Assistant Commissioner’s Message

The inaugural Volunteer Conference was held on the weekend of the 12th and 13th April at the North Coast and although the conference could only accommodate 145 full delegates and another 30 or so day delegates it proved to be an outstanding success according to the feedback received at the function and after the event via an evaluation survey. The main aim of the conference was to provide relevant information across a range of topics to as many volunteers as possible, allowing them to in turn, take that information back to their brigade or group. I personally have received and heard of many examples of where this information transfer has taken place and I congratulate all involved (staff and volunteers) that made this event the success it was.

On the 15th May, the Queensland Auditor General tabled in Parliament his audit on the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland. This audit focussed primarily on performance management systems and in particular how we, as in QFRS and the RFS, strategically plan for the future, taking into consideration risk identification and management, funding, resourcing and training. The paper provided 16 recommendations, all of which we will review in consultation with the RFBaq, to determine the viability and factors relating to each component. It should be acknowledged that the audit team believed that the RFS currently provides effective management of fires within rural communities and further acknowledged the work that had been undertaken to date, in relation to the release of the new risk based approach towards brigade classifications, the new focus on membership types taking into account a role based approach, and the newly released volunteer learning and development framework, having paved the way for the future.

The audit report also acknowledged that, organisationally we had strategically examined future issues and opportunities via our own Future Directions paper. The advancement of these two documents (QAO report and Future Directions) will be through the establishment of five strategic committees. Each committee will contain RFBaq representation and will be required to review each aspect and report on their findings and recommendations within a structured process. I personally am of the opinion that these two papers provide us with the next phase in the future of both Rural Operations and the Rural Fire Service, Identifying further opportunities for improvement and capitalising on the good work that has occurred over the past few years.

The above average seasonal rainfall that occurred during December 2007 to March 2008 falling over most coastal and inland parts of the state and now coupled with the warmer weather, has produced large volumes of grassland fuels over vast areas that were previously subjected to drought conditions. This means that we now have dangerous fuel loads existing across most of the State. With these observations comes the need to be prepared from both a brigade perspective and a community understanding and an acceptance of the environment that they are located within, and the preventative measures that they need to undertake.

It is also an opportune time to promote the Bushfire Prepared Communities program and the Prepare, Stay and Defend or Go Early concept. Further information and support is available through your local Rural Operations Area Office.

In closing, I would like to recognise and congratulate Mr Ilikena Dabea, recipient of the Australian Fire Service Medal awarded through the Queens Birthday Honours List. Illi is the First Officer of Palm Island RFB who is also a member of the Rural Fires Advisory Council and the State Indigenous Australian Reference Group. Illi is an active volunteer contributing countless hours towards Rural Fire Service issues and his community. I have worked with Illi on many committees and projects and am pleased to see his hard and dedicated work recognised through this auspicious award.

Until next time, keep safe and take care.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations
Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
Research into Volunteering for the Rural Fire Service

Earlier in 2008, Researcher Meg Hooper undertook the first stage of her research project on getting to know RFS volunteers. In consultation with the volunteer support team at QFRS Rural Operations, Meg created a questionnaire asking people about their thoughts and feelings regarding volunteering for the Rural Fire Service.

The Volunteer Support team then created a random list of volunteers from the database, across different geographic locations, and telephone interviews were conducted with willing participants. 42 people agreed to take part in the interviews. Given the small number of people who took part, we need to be careful of any conclusions we draw from the initial interviews, we can however, summarise some of the themes and patterns than emerge from the responses. The information also provides the necessary guidance for the next stage of the research.

Some of the information that arose from the pilot study includes:

When asked approximately how many hours per week volunteers spent working for the RFS, we received a wide variety of answers which ranged from “0 when there are no fires” to “a meeting once every 12 months” and “20 hours per week”. This suggests that volunteering means different things to different people and they engage with the RFS as suits their understanding of what it is to volunteer.

When asked about the activities they take part in, fighting fires to volunteer. Engage with the RFS as suits their understanding of what it is volunteering means different things to different people and they which ranged from “0 when there are no fires” to “a meeting once spent working for the RFS, we received a wide variety of answers

Conclusions we draw from the initial interviews, we can however, summarise some of the themes and patterns that emerge from the responses. The information also provides the necessary guidance for the next stage of the research.

Commissioner’s Commendation Awarded to Gogango Creek Brigade Members

Four members of the Gogango Rural Fire Brigade have been awarded with a Commissioners Commendation, for the action they took this February, during flash flooding of the Gogango Creek.

On Thursday 14 February Mr Michael Russell, Mr Peter Lawrie, Ms Gwen Lees and Mr Mark Pacey, self activated knowing the torrential rain would cause water from the Gogango Creek to flow over the Capricorn Highway. The Brigade members intended to use their appliance as a warning to motorists of the rising water until the police, who had been called, could attend. While at the fire shed the Gogango crew heard the impact and screams from a car that had aquaplaned and was washed into the fast rising Gogango Creek.

Although the incident tragically resulted in the death of a 36 year old female, a male and two children were rescued from the flooded creek.

The extent of this rescue was not released due to the communities wish for it to remain a private incident and the details of the actions and risks taken by the brigade members only came to light recently.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service would like to thank the members of the brigade who participated in this heroic act, which resulted in saving three lives.
Western Downs DES Cadet Unit Starts Operation

After two years of work, it was a proud day for staff at the Rural Operations Area Office in Miles, when the new Western Downs DES Cadet unit, became operational.

Sponsored by Rural Operations Area Director Mike Smith, the Western Downs DES Cadet unit provides members with the range of skills held by all areas of Department of Emergency Services staff and volunteers.

Area Director Mike Smith said the new unit, which has two sub units, one based in Chinchilla and the other in Tara, will have the opportunity to learn from a range of staff and volunteers, and they are the future of DES.

“The concept of this unit is that the cadets will train locally in conjunction with SES units, ambulance staff, urban firefighters and Rural Fire Brigades.” Mike said.

“They will learn rescue skills, first aid, fire behaviour and firefighting skills. Then, once every three months, the units will come together for a weekend training camp where they will undertake activities that will test and reinforce the training that they have completed over the previous three months.”

The unit is the first Cadet unit sponsored by QFRS Rural Operations, and has been strongly supported by many areas of the department. Sponsored by Mike Smith from Rural Operations, the unit is coordinator is John Hughes First Officer of the Kogan Rural Fire brigade and the sub units are coordinated by Sandra Allen SES Tara and Leonie Casey SES Chinchilla.

Currently the unit consists of six cadets at Chinchilla and four cadets at Tara however, over time it is expected that the unit will grow with further sub units being added as interest in neighbouring areas grow.

“This unit provides a valuable new avenue for youth development and will allow those who join the group to learn and develop new skills which they can include on their school scholastic record.” Mike said.

“They will also provide an important source of future potential permanent Emergency Service personnel and Volunteers.”
**Deployment Profile**

Name? Paul Kalendra  
Brigade? Bonogin Valley Rural Fire Brigade  
Position? First Officer  
Length of time as a RFS Volunteer? 16 Years  
How many times have you been on deployment? Just the once, to Hunter Valley and Sussex Inlet NSW in 2001 – 2002. The Task Force left Queensland and headed for Newcastle, where crews were utilised in the Hunter Valley. Owing to the fact that fire predictions did not eventuate, we were re-directed to the Shoalhaven area.

What was the most interesting aspect of going on deployment? I think the most interesting aspect was the logistics and forward planning by the host state (NSW) and the QFRS team sent ahead to prepare our accommodation requirements, welfare and operational considerations. The accommodation and meals at the Nowra Navy Base were very good, especially after a 12 hour shift. The fire crews were extremely well supported by radio technicians and mechanics, paramedics and field office staff, who were all part of a Queensland Emergency Services task force team.

What was the most enjoyable thing about going on deployment? Operationally, there were many satisfying moments. After the devastating fires in the area, it was pleasing to see the appreciation from the people on the side of the road, and through the townships, as we passed by in convoy.

What would you say to other volunteers considering nominating for the deployment register? Deployments should be taken very seriously. People considering volunteering should think firstly, of discussing the deployment with their employer and family. Be aware of the physical challenge of 12 hour shifts for up to seven days and sometimes, in extreme conditions. Be totally confident that you can meet the nomination and selection criteria and most importantly, be a positive member of the team. If you are satisfied that you can meet the requirements...volunteer!

