Assistant Commissioner’s Message

The Royal Commission established to review the devastating Victorian ‘Black Saturday’ fires handed down their interim report in July and as a direct result from these findings and subsequent recommendations, the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) convened a three day workshop which saw representation from all jurisdictions. Their role was to develop a National Framework for Bushfire Warnings in line with the interim report.

The new approach has three main components to it and they are:

- A change to the Fire Danger Ratings to incorporate Severe and Catastrophic.
- A tiered system of messages and actions required.

The new fire Danger Ratings and accompanying fire safety messages provide clearer information to people on the forecast bushfire danger. The new ratings and the messages:

- Emphasize leaving as the safer option.
- Provide better descriptions of the scale and severity of the threat people face.
- Are more direct in their instructions to the community.

Research from the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre of which QFRS is an active partner is telling us that:

- The majority of the people living in bushfire prone areas do not accept or are in denial about the risks they face. The “it won’t happen to me” effect.
- Many people think they have a plan but it is not consistent with what fire agencies would consider as a well thought out and effective plan, e.g. many people’s plan is to wait and see what happens before deciding what to do.
- Due to climate change there is going to be an increasing number of fire danger rating days in the upper scales.
- There is confusion over what leaving early means.
- The current building construction standards do not go beyond FDI 100.
- Most life and property loss occurs at the upper end of the FDR scale, and most importantly,
- The language used by fire agencies in its alert messages needed to change.

The three levels of community messaging is aimed at providing Advice information on a fire that is not threatening lives or property, such as a controlled burn or small controllable fire. These will not generally be widely broadcast over TV and radio but will be made available through our QFRS/RFS website once further development is undertaken. The second phase is a Watch and Act message that informs communities that a fire is going and updates on the changing conditions will be provided alerting residents that they need to start taking action to protect themselves and their families. The Emergency Warning message means immediate action needs to be taken by people to save their lives. With this message, QFRS can direct the activation of the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) which is predominantly heard in Northern Queensland immediately preceding a cyclone warning.

The last component of this new National Bushfire Warnings is the Prepare Act Survive (PAS) slogan however as...
Queensland is currently within our fire season we will not promote the new terminology as it may generate confusion amongst staff, volunteers and more importantly the community. The principles behind the PAS are that safety is more important than property and leaving is the safest option and this is particularly so when fires occur in the upper FDR scale.

The “Prepare, Stay & Defend or Go Early” position was and still is about giving people a choice however it should be noted that the Queensland Police Service or the QFRS Incident Controller has the legislative ability to move residents on should they determine that the fire intensity, fuel load, property preparedness, etc does not provide enough protection to stay and defend their property. This is in accord with the Prepare Act Survive measures.

Adopting the PAS for the 2010/2011 fire season provides us time to enhance our Bushfire Prepared Communities package and other related community education documentation whilst at the same time creating training and awareness material for staff and volunteers. A State-wide advertising campaign is also being planned for our adoption next year.

Further information on these changes are available on the Volunteer Portal which if you have not signed up to as yet can I encourage you to do so as we have just launched the ‘NewsDesk’ component which provides a fortnightly news segment.

In closing, and as we have commenced an unseasonal and a somewhat vigorous start to the fire season which has seen QFRS apply fire bans in all but one of our Region can I ask that you keep safety paramount in your minds.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations
Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
New National Fire Warning System

The Queensland State Government responded to the interim recommendations by the Bushfire Task Force set up to analyse key issues arising from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and announced the implementation of a new national fire danger ratings and public warning system.

Fire Danger Rating

Officially implemented in Queensland on 1 October 2009, the new national fire danger rating system will include two new categories of ‘severe’ and ‘catastrophic’. The new fire danger ratings are listed as low-moderate, high, very high, severe, extreme, and catastrophic.

The ratings are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW Fire Danger Ratings</th>
<th>100+</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>74</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>49</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catastrophic</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Low - Moderate</td>
<td>Low - Moderate</td>
<td>Low - Moderate</td>
<td>Low - Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREVIOUS Fire Danger Ratings</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>24-50</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>12-24</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>5-12</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A fire with a rating of “catastrophic” may be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. The flames may be higher than roof tops. Many people may be injured and thousands of homes and businesses may be destroyed.

During a “catastrophic” fire, well prepared, constructed and defended homes may not be safe. Leaving is the safest option for your survival.

A fire with an “extreme” rating may be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. The flames may be higher than roof tops. During an “extreme” fire, people may be injured and hundreds of homes and businesses may be destroyed.

During a fire with an “extreme” rating, only well prepared, well constructed and actively defended houses are likely to offer any safety during a fire. Leaving is the safest option for your survival.

A fire with a “severe” rating may be uncontrollable and move quickly, with flames that may be higher than roof tops. A severe fire may cause injuries and some homes or businesses will be destroyed.

During a fire with a “severe” rating, leaving is the safest option for your survival. Only use your home as a place of safety if it is well prepared and you can actively defend it.

A fire with a “very high” danger rating is a fire that can be difficult to control with flames that may burn into the tree tops. During a fire of this type some homes and businesses may be damaged or destroyed.

During a fire with a “very high” danger rating, you should only use your home as a place of safety if it is well prepared and you can actively defend it.

A fire with a “high” danger rating is a fire that can be controlled where loss of life is unlikely and damage to property will be limited.

During a fire with a “high” danger rating, you should know where to get more information and monitor the situation for any changes.

A fire with a “low to moderate” rating can be easily controlled and post little or no risk to life or property.

During a fire with a “low to moderate” rating, you should know where to get more information and monitor the situation for any changes.
Bushfire Warning System

Community warning messages will include a greater emphasis on early preparation, acting early and highlights that the absolute priority is to save lives, not property. The new fire danger rating will also be used as a trigger for the level of advice and messaging to the community when a fire starts.

There will be three types of alert messages: Advice, Watch and Act, and Emergency Warnings.

- Advice messages will keep people informed and up to date with developments on a fire.
- Watch and Act messages will advise people to take action to prepare and protect themselves.
- Emergency Warnings, accompanied by the siren sound (SEWS), will be activated to advise that you must take action immediately, you will be impacted by the fire.

For the first time in Queensland and only on extreme or catastrophic fire days, where there is an active fire posing a high level of risk to life, the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) will be used for bushfires, most likely in combination with other emergency warnings. SEWS is the siren sound that is used for other broad scale warnings, such as cyclone warnings which are broadcast on radio and television.

