Election commitment funding

This government’s 2009 election commitment funding to ‘Support Our Heroes’ has allocated $7.34 million over four years for Queensland’s Rural Fire Service by providing 14 new heavy fire appliances, retrofitting Rural Fire Service appliances with fire reflective curtains to protect fire fighters should they be trapped in their vehicle and increasing the safety of vehicles used in fires by replacing petrol driven pumps with diesel driven pumps.

In relation to the 14 heavy appliances, these will be owned by QFRS and allocated to brigades on a seasonal risk assessment. Under this approach we will be able to re-locate appliances within Regions or into adjoining Regions should the need dictate. The initial allocation in 2009/2010 will see six appliances built.
**What’s New**

**Bushfire CRC community profiling workshop**

On 22 April 2009, 13 members of the Wieambilla South Rural Fire Brigade participated in a community profiling workshop, alongside Michael Patch (Area Training and Support Officer, Miles), Matthew Prain (Community Liaison Officer, Dalby Shire Council), Doug Bougoure (Customer Service Centre Manager, Tara Customer Service Centre), Ros Wade (Centre Manager of Tara Neighbourhood Centre), Dr Alison Cottrell (James Cook University) and Judy Newton (Manager Research, Community Education & Research Unit, QFRS).

The workshop was an opportunity to trial the new Community Profiling Tool, developed by Dr Alison Cottrell, and establish a community profile. The Community Profiling Tool enables brigades to identify potential risks in their community, including people who may be at risk in the event of a bushfire. All attendees were able to provide local knowledge and were collectively able to discuss and workshop potential solutions.

The Community Profiling Tool has been developed in the form of a guide titled “Know your Patch to Grow your Patch”. This guide was compiled from extensive research performed by the Bushfire CRC under the “Understanding Communities Project”. In the guide, Dr Alison Cottrell states, “Knowing your patch at the local level for fire services is not just about knowing what the fire risk is and the important infrastructure that needs protecting. Knowing your patch is also about who lives in your community, their vulnerabilities and capacities for dealing with bushfires, their perceptions of bushfires, expectations of fire services, expectations the fire service have of the community and organisational needs to address these issues.”

**Rural Fire Service essay competition**

To help celebrate Queensland’s 150th birthday and promote the importance of volunteering, the Department of Community Safety ran an essay competition for primary school students in Years 4 to 7. The competition focused on celebrating emergency services volunteers and asked entrants to write a story about how much they know about the role of emergency services in their community.

Amber White, a student at St Joseph’s School Barcaldine, won the competition for Years 4 to 5 for her essay on how State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers help in her local community. Bernard Dolinski of Muttaburra State School won for Years 6 – 7 with his essay which chose the Rural Fire Service as the group he would like to volunteer for.

Amber and Bernard were each presented with a cheque for $250 by Premier Anna Bligh at the Barcaldine Q150 event on the 2 May 2009. The winners also won $1500 for their schools.
Volunteer leaders program

In previous years a number of Rural Fire Service volunteers from across the State have had the opportunity to attend the Australasian Fire Authorities Council’s (AFAC) Volunteer Leaders Program.

The Volunteer Leaders Program is a five day intensive program held at the Australasian Institute of Police Management. The program aims to develop leadership within volunteer emergency services so that leaders and organisations are better prepared for future challenges.

In April this year, Brian Byers, Second Officer from Bonogin Valley Rural Fire Brigade had the opportunity to attend the program thanks to the support of Dulux and Bunnings Warehouse.

Brian said that after applying for the program for the last three years, and given the number of applicants that apply each year, he was extremely pleased to be accepted into the April intake.

“The program convened at the Australasian Institute of Police Management in the former school of Artillery, located on Sydneys picturesque North Head and it was a very full five days,” he said.

“There were guest speakers and AFAC Fellows who lectured on a wide range of topics to provide a better understanding of leadership concepts, covering everything from personality types, influencing people through communication, media training and teachings on emotional intelligence and generational differences.

“We also attended the sports facility where we participated in a range of individual and group activities. There was a problem solving activity that brought out the competitive streak in us all, as well as archery and rope activities.

“I feel I learnt a lot over the five days,” Brian said.

“I learnt a lot about teams and how to make them work, and about being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses and those of your team. For me the most useful part of the program was learning about how “people work” and how people react in certain situations - not only in operational firefighting and management, but in your personal and work life as well.

“Every aspect of the course provided information and knowledge that will help me better fulfil my role as a Second Officer with the Bonogin Valley RFB and as a casual trainer. The better I can communicate as an officer and a trainer, the safer the environment for those I work with.”

For more information on the Volunteer Leaders Program visit http://www.aipm.gov.au/vlp.html

Father of the Rural Fires board

We were sad to learn that on 7 May 2009 the “father of the Rural Fires Board” Dick Healy passed away.

As many of you will know, Dick took on the position of Secretary of the Rural Fires Board in 1948 and for the 30 years that followed Dick dedicated himself to the Rural Fire Service and rural fire brigades.

Dick’s contribution to the Rural Fire Service ranged from the registration of the first brigade in 1949, to the implementation of the Fire Warden system and much more.

Even after leaving the position of Secretary of the Board in 1978, Dick remained involved with the RFS. During the recent bushfires in Victoria, Mr Healy’s opinion and recommendations were sought in many TV interviews.

We would like to acknowledge the work of Dick Healy and his dedication to rural fire brigades. For 30 years he supported brigades, volunteers and Queensland communities.

Dick Healy was 92 years of age.
What’s New

**More about Volunteer Community Educators**

In the last edition of the Bulletin magazine we outlined the new roles being implemented in the Rural Fire Service (RFS) structure, in particular, the Volunteer Community Educator. Since March a considerable amount of progress has been made.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said Volunteer Community Educators will form a network of volunteers to deliver community education messages to their local communities.

“The Community Educator role will be dedicated to providing bushfire and fire safety education,” he said.

“The role will deliver Bushfire Prepared Communities, Prepare, Stay and Defend or Go Early and assist in the development and implementation of Bushfire Action Plans. The role will also present programs currently delivered by urban firefighters including Safehome, Fire Ed and smoke alarm education.

“Community education programs play a vital role in raising the awareness of at risk communities and in maintaining individual and community readiness. They are essential to a community’s safety.”

Volunteers who are appointed to the new role will receive structured training that will support the delivery of community education programs.

Training and ongoing support will be provided through local area offices, office staff and key personnel of Rural Operations

“This new role is an ideal opportunity for existing volunteers who do not wish to undertake an active role or no longer feel they are capable of remaining an operational firefighter to still be actively involved in delivering community safety,” Assistant Commissioner Rothwell said.

“This is also an opportunity for brigades to appeal to members of their communities who previously may not have considered volunteering with the RFS.”