The option of registering for the Rural Fire Service Deployment Register is available to all firefighters who have completed their firefighter minimum skills. In order to nominate for the deployment register, volunteers will need to undergo a Criminal History Check.

Having the opportunity to go on deployment is a fantastic way to increase and improve your skills, have involvement in areas of the service you may not have been part of before, to meet interesting people and make new friendships, but most importantly, to help people in times of critical need.

If you would like more information on the deployment register, please contact your Area Office.

**Fight Fire Fascination**

Curbing dangerous fire play among children and reducing the number of potential house fires in the community is obviously a priority for Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS), and one that is being successfully met through the Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) program.

Developed by QFRS over 10 years ago, the free program, also known as Triple-F, focuses on children aged between 3 and 17 years who have shown a fascination or unsafe interest in fire.

QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson said the FFF Program aims to support parents in their efforts to educate their children about fire.

“It is based on a belief that children and young people can learn skills to remain safe from fire,” he said.

“The program achieves this by providing families with direct contact with specially trained QFRS officers who educate children and young people to develop fire safe skills.”

During a number of visits over a period of approximately six months, the FFF firefighters develop trust and understanding with children/young people.

They explain the consequences and benefits of fire, and teach the young person how to make their homes and families safe from fire dangers.

With a success rate of over 90 per cent, firefighters have guided over 2000 young people through the program since 2000.

“With results like these, the program has saved lives, property and given parents peace of mind,” said Commissioner Johnson.

There are a number of signs that indicate a child's possible fascination with fire. These include:

- missing matches or lighters turning up in your child’s room, pockets or bags;
- scorch marks on toys, clothes, under beds, or in cubby houses;
- the smell of something burnt; and
- intense interest in, or conversations about, fire.

“One of the most important things we can do is educate families that this program exists, so they are aware that help is available if they need it.

“Even though the program is delivered by specially trained permanent firefighters, it does not mean that it isn’t available to families in rural areas, as these officers will travel to rural areas to undertake the Triple F program.”

“It is also important to understand that it is not just fire inside the house that is dangerous. Parents need to be aware of a child’s behaviour and level of interest in fire, both in an indoor and outdoor setting.”

To find out more about the FFF Program visit http://www.fire.qld.gov.au/communitysafety/freeprograms/fff.asp.
What’s New

Volunteer Portal Upgrade

As many of you will be aware, Emergency Services previously established the Volunteer Portal system, designed to provide the Rural Fire Service (RFS), State Emergency Service (SES) and Queensland Ambulance with the ability to use the site as a tool to communicate with their volunteers.

Unfortunately the system designed was complicated for the end user, confusing to navigate and was never developed to its full potential and many of our volunteers have expressed disappointment in this service.

We are now pleased to advise that we have been able to secure funding to undertake some upgrades to the volunteer portal site. With the upgrades, the RFS section of the Volunteer Portal will get a new look and feel. The site will have a web interface – meaning it will look and navigate more like a traditional website, and the site will lose some of its more confusing functionality, which should make it considerably easier to use. As part of this process we are also upgrading the navigation and information covered to make it a more practical tool.

The home page will now display Announcements, Fire Bans, What’s New on This Site and Bushfire News.

The site will also continue to have a page specifically for each area, and will include latest news including training information or calendars, administration information, events, questions and answers and a photo section. The area pages will be managed and maintained at an area level allowing volunteers better communication with their immediate area.

The top navigation bar will now include ‘Communication’, ‘Operations’, ‘Training and Research’, ‘Forms’ and ‘Links’. For Fire Wardens, there will be an entirely new Fire Wardens Corner, which will include information specific to the role they undertake.

Also included on the site will be a Discussions page where volunteers can add questions or comments, a Frequently Asked Questions page and a Relevant Contacts page.

One of the impacts of the volunteer portal upgrade will be that volunteers who are currently registered to use the existing volunteer portal, will need to register again. With work on the upgrade having already commenced, we look forward to providing all volunteers with information on how to access and use the new portal in the coming months.

Rural Operations sees this initiative as a major step forward in improving communication with volunteers, including the ability to easily access up to date, timely, relevant information.

The Queensland Audit Office Report

Many of you will have seen quite a lot of publicity recently, regarding the Queensland Audit Office Report on the Management of the Rural Fire Service, which was tabled in Parliament in May and consisted of a performance management systems report.

The review started in January and the audit team visited and spoke with staff and volunteers in Northern Region, North Coast Region, South West Region and Central Office (Kedron).

Although the final report focussed on a range of aspects including recommendations and suggestions for improvement, relating to performance measurement, the ageing volunteer workforce, climate change, the changing nature of firefighting, training and forward planning, the audit team certainly acknowledged the great advancements Rural Operations and the Rural Fire Service have made.

The report found the Rural Fire Service currently provides “effective management of fires within rural communities” and acknowledged Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) has “taken a number of positive actions toward addressing” the sustainability issues identified in the report.

Assistant Commissioner Rothwell said the report provided support to work already underway to improve the performance and sustainability of the Service.

“You may have noted in the audit report that mention is made of the ‘Future Directions’ approach that QFRS Rural Operations has undertaken. To expand on this, we, as in the Regional Managers, Directors and myself, have been mindful of our future challenges and direction and compiled a very comprehensive strategic report on the way forward.

Rural Operations has been working on scoping each aspect of the report to ascertain viability, and as a consequence of this, we have established a number of strategic committees that will see membership from within Rural Operations ranks and the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland (RFBAQ), examine these aspects further. Their role will be to “marry up” the recommendations from the QAO report and Future Directions paper to consider the feasibility of each section.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will continue to work collaboratively with our volunteers and the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland to advance the skills and capacity of our Rural Fire Brigades.

Gamba Grass Declared a Weed

In Mareeba in April 2008, QFRS organised an awareness workshop on the fire management issues involving the introduced species Gamba Grass (Andropogon gayanus). Over 50 urban and rural firefighters, landholders and land management agency personnel were fortunate to share Northern Territory’s Bushfires Fire Officer, Sue Lamb’s extensive knowledge and experience in Gamba grass fire management.

Gamba Grass is a perennial species of African grass introduced in the Northern Territory in 1931 as a replacement for native pastures and is now invading savanna ecosystems across northern Australia. It is easily established, able to tolerate seasonal droughts, survive fires, and remains green into the dry season producing late fire season high intensity fires.

Concern for fire fighting agencies is that fires in Gamba Grass have a rate of spread similar or greater than native grasslands with fuel loads equivalent to forest areas causing hot fast high intensity fires that cannot be contained by direct attack. Gamba grows to 4m tall, producing up to 10 times as much biomass as native grasses. Fuel loads of up to 25-30 t/ha have been recorded in Northern Territory with 15-20 t/ha recorded in areas at Weipa, and Mareeba. High fuel loads of gamba grass can build up in a single growing season, supporting fires every year, and sometimes twice a year.

The increased fuel loads of Gamba Grass lead to a substantial increase in fire intensities up to 8 times higher than native grasses. Historically, the need to protect lives and property has not been a major driver of fire management in northern Australia because fires are of relatively low intensity and occur in landscapes sparsely populated by people. Invasion by Gamba Grass has now brought high intensity fires to residential areas introducing an unprecedented fire risk.

The impact of Gamba Grass fires on property losses in areas of infestation was evident when nine dwellings were destroyed in a single fire in 2006. Northern Territory Bushfires attributed the increased intensity of Gamba Grass fuel as a factor in the property loss.

Currently, Gamba Grass exists as relatively small populations scattered across Queensland, with the majority of populations scattered across Cape York south to the Atherton Tablelands.

Reliance Petroleum Get Behind Rural Brigades

We are pleased to announce that Reliance Petroleum and Rural Operations have developed a community safety partnership and as part of this partnership, Reliance Petroleum will be providing 20 slip-on units, to be distributed to 20 Rural Fire Brigades.

Rural Operations has put in place a nomination process, by which brigades can nominate to receive one of the slip on units. Nominations are only open to brigades in Far Northern, Northern, Central, North Coast and South West regions. In this instance, brigades from Brisbane and South East regions are not eligible to apply.

The nomination forms have been provided to secretaries with their edition of this magazine and for those interested in nominating, they need to be completed and returned to your area office by Friday 22 August 08.

Your nomination will need to be endorsed by your Area Director and Regional Manager and forwarded to Central Office, where applications will be assessed on risk, current resourcing, isolation and brigade activities.