Prepare, Act and Survive to replace Stay and Defend or Go Early Policy

Queensland will also introduce a new fire safety campaign ‘Prepare, Act, Survive’ for the 2010/11 bushfire season to support the new fire rating system. “Prepare, Act, Survive will replace the current Prepare, Stay and Defend or Go Early policy

This new fire safety campaign “Prepare, Act. Survive” places greater emphasis on saving lives and people evacuating their properties when the fire danger is in the higher scales of extreme and catastrophic.

This message is consistent with the current “Prepare, Stay and Defend or Go Early” program, with Queensland Police or QFRS Incident Controllers being able to order evacuations if the risk is too high.

Unlike the other states, Queensland is currently in bushfire season and will implement the Prepare, Act, Survive campaign for the next fire season. The new campaign will include television commercials, community presentations, brochures and awareness packages.

Safety Reminder

With the recent fire activity it is timely to remind all volunteers that their Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) must be in operational order.

Section A2.10 in the Rural Fire Service (RFS) Brigade Manual outlines the requirements for care and maintenance of Proban treated garments. In particular, note that the Proban content of fabric decreases with the first couple of washes especially if the garments have not been washed strictly according to the manufacturers instructions.

There are two definite must nots:

- Never wash Proban treated garments in traditional soap based powders such as Lux, Velvet or Advance.
- Never use hydrochlorite-based bleaches such as Domestos or White King.

Suitable powders include FAB, Radiant, Dynamo, Surf, Spree and OMO. Also, check your clothing for tears, rips or fraying.

Make sure you are careful when using drip torches as fuel can spill on clothing making it very easy for the material to catch alight.

Always remember that your PPC should only be your last line of defence when fighting fires. So be ever vigilant on the fire ground and avoid getting yourself into situations where you are not safe.
Call for Teams

Fighting Fit in the Service

In early 2009, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service put the "Fighting Fit" challenge out to all staff. The Fighting Fit program runs over 12 weeks and aims to help people establish healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

The challenge asks participants to set their health related goals and provides them with a range of tools such as a 12-week planner, newsletters, fact sheets and other information which assists with healthy eating and exercise to achieve these goals.

21 teams signed up for the challenge and the week eight statistics showed some amazing results. One person from Ipswich lost 18kg (13.7% of their body weight) and 18cm around the waist (13.4%). Overall, there was 2.7% weight loss, 3.9% waist measurement reduction (this is the preferred measurement for looking at chronic disease risk factors), and 28.6% increase in healthy lifestyle habits (this is a measure that is captured in the self reporting tool that comes with the 12 week planner).

QFRS Rural Operations would like to invite you to be a part of the Fighting Fit program for 2010. We will be running the competition across staff and volunteers. This is your chance to take on the staff and your fellow volunteers in a friendly competition that will also improve your health and fitness and best of all help reduce any Christmas indulgence!

Last but not least there are also some wonderful prizes on offer for the winning teams.

How can you resist?

How to participate in RFS Fighting Fit

1. Form a team with your brigade and nominate a Challenge Team Leader.

2. Come up with a distinctive name for your team. This name will be used when communicating results through weekly newsletters and updates on the Volunteer Portal.

3. Please complete the Physical Activity Clearance form (called Par-Q and you), which you will have received with the Bulletin (extra copies are available from your Area Office or the Volunteer Portal). This will determine any possible health risks and will indicate if you need speak to your doctor and obtain their clearance before starting the exercise component of the challenge. It includes a confidentiality agreement which is to ensure that your health information is handled sensitively. Most adults do not need to visit their doctor before commencing moderate physical activity. However, if you have a chronic health condition, it is advisable that you consult your doctor before starting your physical activity program to discuss the types of activities that best suit your needs.

Return the signed Par-Q to your Team Leader, who will provide it to the Fighting Fit Project Coordinator.

Team Leaders must return all the PAR-Q forms to the project coordinator via email on rural.operations@dcs.qld.gov.au or via post to:

Christine Osborne
Rural Operations
GPO Box 1425
Brisbane Qld 4001

Once the forms for your team have been received, each Team Leader will be sent a Fighting Fit pack, which will provide you with all the information you need to participate in Fighting Fit.

The challenge will begin on 1 February 2010 however all forms need to be received by Friday 22 January 2010, to allow us enough time to get your packs out to you.

For more information please contact Christine Osborne on 3247 8305 or email rural.operations@dcs.qld.gov.au

2009/2010 Equipment List

The 2009/2010 Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Rural Operations Equipment list has been released. The prices in this catalogue will remain current until the end of June 2010.

There are some changes to the equipment list you should be aware of. All Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provided from the list is now 'no charge', provided ordering is in accordance with Rural Fire Service (RFS) policy.

There are also a number of items, such as low price hose couplings and seals that are no longer available through Rural Operations. Brigades can purchase these directly from suppliers however please be aware that when purchasing directly from a supplier, the brigade is responsible for the account and there is no subsidy or reimbursement from Rural Operations.

One of the major changes to the equipment is the provision of Slip-On Units. A new process is being implemented, where brigades will need to lodge an Application for Slip-On Unit Allocation with their Area Director. Please contact your Area Office for further details.

We encourage brigades to make use of the grants available from other organisations, such as the Gambling Community Benefit Fund and RFBAQ, to assist with purchase of Slip-On Units and other equipment. Your Area Office can provide you with assistance in completing any grant applications.
1400 Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers have now completed the Crew Leader training requirements within the Officer Development Program as outlined in the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework (VLDF). Congratulations to these 1400 volunteers for the commitment they have shown in completing this training. This commitment will be recognised through the issuing of the first round of the new Crew Leader epaulettes.

Director Paul Adcock said that in line with the VLDF and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Operations Doctrine, Crew Leaders are considered to be Officers within the Rural Fire Service and we are pleased to begin issuing them with the yellow bushranger helmets free of charge.

“It is important to recognise those volunteers who have completed Crew Leader training to undertake roles as brigade operational officers and the importance of these roles in supervising other volunteers on the fireground. “The provision of the new epaulette and a yellow bushranger helmet to those who have completed the Crew Leader training recognises both the commitment each volunteer has made, and the status of the skills attained.” For more information on the Crew Leader epaulettes and bushranger helmets, please contact your Area Office.

2009/2010 Vehicles and Equipment

The rollout of the election commitment funding is well under way with the cab chassis for the initial six heavy tankers to be built this financial year ordered. These appliances will be based on the Isuzu FSR700 cab chassis and will be fitted with diesel pumps and heat reflective curtains as part of the election commitment. It is envisaged that these appliances will carry a minimum of 3000 litres of water as well as other essential fire fighting equipment. Once completed these appliances will be allocated on a regional basis and located based on a regional risk assessment.

