Assistant Commissioner’s Message

One of the proudest moments for me in recent history was seeing Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers as an essential part of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) response to the unprecedented natural disasters of early 2011. This only re-affirmed with me the essential role our volunteers play in supporting and protecting our communities.

After the sad and challenging events of recent times I wanted to take this opportunity to focus on the positives and the accomplishments of our Service and aspirations planned for the future.

One of the major announcements of this year was the re-direction of almost $1 million in funding to further support rural fire brigades. The availability of the funds resulted from the quiet or non-existent 2010 fire season and was an excellent opportunity to recognise and support the great work undertaken by our volunteers. The funding was distributed through three grants; a Station Improvement grant, GPS grant, General Equipment grant and through an extension of the existing roll out of QFRS station wear or ‘walk out’ uniform.
The response to the grants offered was overwhelming and I was pleased to be able to announce that additional funding of $1.5 million was allocated to these grants, bringing the total amount to a colossal $2.5 million. The grants provided:

- 258 Garmin GPS units which we are currently in the process of distributing to the 188 successful brigades. The brigades will also receive a windscreen mount, adaptor cable and a copy of the Brigade Mapping Toolset.

- 179 brigade applications were received for the General Equipment grant. All of the brigades will receive at least one of the items they applied for.

- 125 brigades will be receiving a Station Improvement grant to undertake improvement work to their existing stations. 75 brigades are receiving grants up to $10,000, and 51 brigades are receiving grants between $10,000 and $30,000.

I have no doubt that these grants will provide much needed additional support to the recipient brigades and assist them undertake works that otherwise may not have been possible.

In addition to the above grants we have also been extremely pleased to be able to offer brigades the opportunity to apply for First Aid Equipment which has been funded through the Olga Wilson Firefighters Trust and QFRS. Again the response from brigades was phenomenal and in total we were able to provide 106 First Aid Kits and 98 Automatic External Defibrillators.

Work also continues on a range of other new initiatives and projects designed to support you, our volunteers. Perhaps one of the most successful events to date has been the Technology Workshops currently taking place across the State. The Technology Workshops were developed with excellent input from the Ripley Valley Rural Fire Brigade and are a follow on from the OziExplorer mapping presentation given at the 2010 Volunteer Summit. The aim of the workshops is to supply Brigades with information on the mapping and GPS systems currently supported by QFRS. The workshops also provide information on accessing the Volunteer Portal and the wealth of information and tools that are available on the site.

Another event that took place on the 8 and 9 April was the Northern Region Youth Summit. With our aging workforce it is essential that we are able to attract and retain younger volunteers. The Youth Summit held in Townsville aimed to further develop the work undertaken at the first Youth Summit held at Kedron in 2010.

The second Youth Summit was a genuine success with 28 enthusiastic participants discussing a range of topics including recruitment and retention, communication, training, the social aspect of the RFS and reward and recognition. The energy from the participants was fantastic and we have now developed a Northern Region Youth Committee and are working to incorporate the feedback provided by our younger volunteers into upcoming programs and campaigns. We were extremely pleased to welcome to the Summit students from the James Cook University, Public Relations and Media Faculty. As part of their studies the students are developing campaigns to recruit “Gen Ys” to the RFS and will continue to work with the members of the Youth Committee.

Development of the new PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE community education clips is nearly complete. The clips give volunteers and the community a visual representation of how they can prepare for the fire season and the action they need to take during and after a fire. It is expected that the clips and DVD will be available for distribution in July.

Rural Operations is currently filming a Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) recruitment DVD. This DVD aims to assist with recruiting both existing volunteers and community members to the role of a VCE. The DVD will show the important role VCEs play in providing bushfire education messages to the community. We have already recruited over 250 Volunteer Community Educators (VCE) since the programs official launch in 2010. This is an excellent result and one which has seen over 360 community presentations delivered across the State by the VCEs.

Another project recently commenced is ‘Stage 2’ of the RFS Volunteer Portal. Since the Portal's initial release we have learned more about how the site is used and what volunteers expect from it. The ‘Stage 2’ release of the Portal will result in additional functionality and a more user friendly site. Work on the portal will not finish with the implementation of ‘Stage 2’. We will continue working on improving it, ensuring it continues to be a useful tool for volunteers.

Lastly, the April edition of Emergency Magazine featured a seven and a half page spread entitled “The Rural Fire Service in Focus” devoted to our staff and volunteers acknowledging the great work the RFS does in protecting Queensland communities. You will also find the articles in this edition of the Rural Fire Bulletin.

Until next time, keep safe and take care.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations
Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
After immigrating to Australia in 2003 and purchasing acreage in Mundoolun, Mark Doble stumbled across a very challenging and rewarding opportunity as a volunteer in the RFS.

After clearing some land on his property, he made enquiries with the local RFS brigade which turned out to his property to conduct training while burning off the fuel load. To his surprise, one of the crews on the truck was his neighbour.

‘I remember being just totally inspired by how willing the brigade members were to help out others in the community,’ Mark said.

‘I did some research into what was required to join and was invited down to a recruitment night back in December 2006. I haven’t looked back since.

‘The work the RFS does through its brigades is amazing. Coming from the UK with no experience, I had a lot to learn about fire behavior and activity. As a volunteer, you receive top-notch training from very experienced officers.

‘You’re able to complete practical training and get really solid experience in all forms of hazard reduction and mitigation, as well as training in fighting bushfires.

‘Living in a semi-rural area is something which I love. What’s been great is to be able to make a meaningful contribution to my community here in the local brigade.’

Mark (pictured here talking to school children about bushfire preparedness) said the many facets of brigade work were appealing.

‘From doing general burns to having members who are Volunteer Community Educators, there is plenty of worthwhile and meaningful work undertaken by each brigade.

‘The volunteers really put a great deal of effort into educating all members of the community about how they can be safe and protect their lives and property.

‘Whether it’s talking to elderly landowners or small children at the local primary school, it all helps raise awareness of the importance of safety and reducing fire risks.

‘It’s so satisfying to be a part of a service which makes a real difference. For me, joining the RFS has been greatly fulfilling and I couldn’t recommend it more highly,’ he said.

Mark was the recipient of the Rural Operations Assistant Commissioner’s Volunteer of the Year Award for South East Region in 2010. He has also received an Australia Day Achievement award.

In late March, 19 RFS Brigade Training Support Officers (BTSOs) from across the state descended on the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy (QCESA) to undertake a three-day skills sharpening workshop.

The first of its kind, the workshop provided a great opportunity for the BTSOs to share ideas and successes from each of the participants’ respective areas. In addition, a series of discussions and presentations were made on topics such as training, career development and improving operational efficiency.

QFRS Rural Operations Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said the energy and enthusiasm of the group was encouraging.

‘Our BTSOs are highly trained and skilled personnel who make a practical difference to brigades in their communities. Their dedication to their roles is inspiring. All of them have made meaningful and valuable contributions to each of their communities and they should be proud of their achievements,’ he said.

‘While many of our BTSOs have come from the RFS with esteemed volunteer careers, others have diverse backgrounds. Some are from QFRS Urban and Auxiliary stocks, others have come from the neighbouring states’ fire and emergency services and some are from volunteer organisations such as Coast Guard.'
The VLDF is a training structure based upon linking the different RFS training programs to the knowledge and skill needed for both operational and support roles.

It provides clear identification of role based skills that are a learning and development pathway from new recruit to first officer.

Training is an essential part of being a brigade volunteer in the RFS, so talk to your Brigade Training and Support Officer and discuss the options available to you!

Welcome to flexible learning for volunteers

The updated Volunteer Learning & Development Framework (VLDF) booklet is now available.

The VLDF is a training structure based upon linking the different RFS training programs to the knowledge and skill needed for both operational and support roles.

It provides clear identification of role based skills that are a learning and development pathway from new recruit to first officer.

Training is an essential part of being a brigade volunteer in the RFS, so talk to your Brigade Training and Support Officer and discuss the options available to you!
Granatham Rural Fire Brigade flood store

On 10 January 2011 the Locker Valley received an unprecedented amount of rain causing the worst flooding in the area in living history, resulting in a number of people losing their lives and many people left without a home. The fast moving and rapidly rising water kept the local Rural Fire Brigades (RFB), Auxiliaries and the QFRS Swift Water Rescue teams extremely busy.

The town of Grantham was severely impacted, with the town’s main business centre built on the creek flats of the Lockyer Valley. The Grantham RFB station and the local Primary School are both built on higher ground and therefore became the safe place for people to retreat to both during and after the floods.