Successful applicants will be advised in writing, and the slip-on units will be distributed over the next 12 months, depending on the production schedule.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service would like to thank Reliance Petroleum for their generous support of the Rural Fire Service, and acknowledgement of the important work RFBs undertake within Queensland communities.
Wildfire Mitigation Regional Plan

In attempt to pull together the different areas of QFRS that have involvement in Wildfire mitigation, a coordination plan for wildfire mitigation has been developed for implementation across regions.

The main purpose is to ensure that all areas of wildfire mitigation activities within the region are coordinated with a common purpose of:
- Reducing risk of wildfire impact,
- Preparing communities and
- Informing operations.

As members of Rural Fire Brigades and the broader Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, we all undertake activities that contribute to the mitigation of impact from wildfires. These activities include hazard reduction (prescribed burns) and community education and awareness activities, including Bush Fire Prepared Communities, and the Prepare Stay Defend or Go Early initiative.

As members of Rural Fire Brigades and community members you have essential knowledge of significant areas of bushfire risk and the activities that are undertaken to mitigate the identified risk. This knowledge is a part of this plan and will have particular relevance at your local level.

As we mature, over the next two to three years, in the development and utilisation of this important coordination planning tool, you may be asked to contribute by sharing your knowledge and experience in mitigation and management of wildfires. This will contribute to building the “bigger” picture of where significant bushfire risks are, and what activities actually have an impact on reducing the impact of wildfires.

Benefits of a coordinated approach to mitigation activities will include:
- Risks identified and prioritised across regions
- A common approach to the identification of risk and treatment activities
- A coordinated approach to mitigation activities through Local Fire Management Groups (where established).
- Coordinated mitigation activities between stakeholders
- Better prepared and informed communities through community safety/education activities
- Better coordinated and prepared Operational Readiness for suppression activities.
- Safer Rural and iZone Communities
- Mitigation plans in place and implemented.

Showing them how it’s done

History was made in Brisbane this April, when Rural Fire Service volunteer Leisa Wirth became the first woman to receive the Brisbane Region Firefighter Championship trophy.

Appearing in her first ever tournament, the mum of two beat almost 80 firefighters, most of them male, to win the title.

Leisa, a member of the Villeneuve Rural Fire Brigade, only joined the Rural Fire Service two years ago.

“It feels great being the first woman to win this, and I’m rural as well, so it makes it extra special considering we use totally different trucks to the ones used in the competition” she said.

“I just went in and did my best, and out of all of the events, I only made one error. It cost us 10 seconds, but for the team to do as well as we did, and for me to win…well I’m very proud.

“I absolutely could not have done this without my team mates from the Villeneuve Villains. I would like to send a big thanks to Ian Swadling, Graham Nugent and Col Miles, I had such great team support and we were so pleased to come fifth in the overall competition.

“I would also like to thank Kilcoy Auxiliary firefighters, who trained our team and helped us prepare for the Championships, we couldn’t have achieved what we did without them.” Leisa said.

“If any thing is to come from this, I would love it to be that hopefully more people come out and support their rural brigade” Leisa said. “I think by winning the championships it proves anyone can get out and be an extremely valuable member of a Rural Fire Brigade, even a mum.”
A2.10 Care of Personal Equipment

What I Need to Know

Care and Maintenance of Proban-Treated Garments

Proban treatment is a flame-retardant treatment, not a flame-proofing treatment. In the Proban process, the Proban chemical penetrates into the cotton fibres where it is polymerized by curing with ammonia gas. Because of its greatly increased molecular size, the polymer is trapped within the cotton fibres.

Although the Proban-treated garments will still burn, the burning process is retarded by a chemical reaction that the Proban treatment activates. When the flame source is removed, the fabric will self-extinguish, unlike untreated cotton which continues to burn, and poly/cotton which burns and melts at a very rapid rate. It is resistant to removal by repeated laundering and can be removed only when the cotton fibres themselves are worn away.

Tests have shown that the Proban content of the fabric decreases in the first couple of launderings as the chemical is removed. Thereafter the Proban level remains very stable with a continuing slight decrease caused by wear to the fabric.

Garments subjected to over 100 domestic launderings have passed the relevant flammability tests. However, garments can fail flammability tests after only five washes if they have been laundered incorrectly. It is, therefore, very important for you to look after your Proban-tested garment properly.

There are two definite must nots:

- You must not wash Proban-treated garments in traditional soap based powders such as Lux, Velvet and Advance. These soap powders can form flammable deposits which may adversely affect the flame-retardant performance of the fabric.
- You must not use Hydrochlorite-based household bleaches such as Domestos, White King (and all supermarket blends) as they can destroy the flame retardant capacity of the fabric.

How I do it

You can wash Proban-treated garments in conventional washing machines. It is recommended that coloureds and whites be washed in cold or warm water at temperatures no higher than 60 degrees Celsius. Use the wash program for non-colour fast cotton articles.

You may use the following washing powders:

- Castle
- FAB
- Cold Power
- OMO
- Drive
- Radiant
- Dynamo
- Spree
- Surf

A short re-soak (up to 2 hours at room temperature) may be useful for articles which are heavily stained or soiled. It is suggested that garments be regularly washed to prevent a build-up of soiling. Garments can be tumble dried (preferably at a warm setting).

Take care not to over-dry the garments. This can occur if you leave them in the dryer when they are dry. Over-drying will not affect the flame-retardant properties of the garment, but, as the base fabric is cotton, excessive shrinkage might occur.

Should you have any further questions as to how your garments should be cared for, simply contact the supplier, Stewart & Heaton Clothing Co Pty Ltd, on: (08) 9277 5555.
Telstra Charity Rates

Many brigades have landline phones in the station building. For these fixed phones only, brigades are now able to access a plan called Business Line Charity. This attracts a monthly line rental of $12.40 including GST per month with competitive call costs.

In order to qualify for this plan, Telstra requires brigades to meet the following requirements:

1. Brigades must have, or be eligible to apply for an ABN
2. Brigades must be endorsed as an Income Tax Exempt Charitable Entity by the ATO
3. Brigades must be endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient by the ATO.

Queensland Rural Fire is now on Telstra’s list of charitable / not-for-profit organisations as we have forwarded a blanket statement to Telstra stating our status as an income exempt charitable entity and deductible gift recipient.

Individual brigades with fixed phone lines in their stations can take advantage of this plan by calling Telstra on 1800 730 053 and requesting the change to the Business Line Charity plan.

Ensuring our websites are top class

We were pleased to announce, in this edition of the Bulletin magazine, the upgrade to the Volunteer Portal and, as you will all be aware, almost two years ago we also upgraded the Rural Fire Service website.

Director of Volunteering and Support Kerrie Purcell said although these upgrades have and will, infinitely improve the service to Volunteers and the community, Rural Operations needs to ensure their ongoing relevance and to achieve this, we have established a Website and Volunteer Portal Committee.

“The Committee will exist to drive both content and technical updates and advances to both the Website and the Portal. It consists of a range of Rural Operations staff from different fields including research, training, workplace health and safety, data, marketing and GIS.” Kerrie said.

“The Committee will kick of by holding a Website and Volunteer Portal workshop, which will also include a range of volunteers, Area Office staff, Regional Office staff and IT consultants.

“The purpose of the workshop is to discuss everything from information that will immediately be included on the site to future updates and information, new technology and how we can use it to provide a better service to Volunteers or attract more community members to the website, as well as discussing future ‘link ins’ – what systems we can link to from the portal or the website to make a better user experience for volunteers and the public.”

Although at this stage the workshop is a one-off event, the internal committee will be ongoing, to ensure the most relevant and up-to-date information is provided on both sites, using new and interesting technologies wherever possible.

“We want to ensure these do not become stagnant sites.” Kerrie said. “We want to ensure our volunteers and the public can use them to gather all the information they need, on an ongoing basis.”

Criminal History Checks are underway

In the previous edition of the Rural Fires bulletin, we advised all brigades that the process of undertaking Criminal History Checks was about to begin for

- All new volunteers
- Volunteers transferring to a new brigade
- Volunteers nominating for the Deployment Register
- Registered Juniors upon turning 18, and
- Volunteers who are working with children through their interaction with cadets or similar.

This process has now begun and is progressing well however there have been a few issues that are occurring. When advising a potential member to send in their Criminal History Check paperwork, please be aware of the following:

- That both the ‘Pre-membership Check’ form and the “Consent to a Criminal History Check’ form need to be completed, signed and forwarded in the envelope provided. A criminal History Check cannot be processed without both of these forms.
- That a copy of the applicant’s photo ID is included with the Pre-membership Check and Consent to Criminal History Check forms.
- That if you were born interstate, please include both the town and state you were born in.