Rural Operations, in conjunction with Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Operational Engineering Services, have completed performance testing of diesel pump sets for light and medium appliances for retrofitting and will develop a modification kit for each replacement engine type to ensure consistency and to minimise the need for plumbing modifications. It is essential that the relative Area Offices be provided with accurate details of each appliance’s existing pump sets so that the correct replacement can be supplied.

Reflective fire curtains are currently being trialled and the rollout is expected to commence in conjunction with the diesel engine retrofitting.

There are a number of contracts with suppliers which must be established prior to the commencement of the first stage of implementation however these contracts have been given a high priority, to streamline the process.

The 2009/2010 vehicle build will be a combination of light and medium appliances including the dual cab mediums. These vehicles will be directed to brigades that have vehicles in the vicinity of 15 to 20 years old.
Automatic External Defibrillators

Seconds matter when it comes to saving a life.

An Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) has been proven to be effective in those first few seconds in saving lives. In the unfortunate event of Cardiac Arrest, a patient’s chances are tripled if early defibrillation is used and can assist the heart to regain a normal rhythm.

Designed so that it cannot be accidentally or inappropriately used, an AED is user friendly and always ready. Most units have comprehensive automatic self-test checks which are on a daily, weekly and monthly schedule, which ensures that the AED is always ready.

There have been a number of queries recently from brigades enquiring about purchase of an AED. As is the case with the introduction of any new equipment, a risk assessment must be made to determine its appropriate use and application. It is important to ensure that the equipment does not introduce any other potential issues and that there are systems in place for their use.

As AEDs are a new first aid tool for many in the organisation, it has been determined that they should be approved by the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations through your local Area Office. If your brigade is interested in purchasing an Automatic External Defibrillator, approval will be based on whether the brigade can meet the following criteria:

1. The equipment is purchased from a reputable source – for example the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) or St John’s Ambulance – thus ensuring it meets the relevant Australian Standards and that there is ongoing support should there be any issues.

2. There is a minimum of two brigade members who have obtained the appropriate first aid qualifications (i.e. the user/s are appropriately trained in use of defibs).

3. A testing regime as recommended by the manufacturer is implemented to ensure the machine’s safe usage; this would normally be the responsibility of the brigade First Aid Officer.

4. An appropriate maintenance regime is implemented in line with the manufacturer’s recommendations.

5. The AED is used for rendering assistance to volunteers who may require life-saving first aid.

Rural Operations has recently consulted with QAS and they have put together an option for brigades to consider. The pack includes a Laerdal AED (which is a very robust and reliable machine) and all the necessary requirements at a very heavily discounted rate. QAS are also able to provide the appropriate training in their use. Your local QAS office can also provide assistance to your brigade on the requirements for first aid kits that meet your needs and can tailor a package to suit.

This is one way that brigades can assess and meet the requirements for obtaining an AED.

Rural Operations is developing a business rule in the next version of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual around the purchase and use of AEDs in the RFS including an easy guideline for brigades to use which will incorporate the above criteria.

Finally, we are working with the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland on this initiative.

This programme is further demonstration of the excellent partnerships established within the emergency services community and the way we join together collectively to ensure volunteer safety. This is an excellent example of partnerships in action.

For more information please contact your local Area Office.
Rural Operations is very pleased to announce the second Rural Fire Service (RFS) Volunteer Summit will take place in April 2010.

Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations Steve Rothwell said after the success of the inaugural conference in 2008 the organisation, in partnership with the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland, is very pleased to be able to offer the 2010 Summit to volunteers.

“The Volunteer Summit is essential to Rural Operations. Not only does it give us the opportunity to be able to update you on the work being undertaken by the organisation, it provides the opportunity for you to be involved in the process,” Assistant Commissioner Rothwell said.

“It is also a way we can recognise and thank you for the hard work and dedication you provide to the RFS and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS).

“At the 2010 Summit we will present to you a new range of information sessions, research and trade displays. You will also have the opportunity to meet and network with other RFS volunteers and QFRS staff.”

The 2010 Summit will be held at Twin Waters on the Sunshine Coast and will run from Friday 16 April to Sunday 18 April 2010. Attendees will be required to arrive and register on the Friday and the Summit will close around Midday on the Sunday.

Once again attendance numbers at the Summit will be limited. To ensure as many brigades as possible are represented, only one volunteer will be selected from a brigade. We recommend your brigade takes the time to discuss who you would like to nominate to attend.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said one of the key criteria for selection will be a volunteer’s willingness and ability to take the information they gathered at the Summit back to their brigade and area, ensuring as many volunteers as possible benefit from this event.

“A 2010 Rural Fire Service Volunteer Summit nomination form is included with this edition of the Bulletin and is also available on the Volunteer Portal. All nominations forms need to be completed and provided to your Area Office by Friday 18 December 2009.

“Applications will be considered by the Area Director and Regional Manager and then provided to myself for final approval. The final attendance list will be confirmed early in 2010 and all volunteers who nominated to attend will receive a letter advising if they were successful or not.

“The Volunteer Summit is a fantastic opportunity to network with other volunteers, QFRS staff and industry specialists, and learn more about the industry, other agencies and the QFRS. In particular, it is a great opportunity to work with the organisation on the way forward.”
On 6, 7 and 8 August 2009, the Queensland State Firefighter Championships and Safe Communities Expo were held at Limestone Park in Ipswich.

More than 2500 children and as many adults attended the expo and received fire education and community safety messages, not to mention cheering on the competing firefighting teams in the State Championships.

The Rural Fire Service was proudly represented by teams from Chambers Flat, Logan Village and Brookfield. All rural teams displayed great skills and provided encouragement to each other throughout the events. Congratulations to you all, you were outstanding ambassadors for all rural fire brigades.

Particular thanks should go to the volunteers from Hattonvale Summerholm, who participated in the competitions at late notice, to help out the visiting team from New South Wales. Our unsung heroes of these championships and the expo are undoubtedly our volunteer track workers, expo workers and marshalls. They worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that every track was ready to run, hoses were rolled and lay flats were prepared.

These volunteers ensured tents were erected and thousands of children were escorted around the expo site, making it an enjoyable and memorable day. And let’s not forget Blazer as he braved the heat and inquisitive children!

Events such as this would not happen without the dedication, professionalism and vision of our volunteers.

Rural fire brigades and rural volunteers were showcased to the public and other fire service personnel during the Championships and the Expo. The result again highlighted what was already known – that we have very professional and passionate personnel with outstanding skills and the commitment to work together as a team to achieve positive outcomes.