Ably lead by Brigade Treasurer Marieanne Purton (Mar), the Grantham RFB provided assistance to their local community by receiving donations and helping distribute them to flood affected families. Truck loads of goods from across Australia, including approximately 10 tonnes of food, clothing, bedding and bric-a-brac each week, arrived at the brigade for distribution to the local community.

Mar and friend Linda, driven by their own personal desire to help their community, spent many hours laughing and crying with impacted local families as they assisted them in their recovery. For the three months following the flood, the make shift store was manned 12 to 16 hours per day, seven days a week.

A community BBQ was held recently at the brigade to thank everyone involved, Mar and Linda in particular, for their incredible efforts over the past three months. The BBQ was attended by the brigade and community members that volunteered their time, Global Care and members of the Locker Valley Regional Council.

Northern Youth Summit 2011

In early April, Rural Operations Northern Region hosted the Northern Youth Summit in Townsville. The event was aimed at 18-25 year olds with a focus on how the Rural Fire Service (RFS) can improve the attraction and retention of young volunteers. The attendees were from three separate agencies with eleven volunteers from Townsville Area Rural Fire Brigades (RFB), six State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers and Emergency Service Cadets, and three public relations and marketing students from James Cook University. The mix of volunteers helped provide a broader perspective on the issues.

The participants on the day took part in five separate streams which looked at recruitment and retention, social interaction, communications, training, and reward and recognition. A major theme running through the sessions was the need for Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) to become involved in social networking and media including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

One the Summit outcomes is a new slogan for our recruitment campaign “Be more than who you are”. Other ideas for recruitment included the use of more photos of young people in our promotional material and greater promotion of the wider range of roles available to volunteers, other than operational fire fighting.

A number of the participants have since volunteered to be part of a youth project group which will take on small projects for the organisation and provide a youth focus. Expect to see big things from this group in the future.

The learnings from the Summit will help inform future recruitment campaigns, reward and recognition programs, communication within and external to the organisation and our training programs and their delivery. All of the participants on the day need to be congratulated for their significant contribution during the summit. Their commitment and enthusiasm for the summit resulted in successful outcomes.
Ingham volunteers go above and beyond to help community recovery

For Ingham canegrowers Vince Balanzategui and Brian Clerk, supporting the community is part of everyday life.

They’ve done it day in day out in their roles as RFS volunteers for more than 20 years and 13 years respectively.

Throughout that time Vince and Brian have contributed greatly to the Service and their communities in a variety of capacities.

During the recent disasters, Brian and Vince were instrumental in coordinating effective recovery operations.

Vince told Emergency about the devastating impact of the disasters and of how hard his fellow brigade members worked to help theirs as well as neighbouring communities recover.

‘On New Years Eve, I helped set up an Air Operations Base in Biloela to support the resupply of isolated communities and coordinate medical evacuations as well as the transport of police officers into surrounding townships,’ he said.

‘This was not an easy task and involved very detailed planning. Everything that goes on a helicopter has to be weighed, so getting the logistics right is crucial.

‘It was the first time I’d assisted in running an air base since I’d completed my training and it was great to be able to put my skills to use when they were needed.

‘Following the crossing of Yasi, Brian and I assisted in the clean-up of debris in and around Ingham.

‘Working with the SES and local council, we went yard by yard helping people remove debris from their homes while also conducting wash-outs when needed,’ he said.

Brian recounted a similar story while reflecting on his role during the disaster period.

‘During the disasters I assisted as a flood warden to aid the flow of communication from officials to residents. I also assisted with the RFS volunteer taskforce which came into Abergowrie, where I helped coordinate their taskings for clean-up and debris removal, while also helping out at the Ingham Air Operations Base.

‘Being able to assist the community is a good feeling. As canegrowers we rely on one another. If I have a fire on my property it is bad news, so I need to know the neighbours and brigade members can help me.

‘Likewise if they were in a pickle, I’d help them. It’s just how it works.

‘Everyone just got in there and helped out. We had assistance from neighbouring brigades and our counterparts within the SES. We also had to strike teams of Rural Fire volunteers from the Central Region who assisted in the Townsville and Hinchinbrook areas.

‘All of the volunteers worked so hard and it was great to be a part of that team. We are just two of many volunteers who gave up their time to help those in need.’

Brian experienced Cyclone Althea as a nine-year-old boy and remembers the howling winds and torrential rain.

By comparison, he said, ‘Yasi was no walk in the park – it was different because it crossed during darkness. There was still a lot of work to be done in the wake of its destruction.’

Vince was the recipient of the Rural Operations Assistant Commissioner’s Volunteer of the Year Award for the Northern region in 2010.

Both Vince and Brian’s work with the RFS continues to inspire the community and serves as an incredible example of the power of resilience and togetherness.
In the November 2010 Bulletin we were pleased to offer eligible brigades the opportunity to apply for First Aid Kits and Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) thanks to $100,000 in support received from the Olga Wilson Firefighters Trust.

The response received was phenomenal, with 144 brigades applying for $270,000 in equipment.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Rural Operations was very pleased, through the support of the Commissioner QFRS, to be able to fund the shortfall of $170,000, ensuring all eligible brigades received this vital equipment.

All equipment has now been distributed and brigades are encouraged to ensure the appropriate AED training is undertaken and kept up to date. It is also a great opportunity for other members to consider undertaking First Aid training if they have not already done so.

It was only through the generous support of Olga Wilson Firefighters Trust that QFRS Rural Operations was able to offer brigades this excellent opportunity, and we thank them for that.

I am the 1st officer at Kalbar Rural Fire Brigade and I have been in this position for 10 months. I have been volunteering with the Rural Fire Service (RFS) for seven years and was the deputy group officer at Boonah for two years.

My passion for volunteering is driven by being the leader of a very professional and dedicated brigade who put their community ahead of themselves. They are continually striving to do the best job possible.

I joined the service for mateship and to learn new things while doing something good for the community.

What I enjoy most about volunteering is the satisfaction of knowing that my team and I have helped the community. I enjoy the mateship and comradery on the fire ground and the satisfaction of completing challenging tasks in difficult situations.

Through this line of work I feel I have contributed in bringing the brigade closer together and increasing the brigade’s presence in our community.

I have had many great achievements in my time volunteering for the RFS and a standout for me would be when I was the incident controller for a large group hazard reduction burn.

For the future I hope to keep seeing my brigade and area grow and develop professionally and to be considered the best brigade in our area.
Across the state, high school students are helping themselves and their communities by undertaking a Certificate II in Public Safety (Firefighting Operations) course as part of their curriculum.

Caboolture Area Rural Operations Brigade Training Support Officer Graham King highlighted the success of the certificate course, praising the students for their willingness to learn and the Service for providing the opportunity.

Graham developed the pilot program last year, with eight students from Kilcoy High School graduating and continuing in their service to the community as RFS volunteers.

‘Following on from the successful partnership between the QFRS and the Department of Education and Training in 2010, the state-wide roll-out has begun,’ Graham said.

‘The program has successfully attracted younger recruits to the RFS, while benefiting them in their vocational study. It’s been great seeing the students become empowered as they learn new skills and take on new responsibilities.

‘From the outset, we’ve seen some great results in what we set out to do. We’ve also been surprised by some wonderful sentiments the students have shared.

‘One participant said the program had helped her develop self-esteem and confidence, which has had a positive impact on her own decision-making.

‘Seeing their confidence develop in line with their competencies is great.

‘The students really enjoy learning and are very enthusiastic when it comes to acquiring new skills.’

Graham said all eight Kilcoy students had remained active in their local brigades, and two from the Hazeldean and Villeneuve brigades had even assisted their Urban counterparts in flood recovery operations in Brisbane.

‘Seeing them working in the community is very heartening, whether it’s during times of disaster or just partaking in everyday brigade business — they’re all very keen to get out there and make a difference.

‘We’ve also got five of the students who graduated last year participating in the regional firefighting championships to be held in Redcliffe in June, where they will learn Urban skills and drills.

‘It’s just another way these volunteers are expanding their knowledge base.’
Fighting fit

The Fighting Fit Challenge is over for another year and the Wellness Team would like to start by congratulating everyone who participated.

There were some fantastic results and we encourage all of you to keep up the great effort even though the competition is over for now.

Congratulations to the Rupertswood Fat Fighters who this year took out the overall prize and won the competition! These volunteers not only lost centimetres off their waists but they also increased their fitness levels. One member even quit smoking during the challenge.