Rural Operations will continue to develop this role and support structure through consultation with volunteers and the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland.

More information on the new role and how to nominate for it will be communicated in the coming months.

Nominations for the role are not currently being accepted however if you have any questions please contact Peta Miller, Brigade Training and Support Officer Ipswich on (07) 3381 7122.

**What is it like to volunteer for the RFS?**

It’s a fact! Volunteers are essential to the success of the RFS! It’s no wonder that the QFRS is interested in the personal experiences of volunteers and how they can be improved.

QFRS Rural Operations are working with a researcher from University of Queensland to conduct a survey of RFS volunteer firefighters. This survey will be a part of the researcher’s PhD thesis and examines the personal experiences of volunteers in the RFS and the things that influence these experiences.

Results from this survey will help QFRS Rural Operations understand RFS volunteering better. The survey asks about volunteers’ attitudes toward particular activities as well as their opinions on the leadership style in their brigades. The survey also hopes to learn how valued volunteers feel and whether this has an impact on their decision to stay with the RFS as a volunteer. This information will help us understand what makes the RFS an organisation where volunteers want to join and then stay.

Participating is easy! A random selection of First Officers and firefighters have received a copy of the survey with this edition of the Bulletin. We strongly encourage all volunteer firefighters (including trainees) who receive the survey to participate. Participation is anonymous and for twenty minutes of your time you can help improve our understanding of what it’s like to volunteer for the RFS. More details about the research are available on the front page of the survey.
On Saturday 23 May 2009 a new stage began for the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and Rural Operations with the launch of RFS Flexible Learning and the showcase of the new RFS Volunteer Portal.

Launched by Murray Watt MP, Member for Everton, and demonstrated by Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell, these new learning and communication mediums provide more flexibility and choice for RFS volunteers.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said flexible learning is one way Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) is supporting RFS volunteers.

“Flexible learning provides more options for volunteers to choose from when undertaking training,” he said.

“These options include a range of different learning choices such as workbooks, podcasts, DVDs and even online courses, all of which supplement face-to-face training.

“Having these options allows volunteers to choose training that best suit their lifestyles and learning styles, and it will be particularly beneficial to volunteers who find it difficult to dedicate large blocks of time to face-to-face training.”

The first of the flexible learning products, RFS Awareness, was released at the launch and will now be provided to all new RFS volunteers through their welcome kit, while a range of additional products are currently in production.

Another new initiative designed to support volunteers was the re-development of the RFS Volunteer Portal.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said the new site has been designed to make volunteers’ jobs easier and to provide consistent communication from all levels of the organisation.

“The new site includes information essential to volunteers such as the Brigade Manual, Operations Doctrine, workplace health and safety information, operations updates and more,” he said.

“Brigades have access to a range of data on conditions around the state through the Fire Danger Rating Graphic, Wildfire Alert Level, weather updates as well as the drought index, curing reports and hotspots.

“Through the Map Shop they can access administrative and operational maps to support planning and response however perhaps the most important initiative of the new Portal is the Training Toolbox.

“The Training Toolbox includes a series of video clips or “Learning Bytes” as they are called, on a range of topics such as equipment, fire behaviour and more.

“We are very pleased to release the new RFS volunteer portal and I encourage all volunteers to explore the range of information, tools and communication methods it offers.

“What I have mentioned here is just the start of what volunteers will find on the site and Rural Operations will continue to improve and develop the Volunteer Portal with new information, updates, tools and Training Bytes.

“I would also like to acknowledge Closeburn Rural Fire Brigade who gave up their time to participate in the filming of many of the Learning Bytes”.

Rural Fire Service Volunteer Portal showcase and launch of Flexible Learning
**Appliances**

The 2008/2009 build of 21 medium appliances (10 single and 11 dual cab) is progressing with all appliances due for completion by June with delivery shortly after. Based on the Isuzu NPS300 4x4 cab chassis these appliances are designed to meet Euro 4 emission standards.

This build of appliances will mark a number of milestones for Rural Operations, with the first dual cab appliances being commissioned. All appliances will be fitted with diesel pumps, which is fuelled from the main cab chassis and a pump control panel which includes pressure and compound gauges, pump hour meter, foam control switch and pump throttle. A low water warning light will also be part of the standard equipment. This warning light will activate when the tank has reached 25% capacity and will allow the Officer In Charge to better manage the resources available. Wet and dry lockers are provided and the 15 litre water bottle has been replaced with a 44 litre esky.

Being constructed by Mills-Tui Australia P/L the appliances will be delivered with a training package developed to assist brigades with ongoing training and maintenance.

**Pre fire season readiness**

Over the past months many areas have received considerable rainfall which has resulted in an increase in vegetation, which over the winter months will start to cure and die off. With this in mind brigades should be preparing for the upcoming fire season. Business Rule A2.2 from the Rural Fire Brigade Manual contains information which will assist brigades in this preparation.

First Officers should conduct audits of the PPC worn by brigade members and if the garments are frayed or torn requisitions should be placed with area offices for replacement garments. Boots should be ordered on a separate requisition form.

As part of this preparation, brigades should be ensuring that their appliances are properly serviced and maintained, this includes the appliance pump and any ancillary pumps the brigade may have. It is a requirement that appliances are issued with a certificate of inspection or a safety certificate annually.
**AFAC 09**

The 16th Annual Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) Conference, incorporating the 6th Bushfire CRC Conference, is being held on the Gold Coast from 22 to 25 September 2009.

AFAC represents all public sector fire, land management and emergency service organisations in Australia and New Zealand. It fosters and promotes an integrated approach to emergency service organisations in Australia and New Zealand. It fosters and promotes and integrated approach to emergency service operations and business management by identifying opportunities to share knowledge, collaborate and optimise the use of resources.

The Bushfire CRC is the peak research body for the fire industry in this region, jointly funded by the Commonwealth Government under the Co-operative Research Centres Program and stakeholders from the fire and land-management agencies as well as research partners such as CSIRO and major universities.

The annual AFAC/Bushfire CRC is the largest emergency services forum held in Australia. Over 1300 delegates attend from over 25 countries.

There are a range of different attendance and cost options. For more information visit www.afac2009.org.au.

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**Primary Producer Brigade (PPB) project update**

**Project concept:**

As part of the Brigade Classification Review Strategy, Rural Operations put forward a new brigade classification and service delivery model called “Primary Producer Brigade.” This new model, which supports 650 brigades, was presented and endorsed at an open forum in Charters Towers. A project team was established to progress the 76 recommendations and a project model and trial has been undertaken with a number of brigades. This has resulted in wide spread participant support and gained endorsement from the then Rural Fire Advisory Council, Rural Operations and the RFBAQ.