All rural brigades can be extremely proud of their colleagues who participated.
Primary Producer Brigades

In many parts of Queensland the traditional rural fire brigade concept of community members coming together to help their neighbours and protect their community from fire still underpins the operation of a rural fire brigade. However, members of brigades in these traditional rural areas were increasingly at odds with the demands placed on all brigades over matters such as organisational compliance and in particular demands for reporting and training.

It became clear to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) there was a need to develop a more “arms length” relationship, more in keeping with the infrequent and episodic nature of the activities of these brigades.

A review of existing brigade classifications identified a need to introduce a new class of brigade to ensure service delivery and area support appropriate for this particular group of brigades was maintained, and that traditional practices and volunteer skills were retained. This new class of brigade became Primary Producer Brigade (PPB).

What is a Primary Producer Brigade?

A PPB is a registered Rural Fire Brigade where members derive their livelihood from primary production. Fire is an integral component of property production systems and brigade members rely on property-based equipment for mitigation and firefighting, with the self-help concept of neighbour helping neighbour. A PPB has minimal and infrequent contact with QFRS and a range of factors have been identified to classify a brigade as a PPB.

The PPB classification process allows decision making at the local level as to the extent of brigade activities and operations including the level of support through the Area Office for both administration and operations. This is formalised through a “Primary Producer Brigade Agreement”.

What is a “Primary Producer Brigade Agreement”?

QFRS Rural Operations recognises that a PPB is a partnership between landowners, as volunteer brigade members, and the QFRS. The Primary Producer Brigade Agreement document sets out the obligations and responsibilities of both parties, it clarifies the service delivery requirements and the support and reporting expectations with the aim to keep administration to a minimum.

The Primary Producer Brigade Agreement is essentially about a common understanding and agreement, developed through a consultative process, which provides a degree of flexibility and can allow for the particular circumstances of individual brigades.

What does this mean for brigades now classified as PPBs?

Throughout Queensland, 650 brigades have been identified as being suitable to be classified PPBs. Because of the independent and often remote nature of PPB operations it is necessary for the brigade to have a sound knowledge and skill base available locally to ensure safe and effective operations.

Some of the features of the new Primary Producer Brigade model include:

- Reduced demands of membership
- Area office support for administration
- Workplace health and safety issues managed through tailored systems of work
- Training requirements reduced
- Operations localised and property based
- Continued equipment and liability support.

This means, that as a member of a PPB we won’t ask you to fill in a lot of unnecessary paperwork, respond out of your own area, undertake training you don’t need or have unnecessary meetings.

It also means that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations will:

- Provide you with increased support from the Area Office
- Continue to provide PPE free of charge
- Continue to allow access to firefighting equipment
- Continue to provide access to insurance including workers compensation
- Continue to support the use of property based equipment and
- Continue to support the use of fire in primary production.

In the coming months Area Directors will work with those brigades identified as Primary Producer Brigades to put in place individual Primary Producer Brigade Agreements. For more information contact your Area Office.

www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au
State-Wide Rural Peer Support Officer Recruitment

FireCare is the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) employee assistance program and its goal is to promote well-being by assisting QFRS staff and Rural Fire Service volunteers and their immediate family members to deal with QFRS work-related difficulties. In conjunction with Rural Operations, FireCare is rolling out a long-term recruitment drive for rural Peer Support Officers (PSOs). The aim of the recruitment drive is to ensure that rural volunteers have greater access to the peer support program.

Alex from FireCare caught up with Helaine Clerk to gain some insight into the program. Helaine is a Brigade Training and Support Officer (BTSO) in Townsville and is also a PSO in Northern Region.

1. What is your background?
   I am a BTSO and I am a volunteer firefighter as a member of the Bambaroo and Rangewood rural fire brigades. My hobbies consist of being a firefighter and tupperware demonstrator and I also enjoy scrapbooking.

2. What attracted you to the PSO role?
   Prior to working with QFRS I was a youth program coordinator at Lifeline and became involved with troubled youth. Whilst involved in this role, I undertook a range of studies including a Diploma in Community Welfare Work and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. I used this training to assist youth to improve their personal development and life skills. After joining the fire service, I became aware of the role that PSOs played within QFRS. I was keen to participate in this area, providing support to help out my fellow firefighters.

3. What have you contributed through your role as a PSO?
   The BTSO position requires me to undertake brigade visits and training sessions. Whilst engaging with brigades I use the opportunity to promote FireCare, its services and the role of the PSO to the rural volunteers.

4. What have you liked the most about being a PSO and what have you gained from the role?
   Through the position of a PSO, I have learnt about stress management, improving personal interactions and how to deal with different personalities, just to name a few points. This training and knowledge has also assisted me in my own life when dealing with difficult situations. The element that I like most about the PSO position is that I have the ability to assist my fellow firefighters, obtain additional life skills that I can apply to all aspects of life (both at work and at home) and I have the ability to give back to QFRS.

5. Would you recommend the role to others and why?
   I would recommend the role of a PSO to any person who enjoys helping others. The extent of the help can be as simple as lending an ear to a fellow firefighter when necessary. If you ever require assistance yourself or you feel that an issue is too sensitive for you to deal with, assistance is just a phone call away.

What is the Rural PSO Recruitment Process?

FireCare has a reputation for providing a highly regarded employee assistance program. Therefore, the recruitment process for PSOs is stringent to ensure the right people are selected for the role. Approximately 10 steps make up the process:

Step 1: A potential PSO applicant is identified or a rural volunteer self refers.

Step 2: The applicant contacts the FireCare office, indicates their interest and is sent an application form.

Step 3: The completed application form is sent back to the FireCare office and the applicant is sent four 360-degree evaluations for their colleagues to complete.

Step 4: Once all four 360-degree evaluations have been received by FireCare and assuming that the evaluations are acceptable, the applicant’s details are sent to the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations who determines whether the application is progressed. At this time, the Regional Peer Support network is also asked to approve the applicant as a suitable PSO.

Step 5: If the application is progressed, the applicant is sent a Learning Guide to complete which makes up part of the Certificate IV in Peer Support. The activities in this workbook are discussed with the Regional Supervision Counsellor and also at the Induction Workshop.
Step 6: The applicant then meets with the FireCare Regional Supervision Counsellor for an interview to discuss their 360 degree evaluation as well as the activities in the Learning Guide.

Step 7: The applicant attends the PSO Induction Course which is a residential training course run over five days. This course also includes the “Basic Group Crisis Intervention” course.

Step 8: The applicant's overall progress is assessed during the workshop and is accepted/not accepted into the FireCare program as a PSO in Training.