A special thank you to Paul Storrs, Mitigation & Education Officer South West Region, who has kindly shared his inspirational story.

Paul Storrs:

Over the 12 weeks I have lost 5 kgs and 9 cms.

The most significant thing for me however is not the weight, it is the energy. Before the challenge I was lacking in energy and one of the biggest indicators was mowing the lawn. I had to take a break half way through in order to complete it, however about half way through the challenge I discovered that I could complete the whole yard in one go, no stops at all!

This last weekend I was able to do the yard in record time! The whole yard, no stops and so quick that my son who had intended to come and relieve me did not get a chance.

My next challenge is to continue to improve and manage my eating and exercise habits and behaviours so I am healthier, which in turn will reduce my weight and increase my fitness and energy.

RFB manual changes

With each edition of the Bulletin we will provide you with a summary of updates and changes made to Rural Fire Brigade Manual Business Rules.

Minor changes

The following business rules have had minor changes made to them and can be downloaded from the Volunteer Portal. Minor changes include spelling mistakes, word or phrase changes, sentence amendments or deletions

A1.2 Hazard Reduction Programs
A3.5 Compliance with Traffic Regulations
C6.1.2 Chaplaincy Services
D4.4 Insurance of Privately owned Vehicles
A growing service dedicated to the community

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) plays a key role in enhancing community safety in Queensland, with about 34,000 volunteers serving more than 93 per cent of the state in a variety of roles.

QFRS Rural Operations Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said the RFS is a growing service that is highly adaptable and responsive to the needs of the community.

‘In times of recent disasters, we’ve seen just how capable our volunteers and personnel are,’ he said.

‘As Queensland faced its worst natural disasters in history, the RFS worked shoulder-to-shoulder with communities and other emergency services agencies to provide immediate response and recovery efforts.

‘I couldn’t be more proud of the work they’ve done and I know all Queenslanders share this sentiment too.

‘Knowing how devastated parts of the state affected by flood and Cyclone Yasi are, it was clear the work of our staff and volunteers was considerable.

‘I might add the level of selflessness and resolve to get whole communities back on track was remarkable. Plenty of our volunteers and staff faced personal hardships of their own and put these aside to help their neighbours and wider community.

‘This sort of attitude is inspirational and is commonplace across the service. It’s what makes the RFS so reliable and responsive. On behalf of the QFRS, I extend an unreserved thank you to all staff and volunteers who work so diligently to help keep their communities safe.’

And it’s not only during emergencies when the RFS springs into action. Steve said brigades across the state conduct business of critical importance to the community each day.

‘Whether it’s conducting mitigation and hazard reduction on fuel loads, teaching communities about the importance of bushfire awareness or conducting training exercises to advance volunteers’ skills, worthwhile activities are undertaken daily to enhance community safety and strengthen our response capacities,’ he said.

‘Long gone are the days of the service exclusively fighting fires. There is still a misconception about the breadth of work they undertake.

‘Technology has enhanced training and operations on the ground, creating many more possibilities in service delivery than there were when the RFS was first established.

‘Providing volunteers with the best training, support and equipment is top priority for the Government and the QFRS, which is why we are constantly updating and reviewing technologies that can assist our personnel in their duties.

‘We know just how important it is to provide our crews with the best available equipment to protect their communities and this is something we will continue to invest a lot of time and resources in to better our support to those in the field.’

Steve said RFS volunteers came from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds, and brought with them a large range of skills and experiences, but they all have in common a strong sense of community.

‘This diversity is what makes the organisation strong, responsive and representative of their communities,’ he said.

‘In their communities, they are landholders, shopkeepers, tradespeople, professionals, housewives and retirees all coming together to protect their livelihoods and that of their communities, their neighbouring communities and communities both intra and interstate. Their devotion is second to no other volunteer service.

‘On my travels throughout the state I’ve met with many of them and no matter where they are, be it Ingham in the state’s north or Ipswich in the south-east, their passion is the same.

‘They work to protect what is their own and what is shared in their community.

‘Many of them develop great ideas which have been of significant benefit to the service. Many provide useful feedback on how to improve operational efficiency. Many of them bring their outside knowledge to benefit their local brigades. The level of ingenuity they bring to their roles is nothing short of amazing.

‘It is my hope that the service will continue to grow and become stronger in the future. We’ve seen how far it has come since its inception in 1948.

‘With the dedication of staff and volunteers behind it, the success of the RFS is certain.’
Review of the Permit to Light Fire and Fire Warden role

Where we are up to.....

The Review identified the need for a dedicated team to assist the Director Rural Operations in progressing the identified changes. Two temporary positions have been created in Rural Operations Head Office, Kedron, filled by Eric Lanham and Lauren Dansie. Eric is the Manager Fire Warden Operations and Lauren is assisting with administrative duties which include updating the Fire Warden page on the Volunteer Portal.

The Review is now in the implementation stage. The Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations Steve Rothwell, has approved a plan that will see the recommendations of the Review implemented through three phases over the course of five years. This plan will provide a framework for the introduction of a number of Fire Warden support measures, general system improvements and the gradual transition to an Electronic Permit Management System (EPMS) by 2015. The paper-based system will also be maintained as long as necessary to ensure Fire Warden information is readily accessible for all.

The Review is currently in phase one and was preceded by two rounds of consultation. The first of these was in November 2010 and involved Chief Superintendent Paul Adcock and Inspector Ferg Adrian travelling to seven locations across the state. The feedback from workshops was subsequently used as a basis to develop a concept framework and to start work on new documentation.

The second series, held over March 2011 involved Acting Inspector Eric Lanham taking the results of the first series of workshops and a number of the concepts and the draft documentation to 24 locations and seeking feedback. The 344 Fire Wardens (FW) and Deputy Fire Wardens (DFW) consulted during the two series means a consultation rate of approximately 14 per cent. Rural Operations would like to extend a thank you to all who participated in consultative sessions.

Since returning from the second round of consultation, the initial set of documents have been modified based on the feedback provided. Modified documents have now been sent to a reference group made up of about 20 FWs, the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) representatives and selected staff to ensure a final quality check.

So what’s on the horizon?

New forms and brochures

The Application for Permit to Light Fire, the new Permit book and a new brochure – Applying for a Permit to Light Fire are in the final stages of development and will be ready for production shortly. One of the new brochures will have a blank copy of the Application as a tear off form below the instructions. This brochure, along with the other two new brochures - Obligations and Responsibilities of Permit Holders and Burning Guidelines, will be available at Area Offices, on the Rural Fire Service website and the Volunteer Portal.

Permit environments

The permit classes mentioned in the last Rural Fire Bulletin resulted from the original concept of Fire Management Zones. Classes have now been confirmed as three specific permit environments. This will enable a FW to easily determine how an application from an owner/occupier for a fire on a particular piece of land will be processed. This will affect the application process and how the permit is conditioned and will be based on:

- Risk;
- The need for fire;
- Land use; and
- The permit holders’ demonstration of their knowledge and ability to use fire safely and effectively.

The three permit environments are:

- Built up areas (generally managed by Urban/town Fire Wardens);
- Rural / Residential; and
- Rural production systems.

It is expected that each block of land within a FWs District will fit into one, or more of the above permit environments. Initially, any breakup will be determined by the FW in consultation with the Chief FW (local Area Director Rural Operations). More details will be provided in due course about how each environment will impact on the application and permit process. Generally they will affect:

- The form of the application (written or oral);
- Requirement for site assessments;
- The duration of the permit;
- Conditioning detail; and
- Notification to neighbours of the actual time of lighting.

Note: The last Bulletin indicated that there might have been a different permit for each class. There’s been a change to this and the decision has been made to stick to just one permit – conditioned appropriately.
Fire Warden role

“Hot work”

Rural Operations is continuing investigation into the issue of “hot work” and the potential for such activities (welding, grinding, etc) to be a source of ignition and as a result potentially dangerous during periods of higher fire danger.

Updating the FW page

The FW page on the Volunteer Portal will be revitalised and receive continuous updates over the coming weeks. If you haven’t registered for the Portal yet, please take the time to register and then check out the current FW page. It contains lots of useful information including the current situation with regards to the Fire Danger Period and if any bans have been imposed, and some general advice to FWs and answers to frequently asked questions. The tools button provides access to photographs in relation to the state of grass curing (under season tracker and curing), and also provides access to the Fire Danger Rating (FDR) Graphic. It is worthwhile downloading the Excel spreadsheet to gain access to the four day forecast. It provides accurate weather forecasts for 80 locations across the State and may help you advise permit holders about their burns. If permit holders would also like to access this spreadsheet, they are able to via the RFS website at www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au, clicking on the FDR graphic (over on the right hand side) and then downloading the FDRG FWO Spreadsheet. Please take the time to check out the information on the Portal as we need your feedback regarding the type of information you find useful.