**Benefit:**

The new brigade classification provides dedicated tools for Primary Producer Brigades by clearly identifying their specific needs and minimising unnecessary training and administrative burden, which is a key factor identified in the consultation process.

**What we have achieved:**

Rural Operations and the project team have been working through the 76 recommendation and many of them have been incorporated into your brigade management or activities. Some of the major milestones achieved so far include a Legal definition for “Authorised Brigade Activity (Business Rule for brigade manuals), Slip On Unit model, PPB Manual specifically for PPB’s (which will be printed with the new version of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual), Partnership Agreement between brigades and Rural Operations and competencies within the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework specifically for PPBs.

The team is still working to finalise the Role Descriptor for PPB Team Leaders.

**Where to from here:**

Full implementation across Queensland is expected to commence within each region from July this year. Each Area Office will co-ordinate a meeting with the relevant PPB brigades to provide an overview, discuss the process and answer questions that arise.

Steve Barber  
Regional Manager Rural Operations  
Primary Producer Brigade Chairperson
Volunteer walkout uniform

Earlier this year Rural Operations was pleased to be able to offer to selected brigade types and volunteer positions the opportunity to receive the QFRS official station wear uniform free of charge.

Due to the popularity of the uniform and ongoing requests, Rural Operations was able to set aside funding to provide the uniform to Rural Fire Service Group Officers, First Officers of iZone brigades, Crew Leaders and Qualified Brigade Training Officers. It is hoped that this offer will be able to be extended in the future and progressively rolled out to other brigades and positions.

Prior to this initiative, Rural Fire Service volunteers have been able to obtain/wear the QFRS station wear uniform, as is detailed in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual however the associated cost was borne by the respective volunteer.

The primary intention of this initiative is to enable the official QFRS station wear uniform to be provided to identified categories of Rural Fire Service volunteers free of charge, and to encourage it being worn at official brigade activities and functions such as training, station openings, vehicle handovers and medal presentations.

Name badges to wear with this uniform, which incorporate the Rural Fire Service logo, can be ordered free of charge from Rural Operations Area Offices.

Whilst the wearing of the QFRS station wear uniform by volunteers is supported and encouraged, it is not obligatory and is therefore at the discretion of the individual volunteer.

Application for permit to burn

Over the past couple of months staff have been researching the permit to burn system and as a result of this research a new Application for Permit to Burn form has been developed. Issued to persons wishing to obtain a permit to burn, the new form allows fire wardens to make a more informed decision when issuing a permit.

The new forms are double sided and as well as having all the usual information there is a new area to allow the applicant to include a map of the purposed burn area. Stocks are currently being printed and will be available from your Area Office in the coming weeks.
News Update

Reliance Petroleum sponsorship

The Reliance Petroleum sponsorship, in partnership with BP, has continued with the following handovers occurring between February and May:

- Tingarra
- Mount Urah
- Home Creek
- Lowestoff
- Mitchell Palmer
- Alice Palmer
- Charters Towers
- Nottingham

There are two more slip-on units to be handed over before the end of the financial year. Rural Operations will continue to sponsor the supply of speed loaders to accompany these slip on units.

The brigades receiving these slip on units have reportedly been putting them to good use and we look forward to reporting on the next round of handovers in the November edition of the Bulletin.

Reliance Petroleum operates throughout rural and regional Australia and is Australia’s largest BP fuel and lubricant distributor, as well as a distributor of the full range of quality Castrol products.
How do I conduct a risk assessment?

Risk is a part of life and every day each and every one of our decisions is concerned with risk and how we manage it. When we cross the street we instinctively know that there is a risk that we may get run over. So we take appropriate action to ensure that this doesn’t happen – for example we use a pedestrian crossing.

Risk management aims to reduce the likelihood and impact of mishaps of all kinds. When dealing with fire and its inherent dangers we automatically take a risk management approach. It is second nature in an operational situation.

Risk assessment is the foundation of risk management and aims to identify which risks are most in need of action and leads to developing options for reducing those risks.

The first step in the risk management process is to identify workplace hazards that could lead to something happening – in other words, an incident. A hazard is defined as anything which has the potential to cause harm in terms of injury or ill-health, damage to property, damage to the environment, or a combination of these.

Generally a risk assessment should be undertaken wherever there is the potential for an incident to occur that could have serious consequences.

This following diagram illustrates the five steps to risk assessment:

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<tr>
<th>Break task into steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify the hazards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess the risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control the hazards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor and Review</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Once you’ve identified the hazard/s you then need to assess them in terms of the potential consequences. You might consider discussing this with your colleagues or with QFRS staff. This may have happened in other situations, so sharing the information is a good way to develop strategies for controlling the hazards.

Achieving a safe workplace is the result of knowing about and doing something to control risk. It doesn’t mean there are no risks, but it does mean that the risks are so low that the work can be completed safely.

Sharing the learnings

As we’ve done in previous issues, here is another case study which is a summary of a recent Workplace Healthy and Safety (WHS) incident. There was a wildfire incident late last year which involved a number of smaller fires which combined to form a large fire front. A number of Primary Producer Brigades were involved in managing the incident, and a number of the members of the community were involved in its management - this occurs regularly in these types of incidents. Some of these volunteers were not registered members of their local brigades and as such, they had not completed any formal training in firefighting operations.

One of these non-registered volunteers sustained a serious injury during mop up activities. The injured volunteer was conducting firefighting duties at the time of the incident and although they had experience from assisting in prior wildfire events, they had no formal RFS training.

A WHS investigation was conducted into the circumstances surrounding how the volunteer was injured with the aim of ensuring that there are systems in place to prevent this from occurring again. One of the key recommendations was the development of appropriate training for senior RFS personnel (First Officer and above) in WHS responsibilities and requirements of senior officers in the incident management process.

In particular it was recommended that this training should focus on how to quickly identify the skills needed in an operational setting by non-registered volunteers. A quick risk assessment tool is under development which will serve as a prompt for those in control of an incident to remember to ask the right questions before putting a non-registered volunteer on the fireground.

It’s a well known fact that in fighting wildfire, communities rely on their members to assist where they can. But it is vital to ensure their safety in those activities. This includes understanding our obligations to these volunteers as “workers” within the context of WHS and ensures that there is a clear understanding and assessment of their skills and abilities to participate in operations. Taking five minutes to identify their skills and assign them appropriately before they go out on the fireground could save a life.

Finally, and most importantly, the injured volunteer made a full recovery and is back to their normal activities again.
Drug and alcohol management plan advice

As a result of a fatal accident on Hamilton Island in 2004, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau recommended that the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) jointly examine the safety benefits of a testing regime for alcohol and other drugs in the aviation sector.