Step 9: The PSO in Training fulfils “on the job” requirements including the development of skills in Peer Support, Defusings and participation in CISDs (Debriefings). These requirements are found in the “Work Experience Assessment Guide”. The probationary period is six months and a simulation option is provided for those who are unable to gain the necessary “on the job” experience. While PSOs are in training they are expected to fulfill the same requirements as an experienced PSO, including attendance at monthly supervision sessions, as well as four days training in each twelve month period.

Step 10: The new PSO is issued with their Certificate IV in Peer Support after their probation, on completion of the “on the job” activities and when they are deemed competent.

Further Information

FireCare’s recruitment drive is not limited to volunteers. FireCare is also focussing on recruiting QFRS staff who frequently engage with volunteers, and emphasis is also placed on recruiting staff or volunteers from areas which are in need of PSOs. If you are interested in applying to become a PSO, please contact the FireCare office on 3006 4584 to receive an application form. Alternatively you can email FireCare on qfrs.firecare@dcs.qld.gov.au. Your local PSO can also discuss the role with you or for further information please take a look at our website www.fire.qld.gov.au/firecare.

New Interagency Protocol on Fire Management

On 8 October 2009 the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS), Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) and Forestry Plantations Queensland (FPQ), entered into an interagency protocol for Fire Management.

Signed by QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson, DERM Director-General John Bradley and Chief Executive FPQ Dr Warren Hoey, the purpose of the protocol is to clarify and guide co-operative fire arrangements between the three agencies.

Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations Steve Rothwell said these arrangements, which are being incorporated into standard operational procedures by all agencies, will ensure a consistent approach to the operational delivery of fire management across a range of land tenures.

"Although various guidelines for fire management currently exist between some of the key fire management agencies, it was agreed there was a need for a broader and more comprehensive protocol,” Assistant Commissioner Rothwell said.

“This protocol comprehensively defines each agency’s role and responsibilities, and ensures a common understanding in managing and responding to a range of fire management issues.

“The protocol provides guiding principles for interagency cooperation, particularly in areas of fire mitigation planning and policy development, planned burning, preparedness and wildfire response.”
A joint exercise coordinated by Forestry Plantations Queensland (FPQ) and Rural Operations was held in the Beerburrum forestry plantations area on Wednesday 29 July 2009. The exercise involved resources and members of FPQ, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Air Operations, QFRS Rural Operations, Parks and Wildlife, Caloundra City Council, McDermott Aviation and the Salvation Army – which provided excellent food and a continuous supply of tea and coffee.

The exercise was based on a scenario where after a week of high fire danger days and a number of arson and other fires, FPQ established an Incident Management Team (IMT) in preparation for a very high fire danger day. Apart from the resources supplied by other agencies, Rural Operations provided area staff, IMT and IMT support personnel and two Strike Teams – one from Caloundra and one from Caboolture.

This photo shows members of the Caboolture Strike team R 1 D being briefed by Peter Venz of FPQ on navigation within forestry plantations. The briefing included how to identify water points and dead end tracks – an obvious safety issue during a wildfire.

Members also received briefings on aircraft safety and working with aircraft.

Both Strike Teams, were kept busy during the day responding to a “wildfire” – actually a 183Ha hazard reduction burn (HRB) in the buffer zone between plantations of pine beside Glass Mountain Creek (see below)

Apart from the pre-fire season HRB activity, FPQ also wanted to establish an IMT and provide opportunities for a range of personnel to refresh their incident management skills.

This photo shows Wayne Simpson (Narangba) and Neil Cook (Mount Mee) during their stint in the IMT.

Well done to all. The exercise provided some great opportunities to shake out some of the cobwebs, practice strike team operations, refresh IMS and get to know a few of the people we will probably have to work with this fire season.
Using Satellites to Improve Grassland Curing Assessment

In 2004 the Bushfire CRC commenced a project using remote sensing and satellite images to determine grassland curing and produce a curing index for all grasslands throughout Australia and New Zealand. QFRS Rural Operations staff and volunteers have been part of the project from the early stages.

As the project nears completion, a pilot trial to test the new grassland curing system has commenced. During the pilot trial period, CRC researchers are working with Rural Operations and other Australian fire and land management agencies to refine the system so that it meets the expectations of end users. The trial pilot is scheduled to run into the summer month.

Curing generally describes the annual or seasonal cycle of grasses dying and drying out. The proportion of cured material in grassland fuel is normally expressed as a percentage and indicates a “curing value”. This curing value has significant impact on fire behaviour and is a critical input into fire danger models and fire danger rating systems. In general, once grass is cured to more than 50%, fires are much more likely to develop and spread and from around 70% to 90% degree of grass curing there is a major increase in the rate of spread of a fire.

To date, the most common method for quantifying curing is visual estimation in the field, however these measurements are generally sparse over both space and time and their accuracy can vary greatly depending on the experience of the observer. This can lead to incorrect determination of grassland fire danger levels and potential fire behaviour. As these outputs are used by many fire services to make decisions on fire potential, being able to provide better and more accurate information was one of the main driving factors of the Bushfire CRC Grassland Curing Project.

The satellite imagery used to determine grassland curing rates for the new curing index comes from NASA’s MODIS satellite. The data provided by MODIS instruments (http://modis.gsfc.nasa.gov) is far superior to what was previously available. Using the different wavelength to pick up the reflective properties of grasses and by calculating an index, allows determination of grassland curing rates. Accuracy of data output has also improved with new satellite technology and the curing rates produced by the index should be at an accuracy of ±10% of measured curing rates in the field.

To ensure the algorithm to interpret the new MODIS satellite data is accurate, extensive field work to validate and ground truth curing levels is taking place. To cover some of the areas not sampled in previous trials, Rural Operations Research staff set up several monitoring stations in south-east and south-west Queensland.

Field data for grassland curing is being collected on a weekly basis using the Levy Rod method. Curing values are recorded weekly and the data is being sent back to CRC researchers who undertake the comparison between satellite and field data.

The curing data produced from this project can be used for control burning, fire danger prediction and for further research. Having access to more accurate grassland curing data will reduce the risk to firefighters and the community, and provide fire agencies with information of when particular grasslands are most vulnerable to ignite and the best time to pursue fuel reduction burning.

To ensure ready access to curing values, a permanent ‘home’ for the grassland curing system, from which the data will be processed and delivered will also be determined during the course of the pilot trial.