If you are undertaking a Criminal History Check to nominate for the deployment register, please also complete and send in, the “Deployment Registration” form.

Generally the turn around time for a Criminal History Check to be completed is three days however please be aware that if you were born interstate of overseas, the timeframe will be longer.

If you have any questions regarding Criminal History Checks or if you require more Criminal History Check forms, please contact your Area Office.
News Update

Changed dates for Gambling Community Benefit Fund

Many of you will be familiar with the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, and that previously, funding rounds for the Fund closed on 31 March, 30 June, 30 September and 31 December of each year. These dates often represent very busy periods for community organisations, and this limits their capacity to compile and submit funding applications. In particular, the closing dates coincide with the end of the school term or with school holiday periods. The 30 June and 31 December closing dates correspond to the end of the financial year and the Christmas/New Year period, respectively.

To address these issues, the Fund has decided on a permanent change of the closing dates for the four funding rounds. The new closing dates for funding applications will be:

- 28 February
- 31 May
- 31 August
- 30 November

This adjustment to the funding timetable will enhance the ability of community organisations to submit a funding application and will improve capacity to provide advice during the peak times in each funding round throughout the year.

To facilitate this adjustment, it is necessary to extend the 30 June 2008 closing date to 31 August 2008. As a result, the Fund will have only three funding round approvals in 2008-09.

To ensure the objective and integrity of the Fund remains intact, Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation will distribute the annual level of funding across these three rounds, rather than the traditional four. Subsequent years will return to a four funding round format.


Tax Breaks for employers supporting emergency services volunteers

In January 2008, Treasurer Andrew Fraser announced employers whose staff volunteered for organisations such as the Rural Fire Service, would be exempt from paying payroll tax for the hours staff spent away from work serving the community.

When announcing the changes, Mr Fraser said the exemption recognises the importance of those volunteers and the commitment of their employers for allowing their staff to take time away to clean up after floods, battle fires or help communities rebuild. He said the exemption should also act as an incentive to employers to support and encourage their staff to take part and volunteer with the SES or their local fire brigade.

Taking effect from July 1 2008, wages will be exempt from pay-roll tax if they are paid or payable to an employee in respect of any period when he or she was taking part in any of:

- Bushfire firefighting activities as a volunteer
- Emergency activities as a volunteer emergency working
- Performing functions of an honorary ambulance officer.

The exemptions do not apply to wages paid or payable as recreation leave, annual leave, long service leave or sick leave.


Firefighter Championship Website

We are pleased to provide advice of the newly formatted and updated Queensland Fire and Rescue Service “Firefighter Competitions” Web site.

This site is easily accessed and provides information on firefighter competitions, including the QFRS Commissioner’s Welcome, State Committee purpose and membership, history of firefighter competitions, the immediate past Queensland Firefighter Championship results and photo gallery, details of the forthcoming Queensland Firefighter Championship, links to the Rules Governing Competitions and much more.

This is the link to the new site: http://www.fire.qld.gov.au/news/FF_Comps/default.asp

Feedback and ideas on how to improve the Firefighter Competitions Web site are welcomed and these should be forwarded to Holly Ford – QFRS South Eastern Region Data Support Officer: hford@emergency.qld.gov.au.

The 2008 Year of Firefighter Competitions will see almost 120 station and rural brigade teams comprising auxiliary, volunteer and permanent firefighters voluntarily contesting Regional Firefighter Championships (April to June 2008) across Queensland. The Champion teams from regions will progress to compete in the Queensland Firefighter Championship to be held in Toowoomba on 14/15/16 August 2008.
Rural Peer Support Officers

We were pleased to announce last year, that FireCare now provides improved support to the Rural Fire Service. This means that all the FireCare programs are available to volunteers and the services provided include counseling, peer support, critical incident response, training and consultation.

For the first time, Rural Fire Service volunteers have attended the Peer Support training and it is with great pleasure that we introduce:

Brisbane Region:
- Crystal Peters Stony Creek RFB 0434 233 994
- Tony Shaw Narangba RFB 0412 984 156

Central Region:
- Len Clegg Hay Point RFB 0439 743 292

Far North Region:
- Tonia May Weipa RFB 0429 699 300

North Coast Region:
- Jeff Keates Tirroan RFB 0435 099 579
- John Wilson Maroochy River RFB 0427 795 691

Northern Region:
- Nellie Baron Charters Towers RFB 0427 566 024
- Helaine Clerk Bambaroo RFB 0437 821 639

South East Region:
- Karen Mason Tamborine Mountain RFB 0409 645 578

South West Region:
- Annette Lamb Admin Officer, Toowoomba Area Office 0414 356 872

As Peer Support Officers, these people are specifically trained to assist and support fellow workers, including Rural Fire Service volunteers and their immediate family experiencing QFRS volunteer-related problems.

FireCare is seeking more people interested in becoming Peer Support Officers. If you are interested, contact FireCare at (07) 3006 4584 or qfresfirecare@emergency.qld.gov.au

We are seeking people who:
- Understand the nature of fire-fighting work – though not necessarily as a fire fighter;
- Are prepared to undertake the ongoing training and supervision provided by FireCare;
- Have the support of both their workplace and their family to take on the role.

These were quotes from two volunteers who attended the training and who are now Peer Support Officers:

Jeff Keates said “I heard first of FireCare at the volunteer conference at Gympie in 2007 and thought it to be a valuable addition to QFRS services, especially as it was available to rurals. Late in 2007 I saw the positions advertised and although initially it seemed as though they were not required in the Bundaberg area, I applied anyway. What a great decision it was. The selection criteria and subsequent work book were challenging but eventually conquered! The induction course was just amazing and our intake bonded immediately. We are out of the nest now and establishing ourselves in our areas, hopefully easing peoples’ burdens and traumas. We are there for everyone, not just rurals. Yes, it’s voluntary with no monetary reward but helping others is what it’s all about. Would I recommend others to join the ranks? Yes, without equivocation, all you need is to care.”

Len Clegg said: “I am proud to be one of the first four QFRS Rural volunteer personnel to have completed the PSO course in December 2007, and I am sure there will be many more to follow. With Rural brigades being called on to undertake more and more stressful tasks, and coupled with the increasing pressures of everyday living, the role of the PSO takes on added importance. To be able to pick up the phone and have a chat about problems sometimes can make all the difference. While my active role to date has been limited, I can envisage, as Brigade members are made more aware of the Peer Support Program, that I could be called on more and more often.”
Welcome to our new BTSOs

You may recall in the last edition of the Bulletin, we were pleased to bring you the news that Rural Operations has received approval to appoint another six Brigade Training and Support Officers (BTSO), and were in the process of advertising and appointing the six positions, plus the existing vacant BTSO position in Bundaberg.

We are now pleased to welcome on board:

Tim Chittenden and Helaine Clerk, who have been appointed as the two BTSOs for Townsville. Dion Skinner, BTSO for Bundaberg, Neil Davidson, BTSO for Maryborough, Nigel Higgs, BTSO for Caloundra, Graham King, BTSO for Caboolture and John Welke, the new BTSO for Toowoomba.

All of the new BTSOs come from a Rural Fire Service background and some have already acted in BTSO positions whilst others have been casual trainers or brigade or group officers.

The BTSOs are currently undertaking a 15 week Recruit Training Programme and graduate on Friday 25 July 2008 however are already undertaking active duties in their respective Areas. I know that you all join with me in welcoming our new BTSOs to the team.

Steve Rothwell
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations
Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
Exercise Capricornia 2008

Central Region supports an annual region wide exercise each year in order to foster greater co-operation and teamwork between Brigades and to showcase the skills that brigades develop during the year. Exercises during the autumn period of the year are rapidly gaining popularity and the major Regional Exercise known as Exercise Capricornia is a good example.

A range of skills based competitions utilising brigade appliances and equipment are used to provide competition between teams. Safe work practices skill, speed and accuracy are assessed by independent judges for a series of events. A series of other training events that allow Brigades to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in communication, hazard reduction planning and burn over response are a great opportunity for all volunteers to participate.

In May 2008 Exercise Capricornia was sponsored by the Port Curtis Group of the Rockhampton Area. The Group offered to host the event at the Mt Larcom Showgrounds over the May long weekend.