Following receipt of the report, the Australian Government directed CASA to commence work to implement the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) initiative, which would include AOD testing for aviation safety-sensitive personnel. The aim of the initiative is to minimise AOD related risks associated with the performance of safety-sensitive activities in the aviation industry. It is not aimed at identifying people who may have used AOD at times when this use did not impact on aviation safety.

New laws were introduced regarding the use of alcohol and drugs in the aviation industry and took effect as of 23 September 2008. These laws require all aviation service providers to implement a Drug and Alcohol Management Plan (DAMP) by March 2009, which has drug and alcohol education, testing and response programs. The overall program is designed to assist those associated with the civil aviation industry to better understand the significance of alcohol and other drug use in their environment, and to ensure that those people are aware of the serious risks posed by the possible impairment caused by the use of alcohol and drugs in that environment.

A DAMP has been developed by the Department of Community Safety for Emergency Management Queensland, Helicopter Services as required under the new laws.

In the case of QFRS Air Operations, whilst we are not required to develop our own DAMP, all contractors used by the service must have a DAMP in place.

What does this mean for all staff and volunteers?

Effective immediately, ANY Departmental employee or volunteer may be required to submit to random drug testing conducted by CASA if they are considered to be undertaking an activity, or if they are available to undertake an activity in an aerodrome testing area. This includes being present at an aerodrome in any capacity other than that of a passenger.

This will affect those members of the Department undertaking, or preparing to undertake, activities such as medical retrieval, aerial spotting, landing strip preparation etc. Roles which may be the subject of testing are: Air Attack Supervisors, Air Observers, Air Base Managers, Air Base Operators, Pilots, Engineers and any other person who is on the “airside” area of an airport and is performing an airborne or ground support role. (Note: This list is not exhaustive.)

There are offences for:

- failing to carry appropriate ID (incorporating a photo, name, date of birth and address)
- refusing to give a body sample (CASA will be conducting breath and saliva tests)
- continuing to perform aviation safety sensitive activities when prohibited under the regulation.

Any person undertaking safety sensitive aviation activities (SSAA) must not test positive for testable drugs or have a blood alcohol content exceeding 0.02%. It should be noted that this alcohol concentration is relatively low and that it may be possible for some people to meet or exceed this limit with very small amounts of beer, wine or other alcohol. Significantly, personnel who have consumed significant quantities in the late evening may still have significant blood alcohol content (BAC) readings the next morning.

Please note that drug and alcohol testing conducted by CASA will use breath and oral fluid samples. In the event that a person is detected they will be required by law to cease their role and leave the immediate operational area, (ie move behind the fence at an airport for example).

In addition to any action required by law, agency personnel who are detected whilst working on agency operations will be dealt with in accordance with the Department’s Code of Conduct policy. This information will be updated as appropriate.

Further information is available from the CASA website http://aod.casa.gov.au/aod/.

If you have any concerns or would like to discuss further, please contact the Manager Air Operations on 07 3109 7781.
Agforce field day at Dunblane Barcaldine

Rural Operations Staff at Barcaldine and Emerald have recently participated in information sessions with AgForce and other key stakeholders. The aim of these have been to promote the safety message out “to the paddock” with other like minded agencies such as FarmSafe Queensland, Ergon Energy and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

The field days have been held in shearing sheds and station workshops and have been well attended by members of Primary Producer Brigades from across the Region.

Working in partnership with these organisations assists in communicating the ZEROharm message and more sessions will be held in the future.

To learn more about these programs visit www.emergency.qld.gov.au
Rural Research and Training

Portable Fire Weather Station Trial

The Rural Operations Research and Training Unit recently purchased a Columbia Pegasus EX automatic fire weather station to undertake a 12 month trial into the suitability of portable weather stations to support QFRS operations. The remote automatic weather station is thought to improve overall weather information efficiency and effectiveness. The station is designed for rapid deployment to incidents to assist in managing emergencies and improving safety and operational efficiency.

Accurate weather information is vital for fire operations. Although the Bureau of Meteorology currently operates a network of over 80 Remote Automatic Weather Stations (RAWS), their location does not sufficiently cover all areas that are susceptible to fire. Although there are several methods presently being used to infer weather and fire risk variables to locations where there are no measurements, it is unknown if this provides the quality local data needed to accurately forecast or assess weather conditions on the fireground so that fire risk management can be made more efficient and effective.

The Pegasus fire weather station is capable of monitoring, recording and transmitting high quality local meteorological data relevant to fire danger prediction. The station is equipped with a standard suite of high quality meteorological sensors that measure wind speed and direction, temperature and relative humidity. These can be augmented by optional sensors that provide measurements of fuel moisture, fuel temperature, and solar radiation.

Data can be transmitted over a variety of telecommunication options which include wireless transceivers UHF/VHF radio or satellite link. At present we are using a 2.4 GHz wireless transceiver as communication link to provide local weather data to incident personnel or the Bureau of Meteorology.

The trial of the portable fire weather station includes:

- providing support to prescribed burning operations and large scale incidents
- support the Bushfire CRC Vesta validation project
- compare the accuracy between BoM Remote Automatic Weather Stations, the Pegasus fire weather station and commonly used hand held weather meters such as the various models of Kestrel Weather Meters and the WindMate weather meter
- explore the most suitable options for live data transfer from the remote weather station at an incident. Options could include communication links using satellites, VHF, UHF radio, wireless internet or a combination of these
- liaise with the Bureau of Meteorology throughout the trial period to better integrate local weather data into their forecasts and automatic weather station network.

During the trial period the weather station will be operated by Rural Operations Research and Training staff based at Head Office but the equipment will be available to support operations at large scale incidents across the State.
There have been a number of exciting developments since the last edition of the Bulletin, including a showcase event at the Kedron Park Complex. This showcase highlighted the new RFS Volunteer Portal and launched the first of the new flexible learning for volunteers products, the RFS Awareness and the Training Toolbox. Attendees had the opportunity to review the new suite RFS Awareness learning objects and take a tour of the Training Toolbox. Both of these products are now available to volunteers and we would encourage brigades to access and make use of these valuable resources.

A number of projects have also been progressed during this time and will be available in the very near future. Two such projects are the Flexible Learning for First Aid and Managing Difficult Situations. Both of these projects are on schedule with First Aid anticipated to be available from July 2009 and Managing Difficult Situations from August 2009.

Both of these programs will include a range of options to allow volunteers to choose what best suits their lifestyle and learning styles and will be particularly beneficial for those volunteers that have found it difficult to dedicate large blocks of time to face-to-face training. I would encourage you to explore the new training options as they become available and talk to your Brigade Training and Support Officer who can give you more information.
In late April Rural Operations Research and Training staff played host to a group of US and Canadian firefighters and fire managers currently on a three week study tour in Australia and New Zealand. The group is visiting Australian and New Zealand fire services and fire management agencies as part of a US, Canadian and Australian exchange program organised by the Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG), the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) and the US National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG).