Further information will be provided over the coming months on the Volunteer Portal regarding the progress of improvements to the Permit to Light Fire system and changes for FWs. Again, we would like to extend a big thank you to all who have provided input into the consultation process stemming from the Review, your recommendations are vital in ensuring the ongoing improvement of the FW system.
Training initiatives

Training or learning in general can be likened to building a brick wall, the better the foundations – the better the wall. It’s a lot easier to start at the bottom and build up.

To assist us with this philosophy, the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework (VLDF) was developed in 2008 to provide structure and a pathway for the delivery of training to Volunteers in the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS).

This enables you, the volunteer, to see a clearly defined route you can take in your training with the organisation and helps to ensure that training is completed in the most appropriate and logical sequence. This helps to ensure important information is not missed.

Since the development of the VLDF, a number of existing programs have been redeveloped to fit into the structured approach, along a number of new programs.

Running in conjunction with the development and implementation of the VLDF, is a co-project – Flexible Learning for Volunteers (FLFV). The project was established to develop a broader range of flexible learning options for volunteers and aims to use modern technology (eLearning) and other available methods to provide a range of delivery options to enable self managed learning.

The eLearning concept is designed to allow volunteers to utilise computer technology to participate in learning activities in their own time. It also provides a greater interaction with the learning material through the use of videos and quizzes.

The latest programs to be released in the eLearning format include:

- **Crew Leader Program** which incorporates:
  - VCL305 – Tactical Command
  - VCL310 – Principles of Wildfire Suppression
  - VCL315 – Intro to briefings
  - VCL325 – Wildfire Prediction Tools
  - VCL335 – Conduct Hazard Reduction Operations

- **First Officer Program** which incorporates:
  - VFO505 – Using the RFB Manual
  - VFO510 – Managing Difficult Situations
  - VFO515 – Power and Responsibilities of an Authorised Fire Officers
  - VFO520 – Mitigation Planning and Management
  - First Officer Program Resource Disk

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National Emergency Management Volunteers Summit


Up to 450 emergency management volunteers from across Australia attended the Summit to discuss contemporary issues relating to the attraction and retention of emergency management volunteers.

QFRS Rural Operations nominated twelve attendees including Volunteer of the Year recipients for each Region:

- Gary Patzwald
- Roger Daly
- John Gilbride
- Mark Doble
- Vince Balanzategui
- Peter Kelly
- Peter Ryan

As well as a number of Volunteer Community Educators from across Queensland:

- Amanda Murray
- Darren Tisher
- Martin Shepherd
- Norm Lewis
- Neil Cook

They were accompanied by Ken Beasley, Regional Manager Rural Operations for Northern Region.

The volunteers listened to a variety of speakers from differing volunteering roles and were treated to a dinner in the great hall at Parliament House.

Our volunteers were able to collaborate, learn, share lessons learnt, develop strategies and most importantly, recognise the valuable contribution emergency management volunteers make towards protecting Australian communities.

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On July 1 we say farewell to our Director for Rural Operations, Paul Adcock, as he commences pre-retirement leave.

Paul's involvement with the Queensland Fire & Rescue Service (QFRS) goes back to 1989 when he joined an auxiliary brigade at Highfields (north of Toowoomba). In 1998 Paul commenced permanent employment with the fire service in the role of District Training Officer and worked in the Toowoomba office for a number of years prior to undertaking a variety of projects. These included work with the Queensland Fire Academy and the formation of the Project Management unit. Paul aided in the implementation of the Online Campus and embedding of the iZone concept into the current systems and policies of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.


As he reflects on his time with the QFRS, Paul expresses his satisfaction with past achievements.

"I really enjoyed having a part in the development and implementation of the Rural Operations Enhancement Package that brought new roles and additional staff that increased our capacity to support volunteers and brigades. I will miss the great people I have come across and being continually exposed to new, exciting and interesting things."

When asked about his retirement, Paul has a few things on his mind.

"I will have more time to ride my push bike, may be then I’ll be able to beat those old guys that get the better of me each Saturday morning. Marg and I are also planning to move back to Toowoomba in the future."

As we say goodbye to Paul, we welcome Superintendent Ewan Cayzer to the position of Director for Rural Operations.

Superintendent Cayzer brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to this position.

Ewan previously held the position of Regional Manager South East Region, appointed in March 2009 and prior to this held the rank of Inspector in the role of Area Director Rural Operations Townsville which he was appointed into in late 2006.

Prior to joining Rural Operations, Ewan commenced with QFRS in 2005 as a Station Officer in Townsville and prior to that, he served with the CFA, Victoria for 20 years.

We wish Paul the best for retirement.
2011 fire season

During the 2010/2011 summer wet season, most of Queensland received record flooding with many areas still affected by the wet conditions. Usually, the tropical and sub tropical winter period produces cold, dry and windy climate conditions that affect the grassland and forest fuels, influencing the start of the Queensland fire season.

The severity of the fire season depends on the complexity of fire weather patterns travelling west to east across Queensland. The duration of the fire season is influenced by the timing of the onset of monsoon rains in the northern tropics and for most other parts of central and southern Queensland, the commencement of the thunderstorm season.


Occasionally, during years of continuous drought conditions, the fire season period may extend from the normal three to four month period in each zone to almost six to seven months. As a result of the warm tropical climate there is a real possibility of fire occurring in parts of the State during a continuous 12 month period.

Fortunately for most populated eastern parts of Queensland, the fire season period occurs in the Spring months.

In 2010, Queensland experienced a relatively short fire season period due to the early onset of the wet season. However, limited fire activity and alternate treatments has resulted in increased fuel loads.

NO TIME FOR COMPLACENCY

Significant rainfall has occurred since December 2010 over most of the State, with long-standing records overtaken. The effects of the previous years of rain fall followed by record rain this year has increased soil moisture and reinvigorated prolific vegetation growth in grasslands and forest areas throughout the State.
Currently the grassland fuel structure is high and continuous across many landscapes throughout western and coastal Queensland. Forest fuel loads are very high over many forested areas with exceptionally high loads and increases of surface fuels in the forest and plantation areas affected by Cyclone Yasi. Tropical weather conditions may assist with rapid natural decay of fallen fine fuels, however elevated vegetation has taken advantage of the open canopy and has increased the fuel loadings.

The June to August 2011 climate models are suggesting that we may experience cooler temperatures for the period. There is a probability of 60 to 70 percent chance of above normal rainfall across the northern tropics, and a probability of 50 percent chance of normal rainfall for the rest of Queensland.

What this means is that we can expect slightly warmer days and cooler nights with the potential of frosts, and slightly above normal rainfall for some northern tropical areas during the winter period.

With the outlook of the temperatures and precipitation in mind, these conditions may slightly delay the commencement of the fire season. However, should an early onset of dry and strong south to south westerly winds eventuate, a normal fire season commencement time may result.

A recent study by the Rural Research team compared the relationship of La Niña years to bushfire events. Preliminary observations suggest that large grassfires have been recorded in the year/s post La Niña events.

During the next three months there may be limited opportunity to conduct effective mitigation activities due to moist ground and fuel conditions, and lower than normal curing status of grassland fuels.

Limiting vehicular access is another factor to consider, due to moist ground conditions and the poor status of fire breaks caused by the flooding rains.

We are yet to determine the extent and duration of the fire season, but we do know that for 2011 we have the highest loads and continuity of fuels across Queensland for decades.

There is a potential for fast running, high intensity fires to occur, should ignition under the right fire weather conditions occur.

Landowners, rural fire brigades and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service are the main partners in bushfire preparation and safety. Please consider the potential and be involved with pre-fire season preparation activities to make your property and community safe.

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**Did you know that you can upgrade your existing manual Quik Reel to a powered version?**

- A 50% subsidy is available to Rural Fire Brigades for all manual-powered hose reel upgrades
- Kits include electric motor in 12 or 24 Volt, power box with manual button for hose retraction, new guards and covers, pulleys and belt for drive, plus all nuts and bolts
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Priorities are something we all must have. In most cases this involves putting the things most important to us to the top of our list of things to do. The priority we give things is based on our values and beliefs, such as giving our family top billing as the thing most of value to us.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) also has values, a mission driven charter and key focus areas, which drive the priorities of the organisation.