This project would not have been possible without the help of others and we would like to thank the Australian Defence Force at Amberley and Queensland Parks and Wildlife at Gatton for allowing use of their land as monitoring sites. A special thank you to Chris Wilson and Carnarvon Station for taking this project on board and for providing us with weekly grassland curing data for some of the western parts of Queensland.

Community Education and You

There is an increasing awareness that timely and effective fire prevention and education saves lives and property. Fire prevention over fire suppression is a top priority, and for the Rural Fire Service (RFS), the key to this is Community Education.

In previous editions of the Bulletin we have provided you with information on the implementation of a new role within the RFS, the Volunteer Community Educator (VCE), and we are pleased to announce this role is now here!

The Role

The VCE role will be a non-operational role dedicated to providing bushfire and fire safety education. VCE’s will deliver Bushfire Prepared Communities, Property Advice, Fire Ed, Smoke Alarm Education, information on the Fire Warden and Permit to Light Fire system and assisting in the development and implementation of Bushfire Action Plans.

Many volunteers may question why the role should be non-operational. VCEs will not only present a range of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) community education programs to the public in the lead up to fire season, but also provide information to their community during and after an incident.

This does not mean that an operational volunteer cannot take on this role. What it does mean is that if there is a major incident where community information needs to be provided, if you are an operational volunteer who has also taken on the role of a Volunteer Community Educator, the role of VCE must take priority in this situation.

VCEs and Your Brigade

VCEs must be a member of a rural fire brigade. For existing volunteers moving across to the role this is straight forward. For new people looking to take on the role they must first join their local fire brigade.

The VCE role is an integral part of the RFS structure and it is essential they become part of, and are supported by, local rural fire brigades. Many volunteers who take on this role will be existing volunteers with years of service, experience and knowledge in relation to fire behaviour and prevention.

For new volunteers coming into the role, they will at first, need to be supported by operational members of the brigade.

It is important to note that whether you are an existing or new volunteer, to become a VCE you need to undergo a Criminal History Check if you have not already done so.
Supporting VCEs

Anyone choosing to take on the role of a VCE will be provided with a range of training to assist them in the role.

The training provided requires a minimal time commitment, but will provide you with the knowledge you require to present QFRS programs, and the skills you need to be a successful community educator. The training would include a range of pre-reading activities, then a one day training course at your Area Office.

VCEs will also receive ongoing support through their brigade and local Rural Operations Area Office. Resources such as educational and promotional material, as well as access to laptops, projectors and more will be available through your local area office. VCEs will also receive the QFRS Uniform and a comprehensive resource kit.

In the long run, there will be two categories of Educators. The Volunteer Community Educator and the Volunteer Community Educators Area Coordinator. The Area Coordinator will coordinate, monitor and assist in the presentation of education programs to communities. They will provide ongoing support and training to VCEs and collect feedback and data from the presentations to provide to the Brigade Training and Support Officer (BTSO). The position of Area Coordinator is not yet available and will be rolled out once the role of VCE is established.

VCE and Me

To take on the role of a VCE you need to be a positive, community minded person who is comfortable presenting in front of small and large groups of people and you need to be willing to develop the skills required to take on the role.

The VCE role is an excellent opportunity for existing RFS volunteers who feel they may want to move out of an operational role and into other areas. The VCE role provides a great way for volunteers to contribute to community safety and continue their close involvement with community members and groups, without the physical demands of fighting fires.

Applications

QFRS Rural Operations is now calling for applications to the role of Volunteer Community Educator. With this edition of the Bulletin, or on the RFS Volunteer Portal, you will find a copy of the VCE Position Description. If you have non-RFS volunteers interested in taking on the role, they must first go through the process of joining a brigade.

If you are interested in applying for the role you can access the application form and Criminal History Check forms on the Volunteer Portal or from your Area Office. To apply for the role you need to complete your application form and provide it to your First Officer for endorsement. Once it is endorsed by your First Officer, it needs to be forwarded to your Area Office. If you have not already done so, you will need to undergo a Criminal History Check.

Because the position is being rolled out progressively, not all volunteers may be successful in becoming a VCE upon first application. This should not stop you from applying for the role in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the role or the process for application, please contact your Area Office.

Making a Difference

The VCE role will be of great benefit to the RFS and Queensland communities. The key to the role is that VCEs will be local people delivering community education messages with the benefit of local knowledge and existing rapport with community members. We look forward to introducing the first RFS Volunteer Community Educators to you!

Flexible Learning for Volunteers

The Flexible Learning for Volunteers team is pleased to advise that the new suite of Flexible Learning for First Aid products will be released in the coming weeks. This release will include a DVD option for the Apply First Aid, Provide Basic Emergency Life Support and Perform CPR courses, plus a brand new series of learning bytes for the Training Toolbox.

This project has been a co-production with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, Queensland Ambulance Service and Emergency Management Queensland and aims to allow volunteers to choose what first aid training best suits their lifestyles and learning styles. I would encourage you to talk to your Brigade Training and Support Officer about the new training options as they become available.

Significant progress has also been made on the new Managing Difficult Situations program. This program will be available as both a stand alone product or as part of the broader First Officer course and has been developed as an interactive DVD. I would encourage you to keep an eye on the latest news section of the Volunteer Portal for updates on the release of new products and initiatives.
In the last edition of the Bulletin we announced the launch of the RFS Volunteer Portal and Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said that since May, more than 1500 volunteers have registered to use the site.

“I am extremely pleased that so many volunteers are taking advantage of the information, updates and tools provided online through the Volunteer Portal,” Assistant Commissioner Rothwell said.

“I would like to thank the large number of volunteers who have provided excellent feedback and suggestions on the site. Please keep letting us know what you think and what else you would like to see.

“I wanted to take this opportunity to provide you with an update on some of the activities and projects taking place on the RFS Volunteer Portal.

“When the Portal was launched one of the major new initiatives designed to support volunteers was the development of the Training Toolbox which is located in the new RFS Volunteer Portal. The Training Toolbox is designed to look and work like You Tube, and 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 have had some excellent feedback on the useability of the Training Toolbox and we wanted to share this with you.”

Rural Fire Service volunteer and Training Officer for the Woodhill Rural Fire Brigade Lauren McDonald said the Training Toolbox has assisted her in delivering training to her brigade and reduced the time she needs to spend preparing for her training evenings.

“The Training Toolbox is really good. It is simple to use and understand, and to be able to have a visual representation of the training really helps to drive home the training,” Lauren said.

“Whether it’s a new training topic, or a refresher, we always get something out of it. I am constantly jumping on the site to check for new content and prepare my next training session.”

Since its launch in May, a number of new clips have been added to the Training Toolbox, with many more still to come, so keep an eye out.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said another new addition to the RFS Volunteer Portal is the “News Desk”.