These three organisations have a long standing recognition that there are many wildfire management similarities between North America, Canada and Australia. Regular visits, study tours, occasional officer exchange programs and research collaborations have occurred leading to several operational and logistical support arrangements and research links.

The core theme of this study group was centred on managing the risk of wildfire and wildfires in the urban interface, community participation in fire prevention programs and collaborative training and research opportunities.

During their brief Queensland visit the group undertook a tour of the operational training and live fire facilities at the QFRS School of Fire & Rescue Training at Whyte Island. The Live Fire Campus has been developed to international best practice, providing realistic fire training in a safe and controlled environment. The Operational Training Facility provides for specialised, experience-based emergency management training including urban search and rescue techniques, breathing apparatus, HAZMAT, confined space and vertical rescue procedures under extreme but controlled conditions.

This was followed by a demonstration of the Rural Operations Wildfire Simulator and training trailer. This fully portable training aid was developed by Rural Operations staff through their experience with fire and their exposure to a variety of training events. The equipment simulates the effects of fuel, weather and topography on fire behaviour.

The simulator is based on an adjustable table top to simulate topography and weather conditions may be natural or are influenced by the operator. Fuels can be added to simulate grasslands or forest environments. Model structures and firebreaks can be added to create a realistic model of how fire behaves in the landscape. Direct or indirect attack can be simulated with water or by other actions making the simulator a valuable training tool for firefighting, incident management and community education.

The study group currently use other simulations to demonstrate wildfire behaviour in North America. These include using a sand-pit where the topography is created by shaping the sand and using other static props simulating the threat and the fire. A second model includes using match sticks inserted into holes located in a piece of timber. This is also effective; however it can take a few hours to prepare and a few hundred match sticks to burn.

The study group study group where particularly impressed by the QFRS simulator as it was portable, simple to set up and was adjustable to suit a number of applications using real fire. The group made comments like “if seeing is believing, then this simulator offers it all”, “a fantastic design offers limitless opportunities to help teach the message” and “your simulator was a hit amongst our group. Anytime a bunch of firefighters can play with fire…. well you know. Its a hit. Thanks again for your excellent demonstration!”

After relocating to the Kedron Emergency Services Complex for a guided tour through the State Operations Centre in Kedron the group went on a field trip to Mt Tamborine to see first hand some of the urban interface management issues in the Gold Coast Hinterland and to discuss bushfire risk mitigation planning and community resilience in the urban interface.

After a long eventful day our US and Canadian collages returned to Brisbane to continue their tour next morning.
Fundraising at Broncos vs Storm game

Rural Fire Service volunteers fundraising at the Broncos vs Storm game on 20 March 2009. The game was a recognition event for the Victoria fire victims.

National Medals Awarded to RFS northern volunteers

The Honourable Neil Roberts MP Minister for Community Safety and Premier of Queensland the Honourable Anna Bligh presented two Rural Fire Service volunteers with National Medals on Monday 2 February 2009 at the Townsville Pimlico Barrier Reef TAFE.

Mr Graham Thompson received his 1st Clasp honouring more than 25 years of service, while Mr Giuseppe Girgenti received his Diligent and Ethical Service Medallion and 1st and 2nd Clasps honouring more than 30 years of service.

Other recipients that were unable to attend the award ceremony due to rising flood water from ex Cyclone Ellie were Primo Pilla, Algi Scarabel, Bruno Nowak, Richard Murray and John Winn. These recipients will be presented their awards at a later date. Congratulations and thank you to all recipients for you dedication to the Rural Fire Service.
Northern Regional Firefighter Competition 2009

On the 9th and 10th of May 2009, the Strand Park was the venue for the 2009 Northern Regional Firefighter Competition. With the ocean to the east and Castle Hill the west, the location made a perfect backdrop for the competition this year. There were eight teams competing on the weekend with the three rural teams being from Bambaroo, Rangewood and Rupertswood Rural Fire Brigades.

The competition comprised of 10 events – nine urban events and one rural event. Each event was based on the skills and drills that are used every day on the fireground such as radio calls, bowling hoses, operating a branch, connecting hose lengths, operating a fire extinguisher, drafting water and climbing a ladder. Penalties apply when they have not followed the skills and drills properly, such as not checking washers, doing things out of order or incorrect calls.

Congratulations to Rangewood who placed 2nd in event 10 and well done to all the teams that competed in this year’s event. We look forward to seeing you all in 2010.

Brisbane Region Firefighter Competition 2009

The Brisbane Region Firefighter Competition was a great success and the participation of 10 rural teams contributed significantly to this. The event was relocated to the Caboolture Showgrounds due to the weather and once again all participating teams thoroughly enjoyed the two days of competition and socialising. With 10 out of the 26 competing teams being from rural brigades the Rural Fire Service’s involvement was well appreciated by the event organisers.
This year an unprecedented four rural teams entered the South West Region Firefighters competition. Cambooya Rural Fire Brigade returned for their 9th time with teams from Stanthorpe group, Warwick group and Warra RFB.

The team from Warwick group was a youth team with all team members under 21 years of age. Stanthorpe groups’ team was a composite team made from a number of brigades from the Stanthorpe group, and Warra RFB’s team was also a composite made up from members from Warra RFB and Glen Aplin RFB.

All teams reported that they had a great time learning new skills and enjoying fellowship with other fire fighters from across the South West Region.

One of the highlights mentioned by one of our senior officers was that often you could see groups of firefighters huddled together from different teams both urban and rural working out the next event and making sure that every knew the tricks and pitfalls. It was great to see everyone working together in the spirit of fun and fellowship.
Our Volunteers Our Brigades

South Nanango Fire Station opening

Members of the Police, Fire and Ambulance services joined Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations Steve Rothwell to help celebrate the opening of South Nanango RFB fire station and the appliance handover on Sunday 15 March 2009.

Capricornia Exercise Yeppoon

Eighteen teams of volunteer firefighters from across Central Region converged on the Yeppoon showgrounds for the annual Capricornia QFRS Rural Fire Brigades exercise. Three teams travelled in from the Highlands and proved competitive and demonstrated they have the skills to match it with coastal brigades. Rolleston and the Gemfields RFB fielded three teams and while all teams performed exceptionally, Gemfields placed 2nd with Cawarral winning overall.

The exercise is an opportunity for all participants to hone their operational firefighting skills while working in a team environment and networking with colleges.