Over two days almost 150 volunteers and their families from 16 Brigades from across Central Region attended and demonstrated an increasingly high level of competence, Staff from Rockhampton, Mackay and Emerald as well as Urban staff from Rockhampton provided support on the weekend.

The Kitchen Van, Training Trailer, iZone Tanker, Little Quirt and presentations from Frank Harvey of QR Ltd and Dick Irwin and staff from RFBAQ broadened the scope of the event.

The tireless efforts of the Organising Committee and key volunteers on the day need to be recognised and amongst the many the efforts of the following people were instrumental in the success of the event:

- Luanne Stewart of Westowe RFB,
- Veronica Mullermeister of Westowe RFB,
- Bruce and Joan Mackay of Mt Maurice RFB,
- Graeme Luck of Turkey Beach RFB,
- David Smith of Calliope RFB,
- Dave Kretschmer of Benaraby RFB,
- Doug Berry of Cawarral RFB and
- Gordon Ryan of Belmont RFB

The success of these events is growing and there is a recognition that smaller operational exercises can provide additional real life training for all volunteers. This has translated into Groups in the Rockhampton Area providing support for each other during hazard reduction events in order to practice Strike Team Deployments and a range of skills required when deployed to an unfamiliar area.

We all recognise that putting some real kilometres on our appliances is needed and despite the increase in fuel costs the benefits far outweigh the costs.

John Fisher
RMRO Central Region
Remote Airport Firefighting Training

Over the first two weeks of April, Northern region staff including myself and Tony Stroud, had the opportunity to visit, along with representatives from the Townsville Airport Rescue and Firefighting Service and EMQ, some of North West Queensland’s more remote communities, to conduct training on how to combat aviation incidents at their local airports and surrounding areas.

Over the two weeks, we worked with local Rural Fire Brigades, State Emergency Services personnel, Queensland Ambulance Service personnel and local council in towns including Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Burketown, Normington and Karumba.

As most are small communities, it was great to see the turn out from the different agencies, and the enthusiasm shown by the participants was first rate.

The training sessions started off with some theory lessons on aircraft safety, including how to combat aircraft fires and other incidents such as hot breaks and fuel leaks. They then moved out to the airfield and did some real life familiarisation of aircraft, led by some of the local pilots.

The afternoon was then spent fishing..... Nah just kidding, the live fire exercises were held in the afternoon, giving the crews some ideas on strategies and tactics for combating an aviation incident. We liaised with the local councils to have some dumped cars placed out to look like something that resembled an aircraft. We then lit up different portions of the “aircraft” to let the crews get an idea of what was going to happen.

The final exercise was conducted when the whole aircraft was lit up and the crews were called in (including QAS, QPS, SES) to combat the incident. This is definitely the most enjoyable part of the day for the all involved... Cos now we can all go fishing.....

All in all the training across all communities was a huge success. The professionalism of all agencies involved was first class and the feedback we have received since the event has been excellent. Planning is now underway for next year’s training.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in the training, Tony, Shane, Jack, Elliot, the local QAS and QPS crews, the local councils and especially the volunteers (RFB and SES) – you’re the ones that make this job so good. And for those who are wondering, no, we didn’t catch any fish. Cheers.

A/ATSO Brett Weston
Cloncurry/Charters Towers Area

Volunteer Learning and Development Framework Launched

A new Volunteer Learning and Development Framework was introduced into the Rural Fire Service at the recent Volunteer Conference in April. The purpose of the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework is to provide structure to the knowledge and skill requirements of each volunteer role. With the programs and courses of the new framework aligned to the role you undertake you will not be expected to complete training that is not necessary for the job you do.

While there are some new programs and courses in the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework all the existing training programs remain current and you will not be required to “redo” any training you have previously completed.

In the March 2008 edition of the Bulletin new volunteer membership categories and roles were introduced along with the associated role/rank markings. The Volunteer Learning and Development Framework directly connects training completion to role/rank and, as such, it is necessary for you to complete all the requirements of any program stream, such as Crew Leader, before the applicable epaulette can be issued.

The First Officer rank marking currently remains an exception and continues to be available to those volunteers elected to the role. Issue of the Officer rank markings however, will now be on completion of the appropriate training program. This does not prevent the brigade from electing brigade officers up to the Eighth Officer, using the current business practices however, these officers will no longer be able to wear an officer epaulette unless they have also completed the officer training.

A range of resources supports the introduction of the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework and include an information booklet, role based fact sheets, a promotional DVD and a range of posters. These are all available from your Rural Operations Area Office.
Bushfire CRC Research Adoption

Rural Operations has started to implement a research adoption program to fully capture research outcomes from the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) as it becomes available.

The Bushfire CRC, originally established in 2003 to provide a better understanding of the complex social, economic and environmental aspects of bushfires in Australia, is now approaching the fifth year of a seven year life and research programs are beginning to increase their outputs.

The CRC brings together researchers from universities, CSIRO, private industry and public sector agencies. Over 80 researchers and post graduate students are currently working for the CRC and the present value research outputs has been estimated to be around $800M.

QFRS has been a core partner of the Bushfire CRC from its inauguration. As the Bushfire CRC is approaching its fifth year of a seven year lifespan many research projects are nearing completion and are beginning to increase their outputs. From an organisational perspective it is extremely important that we accelerate knowledge transfer and adoption of Bushfire CRC research outcomes into QFRS and specifically Rural Operations.

To facilitate this process the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations has established a Rural Operations Research Adoption Group with Paul Adcock, Director Rural Operations as Adoption Manager and Bruno Greimel as project coordinator and as Program Coordinator for Program B – Management of fire in the landscape. Assisting me in the complex task transferring the knowledge from the Bushfire CRC research programs into QFRS are:

- Fergus Adrian, Manager, Planning & Research as Program Coordinator for Program A – Safe prevention, preparation and suppression.
- Steve Crouch, Regional Manager South East Region as Program Coordinator for Program C – Community self-sufficiency and fire safety.
- Bernie Trembath, Regional Manager Brisbane Region as Program Coordinator for Program D – Protection of people and property.

Additional assistance and expertise is provided by Debbie Baumann (Finance), Rob Walker (Equipment), Andrew Hopkins (Training), Wayne Bates (Air Operations), Jade Joos (Promotions & Publications) and Jade Hill (Administration).

Change and continuous improvement programs are part of our day to day business. The QFRS Research Adoption Program aims to contribute significantly to this culture of change and improvement by identifying the research relevant to QFRS, implement research outcomes into operational policies and practices across the rural operations operating environment, identify knowledge gaps and set new research directions.
Safety Matters

Homecomings

If you were to nominate the most important thing in your life what would it be? Would it be your work? Or your friends? Or your family?

Most of us would agree that work is an important part of our lives but would you be willing to die for it? What if you were injured at work and could no longer do the things you enjoy doing with your family? Can you imagine the impact on you and your life?

The Queensland Government has recently launched their Homecomings initiative. Many of you may have seen the recent advertisements on television or in local media. This initiative reinforces the message that the most important reason for making your workplace safe, is not at work at all.

It’s a simple message and one which many of our hardworking volunteers understand and live by: an accident at work doesn’t just affect the injured person. Homecomings is an advertising campaign that highlights the impact of workplace death, injury and disease on family, friends and loved ones.

The Department of Emergency Services has embraced the concept of ZEROHarm and the message from this initiative is the same. Having a safe workplace is an integral part of the way we do business whether it is on the fireground, at the station, or at home.

If you have web access you can find more information at the DEIR website on http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/homecomings/index.htm

On another note, it was wonderful to see so many volunteers and staff at the recent Volunteer Conference at Marcoola in April. The Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) trade display was very well attended and there should be lots of ZEROHarm pens out there scribbling away! We also acknowledge and thank the staff from Ergon Energy who provided a wealth of material that is relevant in rural communities and reinforces the same messages of QFRS.

Online WH&S Reporting System

We’ve spoken before about the importance of good early reporting. One of the most important aspects of having a good safety culture and environment is ensuring that hazards, accidents and near misses are reported so that an investigation can be conducted and action taken to ensure that what caused the injury or near miss doesn’t happen again. Another thing to consider is that the things that contributed to that injury or near miss in one area could be an issue in another area as well.