“Located on the home page of the site, the News Desk works in a similar way to the Training Toolbox, however rather than bringing you training clips, it brings you video updates by the staff of the Queensland Fire and Rescues Service,” he said.

“On the News Desk you will see updates from myself, as well as Rural Operations Directors, Regional Managers and other staff. Our goal with the Volunteer Portal, and in turn the News Desk, is to be able to provide you with information that is relevant to your role as a volunteer, at the time it is relevant.

“Previously, providing information to you in a timely manner has been one of our major challenges, but the volunteer portal now gives us this opportunity. The news desk ensures you not only hear about the important information and updates when they happen, it also means you hear it from the source.”
Brisbane Region

Major activities:

- Brisbane Region undertook significant joint exercises as part of operational preparedness. One of these was with Forest Plantations Queensland (FPQ) in July 2009. Participants included QFRS rural and urban with representatives from Caboolture and Caloundra Areas, Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM), FPQ and Air Operations.

- The region also undertook a number of Joint Hazard Reduction Burns, these included two with DERM on Unassigned State Land and assisting Moreton Bay Regional Council, Redland Council and the Bay Islands with four burns.

- A joint exercise involving QPS, SES, QAS and Urban, Auxiliary and Rural Firefighters also took place on 16Ha of property bordering the Woodford township.

- The region has also been busy conducting public meetings and letterbox drops targeting centres identified as being “at risk”. Volunteers distributed CD’s and Area personnel conducted Bushfire Prepared Communities events at Mt Nebo, Clear Mountain and Bellthorpe brigades.

Major achievements:

- Significant in-roads have been made towards meeting the training targets for Firefighter Minimum Skills (FMS) Crew Leader. Congratulations to all involved.

- An agreement between QFRS, QPS and SES (through a Memorandum of Understanding) has been reached, outlining the joint use of warning signs set up to inform residents within the vicinity covered by the Mt Nebo Early Warning System.

- The Caboolture Area Office has been working on the development of a training page on Caboolture’s Area page on the Volunteer Portal to advertise training courses and enable volunteers to nominate for courses via downloadable course application forms. The training sub page also includes information on how to apply for a course and profiles for each of the courses advertised.

- The region has also completed development of an SMS communication system that enables the immediate communication of important information to all of the regions First Officers and Group Officers. A separate SMS system that enables communication to 92% of the regions volunteers has also been developed.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:

- We note with thanks, appreciation and congratulations, those volunteers who have received awards and certificates over the last few months, such as those from the Bay Islands who attended their special presentation event on Saturday 26th September at Russell Island. 19 Diligent and Ethical Service Medals were presented to volunteers in the Brisbane Region.

- An extremely successful Community Education Day was held at Russell Island in August. Congratulations and thanks to all those involved.

Central Region

Major activities:

- The Central Region fire season is well underway commencing with a large fire on the outskirts of Rockhampton on the 24th June. The intensity of fire behaviour and the capacity of the fire to burn through the night resulted in a 3 500 Ha fire that has produced a very significant fire break along the Yeppoon Road.

- Early hazard reduction has been the catchcry so far this season and the increasing numbers of wildfires throughout the Region has provided a good example of the need to respond to the seasonal potential.

Major achievements:

- Seven new appliances have now been placed into brigades in Rockhampton and Mackay Areas providing a boost to brigade response capability. Some of the retiring vehicles have been passed to new brigades who have experienced an increased risk profile and have indicated a need for an appliance rather than relying on slip-ons and private vehicles.

- The Cawarral RFB have completed their new heavy tanker project and now have a very impressive AWD Isuzu 700 series with a 5 000 litre capacity. The appliance was built by the brigade with an outstanding level of support from local businesses and volunteers and is proving to be an invaluable response vehicle in the Rockhampton area.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:

- Special acknowledgement to Gordon Ryan AFSM who received his award from the Governor in early September for service to the Keppel Group of brigades and to the community of Rockhampton Area.
Regional Snapshots

Far Northern Region

Major activities:

- Far Northern Region is currently experiencing extremely dry conditions with little rainfall recorded across the region, and to support brigades during the fire season, FireCom are now broadcasting weather and Wildfire Alert Levels twice daily at 0830 and 1630.

- Working with landholders and supported through the aerial burn programme, brigades in remote areas have been effectively managing large outbreaks of fires and ensuring minimum loss to valuable feed. Rural and urban brigades are also active across the Izone and rural residential areas with three major fires recorded at Herberton, Ravenshoe and Mareeba areas, and numerous grass fires were reported. Unfortunately despite an intensive community education campaign with media and Bushfire Prepared Community presentations to high risk areas, many fires were still caused through human error.

- Training continues to be a priority in the region with staff eager to offer training to brigades and increase the number of volunteers with FMS accreditation. With the introduction of recognition of prior learning process specific for FMS, many members with skills in firefighting have taken advantage of the reduction in time to obtain FMS. Please contact your Area Office if you wish to participate and remember to regularly review the Area training calendar on the volunteer portal if you have internet access.

Major achievements:

- The Commissioner visited the region in September and travelled to Weipa to meet with members of the Western Cape RFB, Rio Tinto Alcan and Weipa Town Authority. The visit was to review the fire service delivery in the area and plan for the QFRS role in the ‘normalisation’ of the township of Weipa when it prepares to move from a Rio Tinto Alcan mining town to a local authority in 2012.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:

- During his visit the Commissioner presented 1st Officer Marcus Brooks with the Far Northern Region Volunteer of the Year award in recognition of his and his teams efforts in fire suppression and prevention in Weipa and surrounding remote communities.

- Thank you to all the volunteers and staff that have been working tirelessly over the past few weeks operating in the field and in Incident Management teams. It was great to see rural and urban working cooperatively and support coming in from other agencies in managing the fires. While two homes were lost in the Ravenshoe area, we need to maintain our focus on the fact that many properties were saved, and that none of our people sustained any injuries that prevented them from returning home in the same condition they left.
North Coast Region

Major activities:
- The Fire activity currently happening across the Region is a timely reminder to ensure that your brigade is “Operationally Ready” for summer period.
- Brigades across the Region have been very proactive in undertaking hazard reduction burns and have assisted Parks and Wildlife, Department of Environmental Resource Management (DERM) and Forest with a number of strategic burns.
- Training is still being rolled out across the Region during the fire season so check with your Area Office for dates and locations.