Area Director Rural Operations Larry Lewis congratulated both Gemfields and Rolleston RFBs on attending and competing in this event. This is a true example of the commitment our volunteers give to not only the community but also to QFRS, it is also timely that the event was held during National Volunteers Week.
Our Volunteers Our Brigades

Bushfire Prepared Communities

On Friday 20 February 2009 at Willows Shopping Centre a Bushfire Prepared Communities display was on exhibit for the general public. Fire blankets and smoke detectors were given to the community members when they answered questions correctly about fire - for example, what is the number you dial in an emergency?

It was a quiet day at the shopping centre however the local community showed a lot of interest in the display. They asked questions such as how to obtain permits, where to locate smoke detectors and how to become a Rural Fire Service volunteer.

Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade assisted with the manning of the stall along with the Northern iZone Officer, Community Safety, Rural Operations and Urban staff. Money was raised and forwarded to the Victorian bush fire victims through the Salvation Army.

Gemfields receive $7000 grant

The Gemfields RFB received $7000 grant from BMA mining for the purchase of Generator, Compressor & Gerni. Pictured above Gemfields officers Les Hayes and Kris Nilsson.
Central Region Update

The 2009 fire season seems to be developing a lot quicker than we would like with a number of significant fires occurring in April and May. The heavy fuels carrying over from last year and the good growing season we have had this year has provided a high potential risk across most of Central Queensland. The message is very clear - prepare early.

The amount of FMS and Crew Leader training conducted over the past six months has been a strong indicator of the commitment that Rural Operations staff in Mackay, Emerald, Barcaldine and Rockhampton have to providing support to rural fire brigades. I have no doubt this will prove its worth in the coming season.

The annual Exercise Capricornia 2009 was conducted on the weekend of May 16-17 with representation from brigades across the Region. Once again the opportunity to meet with other brigade members in a family friendly environment provides a great opportunity to display skills and training. The effort that many brigades go to train for the exercise justifies the expenditure involved and provides another motivation for brigades to develop strong teams with high skill levels.

The credit must go to the prime drivers of the event who once again came from the Keppel Group. In particular Gordon Ryan (Belmont RFB) and Ivan Western (Cawarral RFB) and Doug Berry (Cawarral RFB) who put an astounding amount of their time and effort to prepare and run the events and scoring. Volunteering has many forms but the common element of a successful training program such as this is the dedication and motivation of those volunteering their services behind the scenes as well as the competitors.

As mentioned in the last Bulletin, Central Region has been fortunate to have two new Brigade Training and Support Officers. Jeff Lane transferred from QFRS Rockhampton to Rural Operations to fill the new position in Rockhampton. Jeff has decades of experience as an urban firefighter and a number of years as the Regional Training Officer in Central Region. He also served a period as the acting ATSO in Emerald and brings a swag of training and operational experience. He is also a great bloke who already has a good profile with rural brigades.

We are also delighted to have Carol Wrage take up the position in Barcaldine and as many would know she has a strong rural fires background as a member of the Gin Gin Rural Fire Brigade and as the Boolboonda East Fire Warden. She has been a great representative and Deputy President for the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) and her enthusiasm and passion for rural volunteers is a great addition to the Emerald/Barcaldine team. Carol has already made a strong impression in the Region and I know she will be a strong supporter of the brigades in the area.

In addition to the two new positions the creation of a BTSO vacancy in the Rockhampton Area has allowed Tracey Charles to be appointed to the permanent BTSO position. Tracey has been acting BTSO for almost 12 months and has been a powerhouse in planning and conducting training in the Rockhampton Area in that time. Tracey has a strong rural and SES background and is a shining light of enthusiasm and organisation in the office and in the field. Tracey has a real dedication to the support of rural brigades and as a skilled member of the Rural Operations team has brought some very positive elements to our training and support program.

Central Region has an ambitious program planned for 2009-10 to provide more and broader training for rural brigades and to help brigades meet their obligations to manage brigade affairs efficiently and competently. Let us hope the season allows us time to undertake the training and skills development program before we have to put it into action.
On Tuesday the 28 April Exercise Elvis was conducted with two particular objectives. To test our regional aviation capabilities and exercise our current Air Observers and Air Attack Supervisors. This was achieved through the running of two exercises simultaneously.

The first exercise was for our Air Observers who had a number of navigation and mapping tasks to complete from an aeroplane while flying at 1500 feet. All tasks were successfully completed and the opportunity to demonstrate the Air Operation and Geographical Unit’s electronic mapping and live film capture and broadcast from the air was taken, adding another capability to both our Region and the State.

The second task was for the Air Attack Supervisor who had to navigate to an identified position, find a mock fire, call for the fire bombing helicopter and contain the fire by directing the helicopter, while flying in an aeroplane. Again this task was completed and the opportunity was taken to demonstrate some additional ground-based tasks to many Rural and SES volunteers and staff.

These ground-based tasks included the setting up of a collar tank (portable dam), working safely around aircraft both on the ground and when water bombing. The exposure to over 75 personnel and the ability to ensure currency of our Air Attack Supervisor made for an exciting, educational and action packed three hours.

WICEN is the emergency service arm of Amateur Radio, providing communications support during times of civil emergency (eg fire, flood and storms) to primary emergency services such as the Police and SES, as well as providing safety communications to public events (eg car rallies, bike rides, etc.).

My sincere thanks to all of the personnel involved in making this day an exercise many will not forget in a hurry. Those who assisted in the running and setting up of this exercise should take a “pat on the back” for a job well done.

Currently the North Coast Region is trialling an Automatic Vehicle Tracking system and the installation is almost complete. This trial will enable Incident Management teams to actively track appliances fitted with this device while they are on the fire ground and using the radio communication in their vehicle.

A large number of North Coast Region volunteers were awarded the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Diligent and Ethical Service Medallion, National Service Medal and three brigades received 60th year Anniversary certificates at recent ceremonies in Gympie and Maryborough. I would like to congratulate all volunteers who received these awards and acknowledge Lagoon Pocket, Langshaw and Kandanga RFB who celebrated their 60th Anniversary this year.

Can I congratulate these dedicated volunteers for their efforts, and encourage all North Coast volunteers to consider recommending your fellow volunteer for these awards (all awards available are mentioned in your Brigade Manual) to your local Area staff.

As you are no doubt aware, radio communication can often be the media that can let the side down if not managed and supported properly. In the case of communications to support our aviation exercise we utilised an SES affiliated group known as Special Communication Group (SCG) or Wireless Institute of Citizens Emergency Network (WICEN).

Since the last bulletin the conclusion of the fire season has certainly happened and we are just at the start of winter. Moving into spring, can I again encourage all brigades to have a good look at the areas that may require hazard reduction, with a view of targeting those areas that may be a high risk next season. As you know, we are moving into the burning period and every window of opportunity taken is a treatment of a possible risk, therefore reducing the likelihood of causing us problems next fire season.