We aim to make reporting as simple as possible. For this reason, the Department of Emergency Services is in the process of rolling out an online reporting system for all staff and volunteers. Although it is still in the trial phase, this system will make reporting an injury or a hazard easy for our volunteers. The department will have a central number that volunteers can call to report WHS issues and this system will automatically notify the appropriate Area Office to enable an investigation to be carried out. It is hoped that we will have access to this system online via the volunteer portal in the near future but with all computer based systems, this will take some time to finalise.

But in the meantime, if you do need to report a WHS issue, contact your local Area Office or complete an incident report form and send it in.
Maroochy River Fire Station Opening, Conondale RFB Appliance Handover and National Medal presentation

On Saturday 31st May The Minister for Emergency Services the Hon Neil Roberts, Staff from the Caloundra Area Office and Volunteers from Maroochy River and surrounding Rural Brigades from the Caloundra Area, attended the official opening of the Maroochy River Rural Fire Brigade station, the handover of a new Nissan Patrol to the Conondale Rural Fire Brigade and the presentation of 9 National Medals to Volunteers from Brigades across the Sunshine Coast.

Medal Recipients were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Rural Fire Brigade</th>
<th>Medal Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter Garrett</td>
<td>Maroochy River RFB</td>
<td>National Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Prentis</td>
<td>Maroochy River RFB</td>
<td>National Medal and Clasp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Welsh</td>
<td>Maroochy River RFB</td>
<td>National Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Thomas</td>
<td>Federal RFB</td>
<td>National Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rozanne Thomas</td>
<td>Federal RFB</td>
<td>National Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Anderson</td>
<td>Doonan RFB</td>
<td>National Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Hook</td>
<td>Doonan RFB</td>
<td>National Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Carson</td>
<td>Black Mountain RFB</td>
<td>National Medal and Clasp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The day was well attended with approximately 60 invited guests present. All enjoyed a social afternoon tea following the official proceeds.

Gary Seaman
Area Director
Caloundra Area Office

Coral Balmoral Memorial

Members from the Toogoom Rural Fire Brigade attended the Coral Balmoral Memorial Dedication Service in Toogoom on Saturday 17th May 2008. A monument has been erected at the Toogoom Community Hall, to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the battle for Fire Bases Coral and Balmoral. The battle was fought in South Vietnam from the 12th May 1968 to the 6th June 1968 and was the largest battle of the Vietnam War.

Toogoom Rural Fire Brigade members, First Officer Matt Murphy, Second Officer Barry Hamilton, Firefighters Leith Stirling, James Murphy and Sarah Murphy, and Brigade Secretary Lisa Murphy took part in the commemoration service. The recently acquired First Aid competencies of James and Sarah Murphy were put to good use in assisting some members of the Australian Army Cadets who succumbed to the heat of the day.
Gemfields Flood recovery efforts recognised

On his annual visit to the Barcaldine and Emerald Area’s, Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell and Director Volunteering and Support, Kerrie Purcell were welcomed to a function on the evening of the 26 March at Sapphire by the Anakie and Gemfields Rural Fire Brigades and Rural Operations Area staff.

During the visit members of the Gemfields RFB were recognised for diligent service to the community and presented with certificates of appreciation for their tireless efforts in supporting the SES group during the major flooding event that swept through the Central Highlands communities of Emerald and the Gemfields in January.

Rural Fire Brigade members worked tirelessly for an extended period throughout flood recovery operations. Other awards were presented to Lorna McArthur (Commissioners Commendation) and a plaque presented to Robert Bailey Anakie RFB for 20 years service.

Area Director Rural Operations Larry Lewis said the awards were a small token of appreciation for the commitment and professionalism volunteers on the Gemfields displayed, and recognition that they went beyond the normal call of duty, working under extreme conditions during and after the flood waters receded.
HAZMAT Training

On the 24th and 31st May 2008 over 30 volunteers from Rangewood, Rupertswood, Rollingstone, Black River, Bluewater, Saunders Beach and staff from the Townsville Area Office worked together with the Urban Crew of the Woodlands Station to familiarise themselves on how to assemble the QFRS Mass Decontamination Tent. These training days are in preparation for a major counter terrorism exercise due to take place on June 24th 2008. This exercise will involve all DES agencies and staff in the Townsville area to assist in the assembly and the operation of the decontamination tent on the day.

The Mass Decontamination Tents located in Townsville are one of two sets in the state, with the second one located in Brisbane. Townsville has two tents in their area; one that is permanently located at the Townsville Hospital and a mobile unit.

The Mass Decontamination tent has separate male and female sections on either side of the tent as well as a conveyor belt in the middle for disabled people. The red sector of the tent is the entrance for the contaminated persons to enter. The yellow sector is the wash down area. The green sector is the clean area. The Mass Decontamination Tent is fully self contained with its own portable generator and portable diesel water heater.

This was a great experience for Rural Fire Service Volunteers to work with Urban staff as well as demonstrating how versatile QFRS is. This equipment will assist the whole of North Queensland in the event of a major hazardous materials or Chemical, Biological and Radiological contamination incident.
Our Volunteers Our Brigades

Ipswich RCR

Rural Fire Service volunteers get involved at the Road Rescue Challenge at Ipswich.
Montville 50th Anniversary and National Medal Presentations

A great day was had by all at the Montville 50th Anniversary celebrations, which was held on the 8th March this year.

Montville RFB celebrated 50 years of operations and supporting their community. The Brigade was formed in 1958 and has a membership of approximately 27 members. The Hon Neil Roberts, Minister for Emergency Services and Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell, along with staff from the Caloundra Area Office were present to honour this milestone and joined in the celebrations with the Brigade members and local community.

National Medals were also presented on the day to the following Brigade members from the Sunshine Coast Area.

- Geoffrey Chant – Valdora Yandina RFB
- Ian Pike – Federal RFB
- Brad Coats – Tinbeerwah RFB
- Bob Vanohr – Coochin Creek RFB
- Ann Vahonr – Coochin Creek RFB
- Justine Choveaux – Tanawha RFB
- Brian Choveaux – Tanawha RFB

A BBQ was held following the official proceeding and was a great time for all to interact and meet with each other.
Central Region

The past three months have been a hectic period of training and skills maintenance for all Brigades and staff in preparation for a significant fire season. The benefits of Brigade level training is reinforced whenever we are called upon to respond to an incident. The ability to keep new volunteers active and to build an effective team within the Brigade requires this level of activity.

Exercises during this period of the year are rapidly gaining popularity and the major Regional Exercise known as Exercise Capricornia is a good example. A range of skills based competitions and a series of other training events that allow Brigades to demonstrate their knowledge and skills are a great opportunity for all volunteers. In May 2008 Exercise Capricornia was sponsored by the Port Curtis Group of the QFRS Rockhampton Area. Expressions of interest are currently being sought for hosting Exercise Capricornia 2009.

A strong focus on safety in the conduct of operations in Rural Fire Brigades is highlighting the need for all Brigades to formally review their Stations and work practices. A number of recent incidents where simple trips and falls have resulted in injuries to fire-fighters highlight the need for greater awareness by all fire-fighters of hazards in the workplace.

All staff in Central Region have now completed Workplace Health and Safety Training and a number of volunteers have completed the package allowing us to implement the ZEROHarm strategy in a local and practical manner.

The volunteer training program in Central Region has produced regular Crew Leader and Fire Fighter Minimum Skills training courses across the Region. When combined with the successful Fire line Leadership courses and the completion of the AIIMS training program there has been a real boost in the ability of Rural fire-fighters to apply the Commissioner’s Command Leadership and Management priority.

Rockhampton Area has just completed Training and Assessment training for 9 volunteers to allow the Area to provide more Brigade level training to volunteers. By completing this training these trainers can now instruct and assess volunteers in the training packages developed by QFRS and will be a huge boost to the productivity of the Region.

Recent rain across Central Queensland and especially the coast has been welcomed by all Brigades and came at a time when many were becoming increasingly concerned at the ability to control hazard reduction burns when the fuel and soil had dried so rapidly. This rain will provide the opportunity to undertake the necessary hazard reduction burns with some increased soil and fuel moisture levels. This will allow Brigades to reduce the level of scorch on over storey canopy and slow the onset of the fire season.

Superintendent John Fisher
Regional Manager Rural Operations
Central Region
Brisbane Region

Once again the weather patterns across the South-East have confounded the doomsayers and those who seek to determine a pattern of change in the long term weather cycles. The recent late season rains have added another dimension to the current season, although the cooler conditions normally experienced at this time of year and the life cycle of the annual grasses should not see any great change to the current available grass fuels across the region.