Major achievements:
- Fire Warden workshops have been completed across the Region
- The Elliott Head Joint Rural/Urban complex was officially opened on the 31st August 2009. This also coincided with the Auxiliary brigade becoming operational.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:
- An answering machine has recently been added to the free call system whereby if the number is not answered after 5 rings an answering machine is activated. The caller will then be asked to leave their name and a contact number for Firecom to return their call. This number should not be used for any other purpose.
- Once brigade members are proceeding to the burn site, in an appliance, they are still to use their normal radio communication procedures to advise Firecom of their status of activity and return to station.

Firecom – response line
- Firecom North Coast’s radio network is becoming very busy. To assist brigades with communication an additional telephone line has been installed.
- This new line is a response line only. The number, 5413 5555, is for auxiliaries and rural brigades to confirm that they will be responding to incidents as requested by Firecom. This line has been tagged as a priority line and is not a general information line. The line does not replace standard radio communications as required for brigade operations.
- Please note that this response number is not to be given to members of the public and is not to be used to communicate control burn or permit information to Firecom. The line is solely for operational response, e.g. when brigades respond to an incident or for providing an operational situation report to Firecom.

Should you experience any problems with either of these Firecom numbers please let your area office know.
Northern Region

Major activities:

- There has been a significant increase in fire activity in the Region with brigades responding to many grass and vegetation fires. High evaporation rates and dry conditions and low humidity have lead to several areas experiencing large fast running fires, this will continue until significant rainfall is experienced.

- Hazard reduction burning has continued in many areas, with a number of large fuel reduction exercises incorporating incident management teams and multi agency fire fighting crews. The Region has fuel reduced well over 15,000ha and crews have supported many large bushfires with many taskforces.

- A number of activities and opportunities have highlighted our region including the Richmond Field days, Mt Isa, Charters Towers and Townsville Shows. Townsville 400 and the Townsville Air show. These events attracted many thousands of spectators and many of our volunteers were very active at all of these events, with all of these activities providing numerous opportunities for recruitment and to showcase our brigades.

- Community education and recruiting programs have been our main thrust within the region prior to the onset of the bushfire season. Local Action Plans, Bushfire Prepared Communities sessions and recruiting opportunities are being conducted in many towns and communities throughout the Northern region.

- This is a busy time for our Fire Wardens, the shortness of the wet season provided ideal opportunities for landowners to undertake fuel reduction burning but this also placed an extra workload on our Fire Wardens due to the significant increase in permit enquiries.

Major achievements:

- Rural and urban crews, together with landowners and other land managers, have worked tirelessly to protect public safety and infrastructure, supported with many community fire safety messages being aired through local radio media coverage. To all our volunteers and crews I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your tireless and continued effort, but more importantly the commitment and dedication you have provided to your and other communities within Northern Region.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:

- I would like to congratulate Inspector Tony Hazel on his appointment as the Area Director Rural Operations Townsville, Tony brings with him a wealth of experience and I along with all of Northern region welcome Tony into the role.

Southwest Region

Major activities:

- An early start to the fire season saw the operations of the Warwick and Roma ICC’s. The Region experienced an abnormally hot and windy blast late August that had the Wild Fire Alert Level at 3 for over a week. A Fire ban was also in place for 3 days.

- Many large fires were burning in the country north of Injune and west of Warwick. Air observation and water bombing were used in suppression activities along with ground crews for QFRS, Queensland Parks and Wildlife and Forest Products. The activities of the week were well executed, coordinated and managed by all agencies.

- The Q150 Train toured the Region during August. This was a steam driven engine and due to the fire weather and fuel conditions parallel to the rail corridor a Rural Fire appliance followed the train from Toowoomba to Charleville and return and down to Stanthorpe and return. 19 brigades supported this operation.

Major achievements:

- Rural Operations and Main Roads have delivered a coordinated effort in burning off high risk areas along the Warrego Highway and New England Highway.

- Phil Young was appointed as the new BTSO in Roma.

- Southwest Region has consolidated the Rural Operations management areas from 3 down to 2. This has lead to the staff from Miles being located to Toowoomba. As a result Michael Patch ATSO has been transferred to Toowoomba Office. The Area offices are now located in Toowoomba and Roma. The Miles office will utilised as a storage facility and a place for pre-arranged staff and volunteer meetings.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:

- New appliances have been delivered to Haden, Cambooya, Freestone and Crowsnest brigades.

- New fire stations have been constructed at Glen Aplin and Dalveen.
South Eastern Region

Major activities:

- Volunteers, Auxiliaries and Permanent firefighters competed in the Regional and State Firefighter Championships at Limestone Park Ipswich.

- A Safe Communities Expo was held at Limestone Park in conjunction with the Firefighter Championships. Rural Operations staff and volunteers entertained a large number of school children and local residents over three days.

- Bushfire Prepared Communities activities have been conducted at many identified high risk areas by brigades supported by Rural Operations. Recent events at Pine Mountain and Springbrook were very successful.

- Significant numbers of planned hazard reduction burn offs have been conducted in the lead up to fire season 2009/10. Brigades recognise the level of risk from the high fuel loads and have actively worked to reduce the risk.

- Heightened fire alert levels and local fire bans have been a feature of the start of the fire season. Three days of very high to extreme fire danger weather in late August tested our readiness in real conditions. All brigades showed they are ready for the challenge.

Special announcements/acknowledgements:

Firefighter Championships:

- Special thanks goes to the many volunteers from across South Eastern Region who gave their time, and plenty of sweat, to man the ‘make up area’ at both the Regional and State Firefighter Championships. Every one of the organising committee has told Rural Operations that the championships could not function without the work of these volunteers.

- Congratulations to the teams from Chambers Flat RFB and Logan Village RFB for making it through to the State Championships. Keep up the training and hard work, and look north to Townsville 2010.

Fire Stations:

- Congratulations to Rosevale on the official opening of their new fire station. The Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, Ms. Peta-Kaye Croft, officially opened the station at a ceremony attended on the 22nd August. Community members and brigade members enjoyed an excellent morning tea and the chance to proudly display their achievements.

- Congratulations also to Chambers Flat RFB on the completion of the extensions to their fire station. The additional space allows for improved training and meeting facilities and the housing of the brigades equipment.

New Appliances:

- Bonogin Valley and Kalbar RFB’s have both received their new medium attack appliances. The appliances are sought after, not only by the brigades, but by Rural Operations, as display vehicles for expos and the AFAC conference.

- Rocky Point RFB will receive their heavy attack appliance from the workshops of Liquip, very soon. The brigade has campaigned long and hard to raise the funds to provide this new resource in their district. This significant project has been a credit to the dedication of all members, in particular the First Officer Brian Currant.
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