Peter Hollier
Regional Manager Rural Operations
North Coast Region
South West Region Update

There has been a lot happening in the Region since my last update. The recent rain has brought to an end the long dry spell. The fuel is currently cured at an average of 80%, which is something brigades need to be aware of in their preparation for fire season.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Forest Products have commenced significant hazard reduction work as a result of the recognised potential fire threat in the area for the later part of 2009.

After the Victorian Bushfires the Regions community safety plan is focussing heavily on delivering Bushfire Prepared Communities (BPC) programs to our at risk communities. Staff and volunteers have been actively attending many shows and field days, promoting BPC, Smoke Alarms, Prepare Stay and Defend or Go Early and general promotion of the Rural Fire Service and volunteering.

The new Fire Ed Program has started to be delivered to our schools in the more remote parts of the Roma Area and staff and volunteers attended the recent Community Safety Expo, held in conjunction with the Regional Firefighter Competition, in Stanthorpe. 650 school children visited the expo on the Friday and kept staff and volunteers busy. I would like to thank everyone for their participation in this event.

A new repeater tower has been installed at Weranga Goramba Rural Fire Brigade station which will significantly increase radio communication coverage in the Tara area and a new radio tower and infrastructure is also planned for installation at the Bunya Mountains.

The trial of the HF Radio/Telephone inter-connect/VHF cross-patch system is being installed in several locations and operational vehicles in the Roma Area. This system will be tested in the coming months. Meanwhile the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service have recently installed a VHF radio network in the Roma Area which QFRS Rural Operations will have access to.

Finally I would like to welcome our new BTSO Phil Young and I would also like to acknowledge the work of ATSO Brian Cook who retired from the service on 17 April 2009. Brian was a terrific member of our staff and his input into achieving our goals was greatly appreciated. We all wish him and his wife an enjoyable retirement.

Wayne Walsbuhl
Regional Manager Rural Operations
South West Region

Northern Region Update

This year saw the return of the “Wet Season”. Above average rainfall has been received across most parts for the Region. Subsequently, the rainfall has contributed to excellent grass growth and elevating fuel levels. The oncoming winter months will see these grasses cure and contribute to the Regions bushfire hazard.

Preparation for this year’s bushfire season is well underway with Fire Wardens actively issuing permits and brigades involved in conducting hazard reduction burns. As part of raising the awareness of bushfire within our communities, we have been involved in delivering with brigades the Bushfire Prepared Communities program. Charters Towers staff will attend the local shows to engage with brigade members and the local community over the coming months.

An observation from the recent fires in Victoria reported that with between 3000-4000 people working on fires at any one time, with approximately 1000 of these people being from interstate and overseas, only 300 injury reports were filed with most of these reports being dehydration. Only 15 personnel reported burns and 15 personnel were hospitalised. These low figures taken reinforce the value of training and efficacy of dynamic risk assessments when entering fire effected areas.

Rural Operations is continuing to develop our organisational capacity. As at the end of April 173 firefighters had completed FMS training and 54 members have completed the Crew Leader training. I would encourage all First Officers to maintain communications with the training staff, in particular Michael Dodds and Tony Stroud, to continue building the capacity of volunteers within your brigade.

I would also like to recognise the contributions Ewan Cayzer made as Area Director Townsville and wish him all the best in his promotion to Superintendent. Ewan has commenced at Beenleigh as the Regional Manager for the South Eastern Region.

In conclusion I would like to share this quote from Jeff Cooper. “Safety is something that happens between your ears not something you hold in your hands.”

Tony Hazell
Acting Regional Manager Rural Operations
Northern Region
Hello to all volunteer members in the South East Region. I have recently taken up the permanent appointment to the Superintendent position of Regional Manager Rural Operations for the South East Region. Moving from Townsville in the Northern Region, to the bright lights and busy lifestyle of the South East has already posed its challenges, although I am learning the local conditions, operating style and culture very quickly, with the help of many of the very experienced and professional volunteers in the Region.

Of course the overarching culture, policy and procedures of the Rural Fire Service and Rural Operations is the same wherever you go across the State, every region, area, group and brigade has its own personality. I have been very impressed with my initial impression of the strong community service focus of all members across the Region. I look forward to working closely with all volunteers to build capacity across the South East Region.

I would also like to thank the people who kept the Region moving between Superintendent Steve Crouch and myself. Craig Smith and Andrew Hopkins have handed over a well run region into my care.

Recent news articles across the Region have indicated that there is a higher than average fuel load in our forests and grasslands. Add to this the publicity around the tragic Black Saturday events in Victoria and you get a heightened level of community concern. Brigades and staff are taking advantage of the opportunity to engage with communities and individuals to deliver Bushfire Prepared Communities information. It has also increased the awareness of the need to “fuel reduce” in strategic areas.

Brigades and agencies have started reducing fuel with many hazard reduction burns proposed over the coming weeks. This also provides the opportunity for brigades and groups to coordinate activities with training opportunities. Some of the bigger burns will be supported by incident management teams as a practice for the coming season. Air Operations will also be integrated into activities to prepare the specialist operators for the coming season.

The level of activity we may see this year is now in the hands of the weather. With recent predictions suggesting a 60% to 80% chance of above average rainfall over the coming months, we may have a good chance to extend the hazard reduction part of the season and get some significant strategic protection areas in place.

I must congratulate brigades for their preparedness so far this year. New resources, such as the Chambers Flat heavy tanker, ensuring vehicles are roadworthy (over 80% inspected), focusing on ZeroHarm through workplace health and safety inspections, and continued training and skills maintenance all add to capacity and safety.

An observation in the short time I have been here is the rapid growth and development occurring in many parts of the Region. Change is a natural part of life and of all organisations. The growth in population creates changes in the communities needs and changes within QFRS to meet these needs. We have a unique opportunity to evolve as a volunteer rural fire service and develop the “no boundaries” approach to firefighting operations. Change is something to embrace. I am sure there will be many discussions and many opinions on what change should look like. Let’s have those discussions and embrace changes that are good for our members, communities and the organisation.

Ewan Cayzer
Regional Manager Rural Operations
South East Region
**Far Northern Regional Update**

The Region is pleased to welcome a new staff member to our team, BTSO Jacqui Gibson who commenced in Cairns Peninsula to provide training and support to brigades. Jacqui brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to our team and was a volunteer firefighter in NSW and worked with National Parks in their remote area firefighting teams doing it tough in many of the steep forested parts of NSW.