The recent Volunteer Conference held on the North Coast was a great success and was beneficial to all who attended. The full delegates and the day delegates who attended were full of praise for the organisation and the information that was provided. A CD of the presentations delivered over the two days has been prepared and will soon be provided to all brigades in the Caboolture Area. Please take the opportunity to view the CD and the wide range of ideas and information that each of the speakers provided.

Congratulations to Inspector Peter Varley on his appointment to the position of Area Director Caboolture. Peter will now continue with the programmes and initiatives that he initiated during his time as the Acting AD.

ATSO Eric Lanham is also to be congratulated for his work in developing and delivering the new approach to the training of the new Brigade Training and Support Officers (BTSO) recently recruited by Rural Operations. Eric’s knowledge, experience and dedication to all facets of training are a tremendous benefit to rural Operations and to the Caboolture area. Eric and ATSO Richard Lohse have worked extremely hard to ensure the Area Training programme has been delivered as planned and I thank them for the good work.

Welcome to our latest staff member Graham King who has been appointed as the Caboolture Area Brigade Training Support Officer (BTSO). Graham will be known to many volunteers as an Auxiliary Officer from the Kilcoy Area. Graham will be the first point of contact for day to day brigade management matters.

The Dept. of Natural Resources and Water (DNR&W) have management responsibility for areas of Crown land across Queensland. Included in that responsibility is the need to ensure that where appropriate a fire management regime is established to maintain the integrity of the specific environment and reduce the impacts of unplanned fires.
Regional Updates

In many areas the size of individual land parcels is not great but the location and risk to the community is quite high.

North Stradbroke Island is one area that is particularly significant. The Island consists of National park, mining leases and freehold lands. The coastal Heathland type which comprises the majority of the island vegetation is a flammable, volatile fuel that is difficult to contain under fire weather conditions. The three main communities on the island are at risk if unplanned fires occur during high risk conditions.

David Limburg the DNR&W officer responsible for the management of those lands has developed a fire management programme across the SE Queensland including the Island.

DNR&W have limited resources and work closely with QFRS Rural and Urban and Local Authorities to conduct those burns safely and effectively.

During the week of the 24th of May the mitigation programme was implemented over an area of 150 ha mitigate the risk to the community of Dunwich.

Three rural brigades from the Caboolture Area, Narangba, Clear Mtn and Mt Nebo, travelled to the island to spend two days assisting with the operation. In total there were 22 personnel and eight appliances involved from all agencies. The rural volunteers and their appliances were critical to the outcomes and were praised by David Limburg for their professionalism.

Many other brigades have been involved in mitigation activities to reduce fire risk in designated areas. Operations such as this are always an excellent opportunity to network and to hone operational skills.

Brigade members not only respond to fires and work to protect and inform residents they also participate in many other activities to assist their community.

On that note I cannot emphasise enough the need to work safely at all times. There is an excellent campaign now being run which clearly identifies working safely means returning home safely.

Thank you to all brigade members for your contribution to QFRS and to your community. Although the seasonal workload has been less than at other times we must continue to prepare for the future.

The continuing environmental, economic and political changes impact on our business at an organisational and personal level.

The Future Directions Paper, endorsed by the QFRS Commissioner, has been developed to address these issues and will be the focus of a great deal of work in the near future. Your opinions and ideas will be actively sought as part of our ongoing management of the challenges we can foresee and those we can only imagine.

Superintendent Bernard Trembath
Regional Manager Rural Operations
Brisbane Region
Far Northern Region

After a good wet season conditions have started to dry out rapidly and Brigades have been responded to numerous fires where landholders have underestimated the conditions when burning off. Hazard reduction burning is continuing through the month of May with a major exercise and multi agency prescribed burn planned for June in the Cairns hill slopes and Mona Mona areas.

Lead by our enthusiastic ATSOs and BTSOs, our casual trainers have been active in the past months delivering FMS training and specialised courses to numerous brigades helping to prepare our brigades for the oncoming fire season. A major effort in Crew Leader training has increased the capability of crew leaders in the region, resulting in over 50 members achieving the Crew Leader accreditation. Nine brigade members from the numerous island brigades in the Torres Strait came together in May for Crew Leader training with instruction on fire behaviour and management being offered by ATSO Jamie Haskell, BTSO Bernie Grech and the RMRO. The training was reciprocal with education being provided to the instructors on command and control for water search and rescue, and the passion islanders have for blue and maroon encounters.

The region had 20 members travel to Marcoola for the Volunteer Conference and a fun time was had at event and continued to the airport feeding with the feeding of the Northern and Far Northern groups and witnessing a close encounter with some overseas backpackers. Thank you to all the volunteers that attended the conference giving up their weekend and taking time of work to contribute to the conference and make the weekend a success for all involved.
Regional Updates

A safety audit of all fire stations was completed in the region and thank you to all the brigade members that made themselves available to assist staff in completing the audit and answering the required questions to help improve and increase safety for our members. Any brigades wishing to construct a fire station should contact their Area office for advice on the approval process and best methods to obtain grants to assist in the purchase.

In preparation for the fire season Bush Fire Prepared Community session are being delivered to at risk areas with joint presentations with urban brigades held on the tablelands and near Cooktown, with public safety displays and recruitment drives held at the Atherton Show. Fire management meetings for the Cape York annual aerial incendiary programme under the direction of AD Bryan Cifuentes have commenced with aerial burning scheduled to commence in mid June as the fuel conditions become favourable.

With the increase of Gamba grass plantings in the region, an awareness workshop was held in Mareeba on 30 April for urban and rural firefighters and landholders. Sue Lamb from NT Bushfires shared her experiences of fire suppression issues in the Bachelor area providing awareness of the fire management issues of working with a grass that has the fire intensity of a large forest fire and blamed for the loss of nine structures in NT last year.

The members of Herberton Group, Tableland Lakes Groups and Julatten RFB with support from A/ATSO Joe Torrisi and BTSO Bernie Grech and local Auxiliary members participated fiercely in the recent Far Northern Championships held in Kurrimine. A blistering charge saw Julatten take third place on the podium for one event and help to finish seventh overall. Thank you to the team members, support crew and Rural Operations staff, for your participation and assistance over the weekend in what is now an annual joint urban rural event on the calendar. It would be great to see more teams in next years championships at Kurrimine.

Superintendent Ian Thomas
Regional Manager Rural Operations
Far Northern Region
Regional Updates

Northern Region

Hello to everybody in the Northern Region rural family and welcome to an overview of the activities and events that have increased the profile of rural operations within the Northern Region. Firstly, I would like to welcome and introduce some new arrivals to the Northern Region Rural Operations team, those being, Tracey Wise, Tim Chittenden and Helaine Clerk. Tracey is an Administrative Assistant and provides support to the Regional Manager, whilst Tim and Helaine take up their duties as Brigade Training and Support Officers (BTSo) in the Townsville Area Office. From all the northern region rural family, Welcome and we all look forward to a long and rewarding partnership.

There is already increased fire activity in the Northern Region with brigades responding to many grass and vegetation fires. Vegetation growth across the eastern parts of the region has been well above average and annual rainfall records for the region continue to be challenged with March/April breaking records for nil rain recorded in several key areas.

High evaporation rates and dry conditions have lead to several areas experiencing overnight fires, this will continue until significant rainfall is experienced.

A number of activities and opportunities have spotlighted our region including the
North Queensland Field Days, Northern Regional Firefighter Championships, Northern Region Road Crash Rescue Competitions, Volunteer Conference, Community Cabinet, Radio Enhancement package, Career Expo and Emergency Management Summit

A number of our regional volunteers attended the inaugural Volunteer Conference held at Surfari Maroocla in April this year. The conference provided an opportunity for our volunteers to meet and socialise with their state-wide counterparts and hear first hand the opportunities and challenges that rural operations have focused on and are pursuing into the future.

A number of topics were presented and discussed, together with a full arena of displays that captured the curiosity of all that viewed and passed their way. All volunteers said it was very informative and gave them an excellent opportunity to ask questions of the organisation, future direction and many other issues.

An ideal opportunity to thrust our new BTSo into the limelight presented itself recently, in the form of the North Queensland Field Days. The event gave them first hand experience in promoting our volunteers to the community, promoting the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework to RFB members, and, of course, taking every opportunity to recruit new members to the RFS ranks. This activity has also led to brigades assessing their equipment needs and there is a lot of new PPE and fire-fighting equipment being ordered in readiness for the upcoming fire season. The field days were a tremendous success and a welcome introduction to life in the Townsville area for the BTSo.