Our values have been developed from our community service based culture to reflect what we want our communities to see us as. These values include:

- **Accountability** – we are accountable for our decisions and performance.
- **Teamwork** – we encourage a work environment based on teamwork, mutual support, common purpose, trust and respect for the history and culture of community safety and volunteer services.
- **Community Safety** – our people have a strong commitment to the community we service and community safety.
- **Diversity** – we recognise and value the inclusion of people from a wide variety of backgrounds in everything we do and foster an environment where people feel safe from harassment and discrimination.
- **Sustainability** – we are efficient with our use of energy and water and our management of waste.
- **Integrity** – we act ethically, honestly, impartially and in the best interests of the community.
- **Learning** – we value creativity, innovation, flexibility and continual improvement in the pursuit of excellence.
- **Leadership** – we value and foster leadership based on our common vision, strategic direction and high standards of ethical behaviour.
- **Safety** – we encourage a workplace culture that has safety as an absolute priority.

Our mission driven charter provides us with:

- A vision – in partnership with the community, create a safer Queensland by providing world class professional fire and rescue services,
- A role – we save lives, protect property and improve community safety and resilience,
- An objective – to provide fire and rescue services in partnership with the community for a safer Queensland.

Our key focus areas are:

1. Focus on front line service delivery
2. Strengthen community capability and resilience
3. Support our volunteer, part time and permanent Firefighters
4. Build organisational capability and resilience.

The values, mission driven charter and key focus areas inform the Commissioner of the direction which QFRS is going. Together with the knowledge of the work done by our membership already, the Commissioner is able to determine which areas of work are our priorities for the year ahead. Each Region and Area set their years work to achieve the improvements which the Commissioner has identified as areas of priority.

The Commissioner’s priorities encompass the entire work of the QFRS covering areas of building fire safety, rescue and firefighting. For 2011/2012, the Commissioner’s priorities that directly relate to the Rural Fire Service include:

- Continuing to mature the state and regional incident co-ordination and management capability
- Enhancing operational safety
- Developing sustainable practices to reduce our impact on the environment
- Building capacity to address vulnerability in high risk wildfire areas
- Embed the PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE policy

Our job for the coming year is to ensure that the work we do in developing our volunteers, brigades, groups and staff, will contribute in meeting the Commissioner’s priorities. We will know we have met the priorities when we can say that we have; improved our incident management capabilities through training, exercising and testing our people and systems. We will continue dynamic risk assessments and provide safe work environments and a culture of Zero Harm. With diligence we will also strive to minimise our impact on the environment whilst reducing risk in vulnerable areas through traditional hazard reduction and community awareness of the PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE message.
A. Focus on front-line service delivery
A.1 MATURE – STATE AND REGIONAL INCIDENT COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY
A.1.1 Areas to conduct at least one major (including other agencies) and two minor exercises each year, where practical, incorporating PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE.
A.1.2 Continue to test the communication and interaction of the control and coordination structures (from ICP to ICC/ROCC/SDCC).
A.1.3 Continue to use appropriate technology, such as the eIAP, to support emergency operations.
A.2 ENHANCE – OPERATIONAL SAFETY
A.2.1 Continue to perform PPE and equipment inspections to ensure operational readiness.
A.2.2 Continue to implement safe operations, focussing on the use of dynamic risk assessment.
A.2.3 Ensure the mobilisation of resources and incident management structures relevant to the intensity, scale and duration of incidents in line with GARS.
A.2.4 Continue to conduct operational debriefs, recognise good performance as well as identify and correct any gaps in operational safety forwarding lessons learned to QFRS Knowledge.
A.3 ENHANCE – STATE AND REGIONAL OPERATIONS CAPABILITY AND SUPPORT
A.3.1 Implement identified learnings from the 2010-2011 Flood and Cyclone disaster period.
A.3.2 Continue to activate State and/or Regional specialist personnel, equipment and resources relevant to the type and scale of the incident.
A.3.3 Further develop the deployable capability to deliver specialist and logistical support to inter and intrastate incidents focussing on the capacity to sustain long duration incidents.
A.4 DEVELOP – ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE
A.4.1 Identify improvements

B. Strengthen community capability and resilience
B.1 BUILD – CAPACITY TO ADDRESS VULNERABILITY IN HIGH-RISK WILDFIRE AREAS
B.1.1 Rural Operations continue to lead appropriate development and planning in bushfire prone areas including continued implementation of the Wildfire Mitigation Coordination Plan.
B.1.2 Commit to developing a multi-agency approach that supports proactive mitigation activities such as reducing fuel loads in high-risk locations through coordinated hazard reduction activities involving Training and Emergency Management, Local Councils, Government Departments and other Land Management Agencies.
B.2 EMBED – THE PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE POLICY
B.2.1 Introduce and embed the PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE campaign through structured community and staff awareness programs.
B.2.2 Further develop the communities capacity to embrace the PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE policy.
B.3 CONTINUE – BUILDING OUR PROACTIVE RISK REDUCTION APPROACH AND ACTIVITIES
B.3.1 Engage and educate staff, building owners and occupiers on their obligations and responsibilities in relation to building fire safety legislation.
B.3.2 Engage and educate staff and the community on the life saving benefits of photoelectric smoke alarms.
B.3.3 Ensure all staff are competent in the utilisation and operation of special fire services within buildings.
B.3.4 Continue to reduce Unwanted Alarms by pro-actively engaging building owners and encouraging them to improve management of their fire safety systems.
B.3.5 Develop LAPs and conduct exercises to test operational capability for all major infrastructure developments.
B.3.6 Support multi-agency inspections of hazardous materials facilities (LDGL and MHF).
B.3.7 Identify, develop and maintain LAPs for high-risk hazardous material sites in each Area.
B.3.8 Forward learnings from past incident analysis, particularly those which identify prevention and risk

C. Support our volunteer, part-time and permanent firefighters
C.1 ENSURE – DELIVERY OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
C.1.1 Progress Q2 and Volunteer Management Strategy recruitment/retention and reward/recognition initiatives.
C.1.2 Finalise development of the Auxiliary Firefighter Training Framework.
C.1.3 Continue to implement the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework.
C.1.4 Development of an education framework to lead improvement across Building Fire Safety.
C.2 CONTINUE – THE DELIVERY OF INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TRAINING
C.2.1 Deliver crew leader, strike team, sector and divisional commander training.
C.2.2 Deliver awareness, intermediate and management level Incident Management System (IMS) training.
C.2.3 Undertake functional role training (Planning, Operations and Logistics) to meet Regional needs.
C.2.4 Continue PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE training.
C.3 CONTINUE – CLM AND CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT
C.3.1 Complete scheduled Core Skills Training Program (CSTP) modules for capability development and maintenance.
C.3.2 Continue the commitment to CLM within the workplace.
C.3.3 Engage in personal and career development programs to develop individual and organisational capability and capacity.
C.3.4 Continue development and delivery of Executive Development Learning Programs.
C.3.5 Increase Regional focus on Auxiliary training program delivery.
C.3.6 Increase Regional commitment to QFRS Driver Skills Maintenance Training.
C.3.7 Increase Regional commitment to QFRS Driver Skills Maintenance Training.
C.3.8 Increase Regional commitment to QFRS Driver Skills Maintenance Training.

D. Build organisational capability and resilience
D.1 CONTINUE – TO EMBED A ZEROHARM HEALTH AND SAFETY CULTURE
D.1.1 Embed a culture of safe practice that builds on the goal of zero Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) injuries at incidents and all non-emergency situations.
D.1.2 Implement practices from ZEROharm principles.
D.1.3 Action positive lifestyle choices as well as promote participation in wellness programs.
D.2 CONTINUE – BUILD THE CAPABILITY TO MANAGE USING SIOPP
D.2.1 Continue to promote and reinforce the planning, process and performance components of SIOPP within business as usual.
D.2.2 Continue to reduce unnecessary rework and duplication of effort through the further development of an approach of “doing things right the first time”.
D.3 CONTINUE – TO DEVELOP A PERFORMANCE AND VALUES BASED CULTURE
D.3.1 Continue to build a performance based culture with staff accepting accountability and responsibility for personal as well as organisational results.
D.3.2 Continue to mentor in order to support and provide the direction that underpins continuous personal and organisational performance.
D.3.3 Promote and enhance reporting and management systems to build on Performance Management requirements.
D.4 ENSURE – CAPITAL WORKS/CLIMATE CHANGE
D.4.1 Ensure obligations
Energex – supporting Rural Fire Brigades once again

Energex have renewed their sponsorship agreement with the Rural Fire Service making $75 000 worth of equipment and resources available to Rural Fire Brigades in the Brisbane and South East Regions.

Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell said he was extremely pleased with the renewed sponsorship agreement with Energex which will greatly assist brigades in the Brisbane and South East Regions and increase their operational and support capacity.

“Energex has long supported Rural Fire Brigades and this new agreement offers brigades the opportunity to apply for a range of approved items that will assist them to undertake mitigation, response and education activities within their communities.”

The items available are:

- Transportable Marquees
- Portable Fridges
- Generator and Lighting Tower kit
- Large Esky
- Portable Pump

Energex Corporate Communications Manager Ron Watson said Energex are proud to support such an important group of volunteers within the community.

“Energex have always been proud to support local Rural Fire Brigades. This renewed sponsorship arrangement is just another way we can show our appreciation of Rural Fire Service volunteers and the important job they do.”

All First Officers and Secretaries have been provided with an Energex Sponsorship Nomination Form with their edition of the Bulletin. If your brigade is in the South East or Brisbane regions and is interested in nominating to receive any of the items listed above, please complete the form and return it to your Area Office by Friday 12 August. Applications need to be endorsed by your Area Director and Regional Manager. Successful brigades will be notified in writing.

QFRS hosts Bushfire CRC Research Advisory Forum

The Research Advisory Forum is a biannual event and is an important part of the Bushfire CRC governance and communications framework. The Forum provides an opportunity for all stakeholders, such as researchers, students, fire agency and industry representatives and other end users to get a good understanding of the progress of individual research projects.

The agenda of the Research Forum was structured around the three main research themes: Understanding the risk; Communicating the risk; and Managing the threat. The program represented a good balance of new projects and project updates that captured the interest of all parties and facilitated in-depth discussion and interesting debates throughout the gathering.

The Forum provides an excellent way for QFRS to be involved in the ongoing progress and direction of current CRC research, facilitating broad participation in the evolution of research and the successful adoption of research outcomes into QFRS operations.
CRC research updates

Since our last edition of the Bulletin the Bushfire CRC has published a number of interesting fire notes and project updates:

Strategic implications for incident control systems in Australia and New Zealand

This Bushfire CRC research project led by Dr Christine Owen of the University of Tasmania, scrutinised Incident Management teamwork in Australia and New Zealand and found a number of areas of concern as well as areas that work well. The work is reported in Fire Note 73, Strategic implications for incident control systems in Australia and New Zealand.

Know your patch to grow your patch

Know Your Patch to Grow Your Patch is a working guide for fire managers. The project, is led by Dr Alison Cottrell of James Cook University in Queensland and Fire Note 75 - Know Your Patch to Grow Your Patch provides guidance to fire agencies to understand their local communities’ perceptions, beliefs and needs, so as to better tailor community safety policies.

Firefighter fitness

An update on a Firefighter Fitness project - The relevance of the pack hike test for Australian bushfire firefighters has been published in Fire Note 74. The research is led by Dr Brad Aisbett of Deakin University, Victoria and highlights key points from a recent review of a US-derived physical test and its validity for Australian bushfire firefighters.

Hydration of Australian rural bushfire fighters

This project is part of the Bushfire CRC Firefighter health and safety research project and focuses on the importance of proper hydration of firefighters before and during firefighting operations. Previous research in this area has shown that many firefighters deployed to a bushfire arrive dehydrated on the fireground. This can have great implications on their health, performance and fireground safety. Fire Note 81 focuses on and discusses two studies investigating the role of prescribing fluids before firefighters deploy to the fire ground and the prescription of fluids during their fire ground shift and the effect on firefighters’ physiology and productivity when working on the fireground.

Firefighter health and safety

Fire Note 80 provides an overview, recent findings and possible intervention strategies from the Bushfire CRC Firefighter health and safety research project. The Bushfire CRC has been researching firefighter health and safety throughout the last seven years in a cooperative effort between fire agencies and research providers and volunteer and paid staff. Based on a review of five-to-10 year injury statistics from three fire agencies in south-eastern Australia, the leading causes of on-duty firefighter injuries were musculoskeletal strains and sprains, smoke exposure and heat stress.

How bushfire fighters think about worst-case scenarios

A number of investigations into major bushfires indicated that bushfire fighters do not always consider the worst-case scenarios when deployed at major bushfires. This project, led by Claire Johnson of La Trobe University studied the extent to which firefighters prepare for the worst during incidents, highlighting the importance of being ready for a worst-case scenario and finding inconsistencies in preparation for such scenarios. Please see Fire Note 77 for more detail.

These and all 81 Fire Notes published to date are available on the Bushfire CRC website at www.bushfirecrc.com.
New facility for QFRS Air Operations

Rural Operations has taken on the lease for our own hangar facility at Archerfield Airport, moving away from the shared facility we previously occupied.

The hanger is situated within the south-east corner of the Archerfield Airport precinct with vehicular access from Mortimer Road and Lorres Bonney Drive. The building incorporates a mezzanine level and internal ‘fit out’ measuring 832 sqm. This new facility will provide a suitable location for the storage of Air Operations / Rural Operations logistical supplies, as well as assist with providing on-going support to rural volunteers as well as operational support to and training of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Air Operations personnel.

This facility reinforces our commitment to the development and sustainability of an air operations capability, ready to respond to fire and other emergency/disaster events in support of ground crews and the community.

Diversification of air operations

Since the integration of aerial resources into QFRS, operational firefighting response in 2004 / 2005, approximately 4,000 hours have been flown in support of a variety of operational and non-operational activities. These activities have included aerial observation, water bombing and transport for firefighting purposes through to provision of support to external agencies for both pre / post storm, cyclone and flood response.

With an initial focus on developing the capacity and capability of QFRS operational personnel, the Air Operations Unit has provided training to a cohort of rural, auxiliary and urban staff. These individuals perform the functions and roles necessary to support a variety of internal and external agency operational needs.

During the recent responses to the Queensland wide floods and cyclones, QFRS Air Operations coordinated the deployment of qualified Air Observers, Air Base Operators and Air Base Managers to various parts of the State, tasked with providing support to the local communities. This support included aerial Rapid Damage Assessment of communities impacted by Tropical Cyclone Yasi, operation of air bases including coordination of the movement of pregnant women, food relief for isolated towns and properties and video mapping of flooded areas. Helitack 220, tasked through the

NSW Rural Fire Service, also undertook winch rescues in the Lockyer valley, including Grantham on January 10 and 11, rescuing 47 people.

During this period, the Air Operations Unit also saw the intelligence gathered by the air crews being used, not only for tactical purposes, but also for strategic and political purposes.

This diversification of air operations is part of the QFRS ‘all hazards’ approach in support of QFRS and other government agencies, during a wide range of emergency events. This is also acknowledgement of the skills, capabilities and resources held by our air and ground crews.

Rural Fire Service volunteers help lift Air Ops

Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers helped the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Air Operations Unit provide key support to disaster-stricken communities across the state during Queensland’s darkest hours last summer.

From the co-ordination and execution of winch rescues in the devastated Lockyer Valley to arranging medical evacuations and food resupplies to isolated communities, Air Operations played a vital role in the immediate disaster response and recovery efforts.

Air Operations Officers Wesley Bruce and Andrew Marnie paid tribute to the selfless efforts of the many QFRS Urban, Auxiliary and RFS volunteers who lent their assistance.

“Without them, we could not have assisted the communities in the way we did. The RFS volunteers are the unsung heroes of this disaster. From the outset, they provided great assistance and professionalism in responding to what really were unprecedented events,” Andrew said.

Andrew managed the Air Operations Base in Emerald, on behalf of EMQ and the region’s local disaster management groups, in late December and worked in the State Operations Coordination Centre at Kedron throughout January.

“Having worked in the flood-affected Central Highlands, I saw the extent of the devastation first hand. It was great to be able to support this community by coordinating logistics and supplies to help them,” he said.

“With the support of various agencies, QFRS volunteers and staff, aircraft operators and Army personnel, we were able to organise vital services for the community, such as providing medical evacuations and providing food, fuel and medical resupplies.

“Not having worked through a series of events of this magnitude before, it was inspiring to see the resolve of so many people to just get in there and get the job done.