The majority of the Region experienced good rainfall during the wet season and this combined with low stock numbers has produced high grassland fuel conditions in the tablelands and western areas. Brigades and staff in the Region have been active in the communities encouraging landholders to prepare their properties prior to the fire season and implement all fire breaks and hazard reduction burning now while conditions are favourable. Bushfire Prepared Community meetings are being planned in the high risk areas and work is being completed with land management agencies through the Fire Management Groups to conduct hazard reduction activities in at risk communities.

Atherton Tableland Air Service was successful for the tender for aerial services for the annual Cape York aerial burning program, and the Area Director Cairns Peninsula is working with landholders and land management agencies to plan this year’s burning schedule. With the increased fuel loads after the wet season we are receiving strong interest from landholders to participate this year in their efforts to protect their properties and maintain feed for stock. The aerial burn operator going by the handle “Jamie Jesus” will be supervising this year’s burn programme and will also be conducting brigade training while in the remote areas in the Cape to any willing volunteers.

Training continues to be the main focus in the Region and our ATSOs and BTSOs, with support from their volunteer trainers, have been active with increasing the number of volunteers with FMS training. The time given up by the volunteers and staff is appreciated and the more members we have trained the safer we can function as a team during fires and incidents. In addition to volunteer training the Region is working with our urban and auxiliary members in providing joint training in specialised areas. The course ‘Navigate in Urban and Rural Environments’ attracted participants from all parts of the organisation and under the leadership of ATSO Brendan Ridgwell I am advised that all attendees successfully completed the course and were able (despite being several kilos heavier from Genazzanos excellent food) to find their way home from the course venue in Lake Tinaroo.

Volunteer firefighter Kevin Zaro, Mer Island RFB, attended the AFAC Volunteer Leadership programme at the Australian Institute of Police Management, Manly, NSW in April. The programme is designed to promote leadership in volunteer organisations and Kevin was fortunate to be selected to represent QFRS and the Region along with delegates from all over Australasia.

As part of the blackspot identification programme a UHF/VHF repeater was installed on the Hann Tableland providing a link back to FireCom on UHF Channel 59 and a fireground facility on VHF Channel 63 for command and control support in major incidents. A second repeater site planned in the programme is for the Alexandra Range to provide service to the Daintree and Cape Tribulation areas and should be completed prior to the fire season.

To increase awareness of the changes and developments in the organisation, Cairns Peninsula Area held four one day information workshops for brigade members in and around the Gordonvale, Mossman, Cooktown and Mareeba areas. The participants provided lively discussion on numerous topics, and information flow was certainly two way with the presenters learning as much about the local issues as the volunteers were learning about the organisation. Well done to Bryan and his team, Jamie, Jacqui, Brett, Kelly, Lee and Annette for the initiative and thank you to all the volunteers that gave up a day in their busy schedule to participate in the workshops.

Following the devastating fires in Victoria, QFRS was asked to provide two deployments consisting of staff and volunteers to assist the CFA firefighters and Victorian community in containing fires and planning for fire response in several severe fire weather ‘blow up’ days in February/March. ATSO Brendan Ridgwell, A/BTSO Lee Crimmins, volunteer Rural Officer Steve de Prada and Superintendent Ian Thomas represented the region in the QFRS contingent working in Incident Management Teams in Belgrave and Wangaratta. The opportunity to work with other fire services and participate in large fire management is excellent for developing members’ skills in incident management. Volunteers wishing to be eligible to participate in these activities should ensure that they are registered with the Area Office on the deployment register.

Finally with the wet season now over and heading into the fire season with above average growth in many areas, I would encourage brigades to ensure their communities are prepared for this year’s fire season and to make certain that safety and ZeroHarm is always first in your mind when working at fires or hazard reductions over the next few months. The organisation places a high value on safe working practices for our volunteers, all we ask is that you place the same high value on your own safety.

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

How quickly we seem to have arrived at the mid point of the calendar year. While the seasonal conditions in Queensland have once again moved into the normal mid-year mode, elsewhere in Australia the weather related events that have occurred since the last Bulletin have been dramatic.

I welcome back Area Director Peter Varley, who returned from his extended holiday in North America. Peter wishes to assure all that he did not visit Mexico, nor have close contact with any porcine residents of that great country. My thanks to Station Officer Gary McCormack, for very capably carrying out the duties of the Area Director, during Peters absence.

Another face appearing at the Area Office is ATSO Eric Lanham, who has also returned from a well earned extended break. I would like to extend congratulations to Graham Smith, Group Officer Caboolture Group, for his employment as a full-time QFRS employee, and ATSO Richard Lohse and BTSO Graham King are also to be commended for their good work in the delivery of the area training program.

Two successful Crew Leader courses have been completing the training and adulation for the standard of instruction provided. I would like to thank and congratulate all participants and instructors for their efforts.

In the other southern part of the Continent, particularly Victoria an extended drought of 12 years combined with extreme fire weather conditions has resulted in a tragic loss of life and property in the Dandenong ranges. QFRS staff and some volunteers were deployed to assist the Victorian agencies as their seasonal conditions exhausted available reserves. The extent of the losses and the continuing cycle of extreme fire weather were overwhelming to local inhabitants and firefighters. During the week that I spent at Belgrave I was fortunate to be able to speak to some CFA firefighters about their experiences. One volunteer Group Officer said to me very late one night, “We are over it. We are taking whatever comes and responding the best way we can”. His physical and mental exhaustion and that of the other firefighters was obvious.

As firefighters, volunteers and residents, it is now more important than ever that we use every opportunity to inform our communities that fire in the Australian environment is no more or less a natural disaster than flood, cyclone, storm or drought. Whilst the occurrence of wild fires is not totally preventable, a knowledge and understanding coupled with mitigation and preparation actions can reduce losses and trauma.

On a recent visit to Brookfield Brigade I was pleased to see their progress in preparing Local Area Plans for the brigade management and response. Brookfield members have been very active in mapping roads, tracks and significant features to aid all facets of management. I am aware that other brigades are also working on similar programmes and I look forward to seeing the results of those efforts.

The brigade information will be collated along with that of other agencies (QPWS, DERM, and Local Authorities) to inform the Area Wildfire Mitigation Plan.

Congratulations to Area Director Peter Varley and Station Officer Gary McCormack for a very successful exercise conducted in the Samford/Mt Nebo area during February. Exercising people and infrastructure is the only way to ensure readiness and capability. Planning for the next exercise in the Brookfield area is well underway.

As I have said previously the nature and extent of the upcoming fire season will be dependent on a number of interlinked conditions. The increase of the availability of one component (fuel) cannot be automatically used to predict what may occur. If and when extreme fire weather conditions occur any fire will be of concern and require rapid response and management is the key. Mitigation and preparedness are the critical focus for fire fighters and the community.

Thankyou once again to each of you and your families for your continuing selfless community service.

Bernard Trembath
Regional Manager Rural Operations
Brisbane Region
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