A number of our volunteers and their supporters gathered and competed in the Regional Firefighter Championships at Bowen recently. Although we did not win an event, our competitors and supporters already won the weekend through our commitment, enthusiasm and the spirited manner in which we competed. This did not go unnoticed and I am convinced, that Rural Operations will “kick a little butt” in future competitions. To all those competitors and supporters, (the sea of yellow was a sight to behold) well done and once again you did us proud.

The Road Crash Rescue Competition (RCR) was held recently in Innisfail, and was a combined event between Far Northern and Northern Region. Northern Region was well represented by Palm Island, and after a fierce two day battle between nine well matched teams, our Palm Island finished a credible 6th. I would like to congratulate Illy and the team for their commitment and enthusiasm, and for once again demonstrating that nothing is too much of a challenge to our volunteers.

Many brigades are assisting with much needed hazard reduction burns and bushfire mitigation advice in their local areas. Brigades have also been keeping the community spirit, alive, by assisting at local events. The Black River and District RFB, with assistance from a number of neighbouring brigades, provided assistance at the Monster Truck Show recently, and the Lime Hills Elliot RFB supported the “Hot Rocks” mountain bike event at Ross River Dam.

April saw the successful running of the Remote Airport Firefighting Training program for our volunteers and the communities of Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Burketown, Normanton and Karumba. May saw the successful completion of the first ever Crew Leader course in Cloncurry. This was a challenging experience for both crew leaders and trainers alike, well done to Shane, Brett, Tony and the team for a well delivered and well run course. I would especially like to congratulate Michelle and Gary for the culinary expertise they provided to the course, all were well satisfied.

Rural Operations in partnership with the Doomadgee Community Development Employment Project recently recruited 10 new volunteers. These members will complete their Firefighter
Minimum Skill sets by the end of May. Similarly with Mornington Island RFB, the brigade now has eight new members through the Community Development Education Program plus two from QPS and one from QAS. Brett Weston has been busy assisting and delivered training to the indigenous Auxiliary Recruit Training Education Program course in Mt Isa. The recruits will attain the Crew Leader qualification after receiving training in Respond to Wildfire, Suppress Wildfire and Work Autonomously.

Community education and recruiting programs have been our main thrust in the Charters Towers Cloncurry area. Local Action Plans, Bushfire Prepared Communities sessions and recruiting opportunities are being conducted in many towns and communities throughout the West.

The Ayr / Home Hill area is one of the only areas where cane is still fired before harvesting. Area staff have been discussing awareness strategies for Fire Wardens who have difficulties with people who do not understand the permit system or comply with permit conditions. Some brigades are looking at new letter drops and billboard style signs at their fire stations, or at vantage points when entering fire warden areas, "pushing" the liability aspects of not getting a permit rather than the "big stick" penalty angle. Our fire wardens play a vital role in the community and are normally the first point of contact for many people when dealing with the Rural Fire Service, so please continue to support our fire wardens, particularly during this heightened fire season.

I have had the opportunity to meet a number of our volunteers and fire wardens, and look forward to meeting many more into the future. I will endeavour to visit as many brigades and members as possible over the coming months.

Superintendent Steve Barber
Regional Manager Rural Operations
Northern Region

South East Region

I returned to the Regional Office on June 2nd after enjoying some extended annual leave. Whilst the break was a relaxing time to catch up with family and friends it also refreshes the enthusiasm to return to work and continue to be a part of the Rural Fire Service future. Thanks to Inspector Andrew Hopkins who relieved in the Regional Managers position during my absence.

Congratulations to the South Eastern Region delegates who attended the Volunteer Conference on the North Coast. It is pleasing to hear that the information provided to you is being passed on to the brigades in your area. A true and accurate delegates report will allow all volunteers to better understand the future for Rural Fire Brigades.

Preparation for the fast approaching fire season is under way across the region with many brigades seeking assistance in developing LAP’s (Local Action Plans) for identified risks in their brigade areas. The Group Officer workshop, conducted by Area Director Craig Smith, appears to have sparked enthusiasm in identifying risks and formulating a collaborative approach on addressing all risk issues.

Crew Leader and New Member training has been progressing well over recent times with 72 volunteers successfully completing the Crew Leader course and 114 volunteers attending the New Members course. Acknowledgement must be made to all the staff and volunteers who have attended these training courses whether it is as a participant or trainer. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

The formation of Regional Councils is now starting to impact upon brigades across the Region and as a result meaningful consultation is imperative to achieve the desired result for all concerned. Please contact the Ipswich Area Office to discuss issues which are affecting your brigade. A joint consultative approach is the best option in achieving the best result for all concerned parties.

Good luck and keep safe.

Superintendent Steve Crouch
Regional Manager Rural Operations
South East Region
Regional Updates

South West Region

In March this year, Col Neal (BTSO, Roma) and Craig Magick (Casual Trainer, Roma) visited Wyandra and were lucky enough to stay at the ‘Wyandra Hilton’. The luxury accommodation at the back of the local store included air conditioning (open air accommodation with only 2 walls) and all the mod cons; 2 TV’s, wood stove, radio, pool table, dart board, piano and fridge. While enjoying their stay they delivered Fire Ed to the 24 students at the local school and held a Brigade Meeting covering correct use of PPE, operating procedures and Respond to Remote Structure Fires.

On 29 April 2008, the Toowoomba Area and South West Region ran a five day IMS Course which brought together Toowoomba Regional Council, Environmental Protection Agency, Forest Plantations Queensland and Natural Recourses and Water representatives, and Rural Fire Volunteers and staff to share their experiences and gain further knowledge in Incident Management. The course was facilitated by Toowoomba Area Training and Support Officer, Brian Cook and Tim Akers from South West Regional Training.

As Regional Manager for South West I felt the outcomes from the course were extremely positive. Getting the agencies together with our volunteers and staff for a course such as this demonstrates the relationship building Rural Operations staff has achieved in the South West. Gaining skills in incident management was one outcome of the course, but the opportunity to develop networks between staff, volunteers and other agencies certainly is a bonus.
The Regional Fire Fighter Competitions were held in Miles over the weekend of May 30. 12 teams took part in the competitions with Cambooya Rural Fire Brigade doing themselves proud by taking out two third places, first place in the rural event and fifth place overall. Congratulations, well done guys!!

North Coast Region

Weather conditions have generally been dry in recent weeks in North Coast Region and curing rates are around 70% in coastal areas and 80% percent in western areas of the region. Fuel levels are higher than normal following good spring and summer rains. Fuel quantities are however decreasing to moderate levels where grazed.

The severity of the coming fire season will depend on rainfall amounts during late winter and spring.

I congratulate the three new Brigade Training and Support Officers Nigel Higgs, (Caloundra) Neil Davidson (Maryborough) and Dion Skinner (Bundaberg) on their appointment and welcome them to the region. At long last we are getting the staff we need to support the volunteers.

I attended the naming of the Gympie South RFB medium appliance in recognition of the distinguished service of Doug Ellis second officer of Gympie South RFB on Saturday May 10. Doug has given 20 years of outstanding volunteer service in the capacities of first and second officer, fire warden, task force member and Cooloola Shire IMT member. Brigade members spoke very highly of Doug’s volunteer service to the brigade and the wider community.

Area staff and RFB volunteer members of the new Regional Council RFB finance committees attended meetings to collate brigade budgets and prepare 2008/2009 funding submissions to regional councils. Regional councils will consider the funding requests at their budget meetings in coming weeks. Regional councils have also been asked to consider adopting the policy of many previous shire councils and provide council equipment free of charge to assist RFB’S at times of large fires.

A/Superintendant Warren Edwards
A/Regional Manager Rural Operations
North Coast Region

South West Region Rural Operations staff recently conducted a controlled burn at the Millmerran Sporting Shooters Association of Australia. This was a hazard reduction burn following on from last years exercise held at the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia. The residual burning exercise was considered to be a huge success with staff competency maintenance a priority. Nine staff attended the exercise extended over three days and displayed outstanding teamwork, effort and camaraderie. Non-operational staff observed and participated in many basic fire skills with a focus on fire safety. Thankyou to Warwick Group, Cambooya and Forest Pines Rural Fire Brigades for the use of their vehicles.

Superintendent Wayne Waltisbuhl
Regional Manager Rural Operations
South West Region
## Contact Details for Area Offices

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