“I have been involved with Rural Operations for some time and I’ve really come to appreciate just how hardworking
Use of air craft
To meet its operational and training needs, the Air Operations Unit engages aircraft through the National Aerial Firefighting Council (NAFC) or the ‘Call When Needed’ (CWN) Register.

NAFC contracted aircraft
Based at Archerfield during the bushfire season, the three Helitacks are engaged through NAFC and provide an immediate response profile radius of 120 kilometres from Archerfield for Brisbane, South East and parts of the North Coast Regions. It was intended to trial responding the Helitacks as part of the initial response to a fire during the 2010 fire season. As the prevailing weather conditions meant this didn’t occur, the Unit is planning to conduct the trail during the upcoming season.

Call when needed aircraft
Complementing the NAFC contracted aircraft, are the aircraft in the CWN Register. These aircrafts provide the Air Operations Unit with a year round response capability. Ranging from fixed wing agricultural ‘crop dusting’ planes, through small fixed wing passenger planes to a range of rotary winged (or helicopters); these aircrafts are sourced from commercial operators across Queensland as well as interstate.

Unless placed on ‘standby’ during periods of elevated bushfire risk, response times for aircrafts may be over two hours. This is because the aircraft may already be chartered, located away from their home base or, in the case of the ‘crop dusters’, require spray booms removed, hoppers decontaminated and fire doors fitted.

As mentioned, CWN aircraft may be placed on standby during periods of elevated bushfire risk. During such times, aircraft response times may be as low as 10 to 15 minutes. The response time allows for mission planning, crew briefing and engine start up; it will also be dependent on the distance from the air base to the fire.
The March Bulletin featured a profile on Murphys Creek Rural Fire Brigade and the devastating impact of the January 2011 floods. It was a difficult time, with the Brigade virtually inoperable, as well as many of the volunteers suffering personal losses.

Brigade members remained positive and three months on an inspiring story is unfolding as the community bands together to rebuild. Many organisations from as far way as Tasmania have donated money to the Brigade to help rebuild. Within a week of the devastation, QFRS Rural Operations had provided two appliances on loan to the brigade while their new replacement appliances were being built and not long after QFRS also had erected two shade sheds and a shipping container on private property to store brigade equipment while the station is being rebuilt.

The comprehensive insurance coverage provided by QFRS has meant the station reconstruction was able to commence not long after the events of January and has also resulted in the speedy replacement of the two medium appliances and one light appliance destroyed in the flood, with brand new units, all at no cost to the brigade or the local community. If weather permits the station will be

The State Air Desk, in consultation with Regions, may also launch detection flights during periods such as Total Fire Bans. Such flights allow for the early detection of smoke, investigation of the source of the smoke and subsequent advice to Firecom for the responding of ground crews. The rapid combined response of ground and aircrews is likely to result in an earlier containment of the bushfire.

The placement of aircraft in standby as well as the use of detection flights, facilitates the early deployment of ground crews and attack aircraft. These strategies are based on findings from the Victorian Royal Commission as well as from the Bushfire Cooperative Research Council (CRC). The Bushfire CRC research found that on low, moderate and high fire danger days the deployment of air attack at the same time as ground crews increase the likelihood of containing the fire within two hours and under five hectares by 50 percent.
Bushfire Arson is a major threat to the Australian community. Up to half of all bushfires are either deliberately lit, or start in suspicious circumstances. This devastation affects whole communities and recovery is never quick or easy. It is estimated that arson in all its forms costs the Australian public approximately $1.6 billion each year.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) recognises that early detection of arson activity and determining the cause and origins of bushfires is essential for investigating and prosecuting arsonists. This had also seen the development of community safety initiatives, such as the PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE campaign.

The key to reducing bushfire arson is to increase cooperation between relevant parties, stakeholders and resources as well as priority given to programs that prevent bushfire arson from occurring in the first place.

Queensland adopts a whole of government approach to Bushfire Arson prevention through its Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) on Bushfires, including a specialised Bushfire Arson subcommittee and regional sub committees.

The IDC has representatives from all agencies and major service providers that have some fire management responsibility including Department for Environment and Resource Management, Forestry, QLD Rail, QLD Electricity Providers and QLD Police. The IDC fosters Interagency collaboration at a training, planning and operational level. This includes strong links to Queensland Police Services, Crime Stoppers and a Community Awareness package for targeting known arson problem areas or non permitted burns.

To increase our capability in bushfire arson prevention and to investigate the cause of bushfires, the QFRS is increasing the number of qualified fire investigators across the State. This includes training 30 volunteers as bushfire investigators by June 2011, to strengthen the existing fire investigator network.

Course One was held in Rockhampton from 21 – 25 March 2011 and has been completed successfully thanks to a lucky break in the weather and the efforts of Ivan Western and the Cawarral Rural Fire Brigade. The second course was held in Gympie from 16 - 20 May at the old Forestry Training Centre.

Posters and other promotional material relating to the prevention of Bushfire Arson are available by contacting your Area Office. Help to spread the message amongst our communities.
Vesta validation project

The Vesta Validation Project of a revised Fire Behaviour Prediction System is set to continue for the 2011 fire season. The Vesta Validation Project originally commenced in 2009 when Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) partner agencies decided to test the validity of the Vesta Fire Behaviour Prediction Model in different forest types before its nationwide adoption. As a result of the difference in fire seasons and varying fire activity across the States over the past two years, researchers unfortunately received insufficient data to carry out a comprehensive validation process. As a result, the Vesta Validation Project has been extended.

For Queensland’s Fire and Land Management Agencies it is extremely important to participate in this project to ensure that the Vesta Fire Behaviour Prediction Model in its current form is suitable and applicable to Queensland. To get improved data on fire behaviour and fuel structure in the future, we are asking for your help. For all Rural Brigades that have so far assisted in collecting data, we thank you and would ask that you continue your support in the future.

Hopefully, with your continuous support we can obtain enough information to determine where changes or further developments (such as in eucalypt forests, grassy understorey or wetter type forests) are needed. This potentially is an ongoing process and further monitoring and data collection may be necessary, especially if the model is changed to adopt the differing fuel types and fuel structures.

To help you help us, we have placed a standard template for Vesta Validation in the Research section of the Volunteer Portal. Alternatively, the forms will be available through your local Area Office. This form has been specifically designed for Fire Crews. It has been limited to two pages, in order that it can be printed in double sided pad form. Ideally, a copy of the form would be within a number of fire units to enable basic information to be collated by crews, regardless of fire size.

The Rural Operations Research Unit will collate all our data and continue to work with partner agencies and the Bushfire CRC towards the adoption of Vesta. For more information and updates please check the Volunteer Portal and future editions of the Bulletin.
Volunteering leads to a great career

When Fergus Adrian joined the RFS as a volunteer in 1980, he had no idea how big an opportunity lay ahead of him.

Now, 31 years later, Ferg heads the Planning and Research Unit, adopting the results of and giving input to national bushfire research, assisting with the development of training programs for RFS volunteers, and providing advice on weather systems and their impact on QFRS operations.

While he works full-time for the QFRS, Ferg is still an active member of his local RFS brigade.

‘When I started out, I progressed through the ranks of the local brigade and reached district level roles before coming to the Kedron Park headquarters to undertake a Training Resource Officer position that involved developing training programs for RFS volunteers,’ he said.

‘This led to the opportunity in 2005 of heading the planning and research for Rural Operations.’

Ferg said his current role was challenging and required a number of skills which he had developed in previous positions, including his volunteer work.

‘Having progressed through the system myself, I find it easier to relate to challenges volunteers may face and I’m familiar with what works well,’ he said.

‘This is of great benefit when assisting in the design and implementation of training programs and introducing the latest research into operations.

‘Having the experience in the field has also been of great assistance when gathering materials and interpreting information and data for briefings.

‘During the recent disasters and in the lead-up to bushfire season, the unit provided regular briefings to the QFRS Commissioner and Senior Executive Operational Officers.

‘The information contained within these briefings relates to the impact of weather systems and can assist operational efficiency on the ground.

‘In times of storm and cyclones, this information can be very beneficial in deciding deployment locations.

‘When it comes to bushfire season, it helps us with issuing community warnings and assists the deployment and safety of our operational resources.

‘We work closely with many agencies to develop the information within these briefings. It can be hectic at times, but is very rewarding.’

Ferg recently completed a Graduate Diploma in Bushfire Protection and said his interest and commitment to the fire service had increased as he progressed.

