outstanding contribution as Fire Warden in the Benaraby Riverston Fire Warden District from 1988 to 2010. Albert's dedication to protecting his community over more than two decades is truly inspiring.

**TOOWOOMBA HONOURS VOLUNTEERS**



Cooyar and District Rural Fire Brigade proudly hosted the Toowoomba area award presentation and appliance handover, bringing together members to celebrate dedication, service and community spirit.

Volunteers were recognised for their outstanding commitment, with awards presented to members who have given up to 40 years of service.

A Commissioner's Commendation was awarded in recognition of efforts during the 2019 Townsville Floods, highlighting the courage and professionalism shown in times of crisis.

A special milestone was the official handover of the Bowenville 51 and Cooyar and District 41 appliances to the brigades' first officers. These new vehicles will strengthen response capacity and support crews to continue their vital work.

The ceremony concluded with the unveiling of a mural at the Cooyar station, designed to remind everyone of the importance of looking out for one another when things are not 'OK.' It's hoped this initiative will encourage more conversations, connection and support across the community.

## **+ GOLD COAST COMMAND SHARES APPLIANCE KNOWLEDGE**

Southport Fire and Rescue Station recently hosted an appliance familiarisation session aimed at increasing awareness of specialist resources available across the Gold Coast Command.

The session brought together operational crews, senior management, Firecom personnel and RFSQ members to enhance understanding of the specialist appliances and capabilities available within the command, and how they integrate during incident responses.

Capabilities showcased included Technical Rescue, BA/HAZMAT, Ladder Platforms, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), Incident Control functions and RFSQ command and control vehicles.

Key outcomes included improved cross-crew awareness, a stronger understanding of specialist asset deployment, and reinforced interoperability with RFSQ. The session also provided an opportunity to demonstrate QFR's operational capability to representatives from the Gold Coast City Council Disaster Management team.

Specialist operators, Professional Development Command representatives and RFSQ crews demonstrated professionalism and a strong willingness to share their expertise, further strengthening capability across the command.

There is clear value in continuing to deliver these sessions across all shifts and maintaining a strong focus on familiarisation and shared learning to support ongoing capability development and community confidence.

## **WADE NAMED APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR**

Congratulations to Wade Burgess for being named Motor Trades Association Queensland Apprentice of the Year.

Wade has been an auxiliary firefighter for 13 years and was recently appointed Captain of the Tara Fire and Rescue Station. Alongside his service to the community, he works full-time as a mechanic and co-owns an outdoor power equipment business with his wife Lisa, who is also a proud auxiliary firefighter.



## **HIGH HOPES FOR HORSESHOE BAY**

Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade officially turned the sod on their new boundary after Townsville City Council extended their lease by a further 250 square metres.

The brigade was formed in 1959 and it wasn't until 1994 that they secured their lease from the council. Three years later, after fundraising, grants and a lot of assistance from community members, they built their first two-bay shed.

Brigade Secretary Julie Carmody said the brigade had 30 volunteer members ranging from the age of 18 to 74 and the lease extension would enable the brigade to futureproof its operations.

"Successional planning and future proofing for growth are critical to a volunteer rural fire brigade because they ensure operational continuity, safety and long-term sustainability," Julie said.

"The brigade is very appreciative of the ongoing support from Townsville City Council over the last 32 years."

Attendees at the sod turning, pictured above from left to right, included Councillor Ann-Maree Greaney, Townsville Mayor Nick Dametto, Brigade Secretary Julie Carmody and First Officer Ian Priestly.

As part of his prize, Wade spent a week at the Penrite Racing workshop in Melbourne, working hands-on with their Supercars and GT3 race car team — a truly unforgettable experience.

A massive achievement for an outstanding leader. Well done, Wade!



## **A CENTURY OF SERVICE**

This year marks an incredible milestone for Drayton Fire and Rescue Station – their four lieutenants have reached a combined 100 years of service. A full century of experience, commitment and courage between them.

The lieutenants are pictured below, from left to right: Tony Biggin, Michael Williamson, Matt Brown and Jason Huggins.





QFR level 2 swiftwater instructors honed their skills at Koomboolomba Dam and Barron Gorge in the far north.



QFR firefighters rescued two people stranded on Mount Tibrogargan after using drones with thermal cameras to locate them.



Auxiliary firefighters from Beenleigh Division completed a four-day training course to hone their skills in road crash rescue.



A strike team of RFSQ volunteers from the Darling Downs helped their neighbours in the Warrego District.



Firefighters from Durack Fire and Rescue Station carried out an aerial and vertical rescue exercise on a fixed crane to simulate rescues from height.



Condamine, The Ridge and Kogan and District rural fire brigades received new firefighting vehicles



QFR crews in Mount Isa loaded crucial supplies to support the isolated communities of Boulia and Bedourie in coordination with Local Disaster Management Groups.



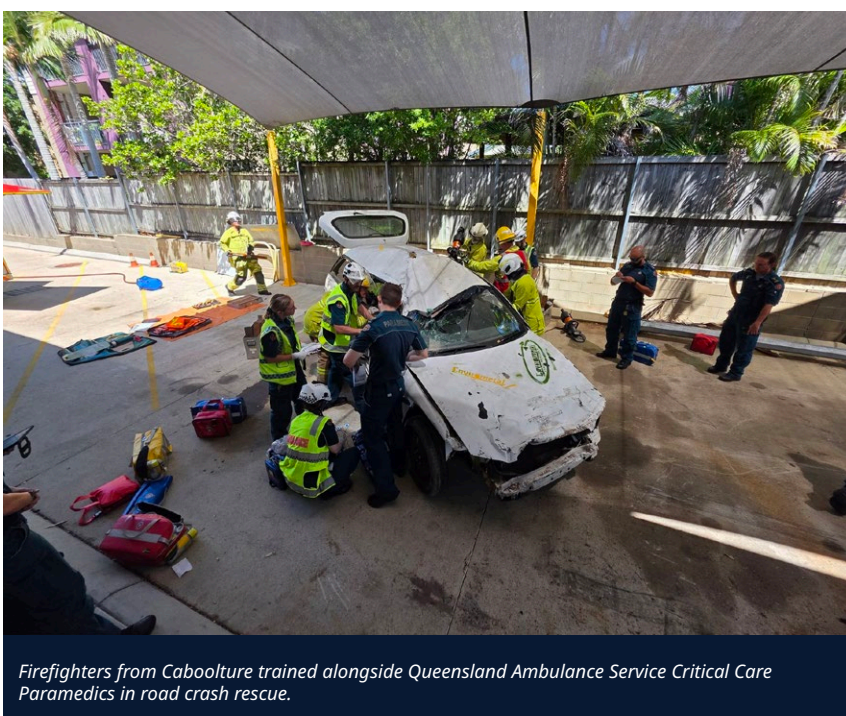
RFSQ crews fought a large vegetation fire at Maryvale near Warwick.



QFD's newest cohort of drone operators completed their induction with training flights at the Glasshouse Mountains.



Six drone pilots completed their training course in Toowoomba.



Firefighters from Caboolture trained alongside Queensland Ambulance Service Critical Care Paramedics in road crash rescue.



QFR swiftwater rescue crews were strategically positioned in Tully, Ingham and Bowen to support North Queensland communities through severe weather.

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