And his family shares the passion: Ferg’s son Clint is an Urban firefighter in Gladstone, his son-in-law Tim is an Urban firefighter in Brisbane, and his wife Donna has an active role in their local RFS brigade.
Operational hazards

An analysis of Rural Fire Service (RFS) incidents and injuries in the Safety Health and Environment database has identified that slips, trips and falls remain our highest risk category. Heat stress related issues were also prominent during the recent summer months.

Always remember – In order to protect the community we must first protect ourselves

and risks

Slips, trips and falls

Incidents occurring due to the rough terrain we regularly operate in and trip hazards such as logs, rocks, slopes and slippery conditions accounted for 70 per cent of reported incidents in the slips, trips and falls category. The alarming statistic is that the remaining 30 per cent of incidents in this category, occurred while entering or exiting an appliance or vehicle or stepping up or down from an appliance when accessing equipment.

Working in and around an appliance is considered a controlled environment and therefore the risks and hazards should also be controlled. The number of incidents is a concern. Situational awareness is critical in an operational environment and we need to be vigilant to underfoot hazards at all times. This cannot be emphasised enough. The WHS and Wellness team will look closely at this high risk area and develop some control measures for the RFS for consideration.
Working in rough terrain in difficult circumstances presents many hazards. Ensuring we wear our appropriate Personal Protective Equipment will minimise the risk of injury. The use of eye protection will enable volunteer fire fighters to visually identify hazards. Wearing masks to help protect from smoke and particles in the air will ensure we are not distracted from the surrounding hazards due to breathing difficulties.

Heat stress and fatigue

The impacts of heat stress can be debilitating and can begin without warning. When combined with fatigue, symptoms can occur much more quickly. Heat stress or heat exhaustion occurs when excessive sweat loss, combined with inadequate hydration, causes depletion of the body’s fluid volume. Heat cramps may not always be present. Impaired judgement, trembling, weakness and poor coordination are common symptoms.

Regular drink and rest breaks are critical to prevent the onset of heat exhaustion. Water is the best fluid replacement and a drink break should be taken at least every 20 minutes.

Due to the nature of our operations, it is not unusual for volunteers to be called to an incident after already having completed a day’s work at the farm, business or place of work. The hours already worked and the potential meals missed, combined with the extreme conditions of fighting a bushfire, can quickly lead to the onset of fatigue.

Make sure you advise your incident controller when you last slept and ate, prior to commencing emergency operations to enable a fatigue management plan to be developed. The fatigue management plan should include regular rest breaks where food and drink are available. It is the responsibility of Officers, staff and volunteers to manage fatigue levels of not only themselves but other team members on the fire ground.

Queens Birthday honours and awards

On Monday 13 June 2011, Crows Nest Rural Fire Brigade member Mike Garrahy and Caboolture Area Training and Support Officer Graham King were presented with the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in a Queen’s Birthday Honours and Awards ceremony.

The AFSM is perhaps one of the most well known awards available to Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers. It recognises distinguished service made by volunteers and paid members through fire control techniques, training and or community education and service in fire prevention/protection. The recipient of the medal is also seen to demonstrate a high degree of resource and devotion to duty in a particular situation, or in the exemplary discharge of special duties above and beyond normal work. Nominations are only considered twice yearly for the AFSM, for presentation on the Queen’s Birthday and Australia Day public holidays.

Graham King’s citation:

“Mr King has demonstrated consistent dedication, commitment and enthusiasm to advancing volunteer youth recruitment and engagement within the RFS through his leadership and vision in development a partnership with the Kilcoy State High School, local Rural Fire Brigades and the Department of Education, which has now been adopted as a state-wide recruitment strategy. Through his dedication and foresight, Mr King has ensured that the age profile of the RFS will be altered over time.”

Mike Garrahy’s citation:

“Mr Garrahy has demonstrated consistent commitment toward developing the capacity of the volunteers and brigades of the Crows Nest district to provide fire mitigation and response services to the community including the development of the Brigade Mapping Toolset which is used by Rural Fire Brigade volunteers. Mr Garrahy has also been resourceful in obtaining additional sponsorship and funding from both individuals and organisations to ensure that both the Crows Nest Rural Fire Brigade and Group are well equipped.”

Congratulations to Mike and Graham on this exceptional achievement.
Specialist support units

The recent history of disasters in Queensland has seen a great diversity of roles assigned to volunteers and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) as a whole, roles that volunteers would not have been involved with, in the past. Some of the key roles have been identified as suitable for the development of new Units within the Rural Fire Service (RFS) structure that will build upon the existing Brigade and Group structures and call upon RFS volunteers to take on new skills and functions.

The QFRS Commissioner has approved the establishment of Specialist Support Units for Air Operations and for Communications. To determine how these new Units can best be effectively incorporated into QFRS operations, trial Units are being formed in South East Region, South West Region and Central Region.

Initially the Units will seek to engage volunteers from existing brigades and/or groups and build equipment and operational capability to suit the particular needs of the Region. Currently these support functions exist in a less formal manner in some areas and this project will seek to formalise the arrangement, establish governance procedures and develop operational protocol. Equipment is also being developed for each of the Units, with an Air Support trailer currently being prepared by the Air Operations unit.

The value of these units is clear when we reflect upon the support required of QFRS by Local Government across the State in the recent floods, but also as part of the 2009 bushfire emergency. The demand from District and Local Disaster Management Groups for support will only increase. The skills and knowledge required to effectively support the communications network and expand it during an emergency or to manage an airbase during a campaign response are very specialised. The business will enlist dedicated people who have the skills and interest in performing these specialist roles.

Interest to date has been very positive and with the completion of equipment development it is envisaged that these Units will be trialled in the coming fire season, with a review at the end of the year. Clearly the existing skills our volunteers are broad and diverse. The ability to provide alternate specialist roles for enthusiastic volunteers will be a great opportunity for current and future members.

GIS wins award

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) has been selected from over 100,000 organisations worldwide to receive a Special Achievement in GIS Award at the International Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) conference in America later this year.

The Special Achievement in GIS Award is given for “embracing geographic information system (GIS) technology to improve our world — and setting new precedents throughout the GIS community”. The award internationally recognises the work of the QFRS GIS Unit in developing the Aerial Total Operational Mapping (ATOM) and Rapid Damage Assessment (RDA) systems and the role the systems played in the recent Queensland Flood and Cyclone events.

Tom Patterson from ESRI said the 2011 floods in Queensland, and the subsequent Tropical Cyclone Yasi, presented another opportunity for mobile GIS to prove to be the best solution in a complex situation. More than 75 percent of Queensland was affected by devastating flooding and the Category 5 cyclone. Together, these were declared to be the costliest disasters ever in Australia.

QFRS firefighters conducted rapid damage assessment inspections on 8,184 flooded properties using PDAs running ArcPad mobile mapping software. About 2,500 additional damaged or destroyed structures were mapped after Cyclone Yasi passed through. ESRI’s ArcGIS Mobile was used on both a Tablet PC and a PDA to map hazardous debris that floated downstream through Lockyer Valley, as seen from a helicopter.

Condition reports of the structures and photographs of the damage were transmitted to fire planning officials, who used the information to prioritize recovery efforts.

Patterson said it was interesting, from a technical standpoint, to be able to remotely access from a Tablet PC the Total Operational Mapping (TOM) situational awareness Flex viewer that Brisbane State Operations Coordination Center (SOCC) was using and see the data updates. “We were synchronizing to the QFRS server and TOM via the Internet on the Tablet PC while flying in a helicopter 65 miles from the SOCC,” he said. “We could also see the same map the decision makers were viewing. It was exciting to watch our updates, as they displayed in TOM, from the back seat of the chopper.”

The PDA was synchronizing to a server in the Amazon cloud.
Bunya dreaming festival

Norm Lewis, a Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) from Maleny and District Rural Fire Brigade, attended the Bunya Dreaming Festival at Lake Baroon earlier this year.

The festival is used to generate understanding of Indigenous Culture, providing a forum for networking and information sharing, including the strengthening of Community partnerships.

Norm met and provided locals with fire awareness information and also promoted the role of a VCE.

Beverly Hand, one of the festival organisers, attended Norm’s very first community education session as a guest speaker, and spoke to the community on how controlled and selected hazard reduction burns can help the native flora and fauna. She also added some suggestions on planting fire resistant native trees and groundcover plants.

NOW AVAILABLE ON DVD: Flexible Learning for Crew Leader

For more information on this or any of the Flexible Learning for Volunteers products, talk to your Brigade Training and Support Officer.
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<td>Charters Towers/Cloncurry Area Office</td>
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