As many of you will know, former Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations Steve Rothwell left the organisation in September 2011. In October 2011 Neil Gallant was offered and accepted the role of Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations.

Neil Gallant commenced his fire service career in 1983 as a firefighter with the Mackay Fire Brigade. He served as an operational Firefighter and Station Officer in Mackay for 14 years. During this time he was seconded for 18 months to State Training, managing the Officer Development Program.

Following a further secondment to manage the implementation of the Staib Review, Neil was appointed Area Director at Maroochydore in 1997. He served in this capacity for seven years, including further secondments involving the introduction of the GST and managing the Linton Inquiry, which involved a full review of the Rural Fire Service.

In September 2003, Neil was appointed as Assistant Commissioner, Central Region. During his time there, Neil led the region through some of the worst fire and flood seasons on record, including the 2009 bushfires in Central Queensland and the 2010-11 floods. Through his involvement with Rural volunteers during the Linton Inquiry and the fires and floods in Central Region, Neil developed a strong respect for rural firefighters.

Neil was appointed as Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations in October 2011, a position that he considers to be the highest honour of his career. Neil was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in 2011 for his outstanding service to the community and distinguished leadership in the QFRS Central Region. Neil is a Graduate and Member of the Institute of Fire Engineers, and has completed a Bachelor of Adult Education, majoring in Human Resource Management.
I am very pleased to take on the role of Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations. As mentioned opposite I have had the opportunity to work with many rural volunteers in my role as Assistant Commissioner Central Region and I look forward to the opportunity of getting to know many more volunteers from across the state.

As many of you may be aware, there have been a number of changes within Rural Operations in previous months, with a number of staff retiring, moving on or moving within the organisation. As a result of these staff movements you may notice staff changes within your Area, Region and at head office at Kedron.

It is important we realise that while change may occur at an Area, Regional or State level, the core business of the Rural Fire Service remains the same. That business is to protect Queensland communities to the best of our abilities, to educate them and help them prepare should natural disasters occur. The work that has been undertaken in recent years by volunteers across the state, to help our communities prepare for, and respond to, natural disasters has been outstanding and I have no doubt this work will continue to the highest possible standard.

It is essential however, that while we continue to assist our communities and keep them safe, that we also do the same for ourselves, and our fellow volunteers. Safety is a priority in everything we do. I believe safety is a result of operational professionalism and good communication and that we, as an organisation, must continually strive to achieve ZeroHarm in all activities.

I look forward to sharing the plans and priorities of Rural Operations and the Rural Fire Service with you all in the coming months. I am sure I will have the opportunity to meet and work with many of you when tackling both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Neil Gallant AFSM MIFireE BTeach
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations
New grant opportunities available to Rural Fire Brigades

The RACQ Foundation was established in response to the unprecedented series of natural disasters in late 2010 and early 2011 to help impacted communities to recover.

With funding of $8 million, it is one component of the RACQ’s three-part $20 million assistance package for victims of the Queensland natural disasters. The RACQ Foundation was formed specifically to facilitate the distribution of these funds towards the rebuilding of communities, and for other charitable purposes.

RACQ wanted to contribute on a scale which reflected the impact and gravity of the disasters and to provide an enduring legacy to the Queensland community.

The Foundation is now accepting applications for funding and welcomes applications from organisations with, or without, deductible gift recipient (DGR) status.

The RACQ Foundation’s priorities are to assist:

1. Queensland community organisations that have been significantly affected by natural disasters to help them regain their position prior to the relevant weather event.
2. Deserving charities or other organisations with a charitable purpose that help Queenslanders who have been impacted by a natural disaster.
3. Projects that will benefit Queenslanders and be completed within 12 months of funding or projects that, when completed, will have an immediate community benefit.
4. To be eligible for funding your organisation must be either:
   a. a small to medium community organisation; or
   b. a charity or other organisation with a charitable purpose.
5. The project must benefit Queenslanders who have been significantly affected by flood, other weather event or natural disaster.
6. The project must be completed within 12 months of funding or must, when completed, have an immediate community benefit.
7. The funding must be used to:
   a. pay for material items or something tangible; or
   b. fund the provision of social and community support services; or
   c. cover the costs incurred by the organisation in relation to the cleaning and restoration of property.
8. Applications to the RACQ Foundation by organisations are to be for amounts of no more than $200,000.
9. Applicants may only apply for funding once in each calendar year.
10. Funds will not be allocated for projects that duplicate government funding or services provided by government. However, funds may be granted to supplement government funds as part of total project costs.
11. The RACQ Foundation Trustee Board may, in its absolute discretion, resolve to provide funding to organisations that do not strictly meet the above criteria and may provide funding in addition to the cap.

The next closing date for submissions is 4 May 2012. Submissions need to be forwarded so that they are received by the closing date.

For more information, visit the RACQ Foundation web page at http://www.racq.com.au/about_us/news_and_community/racq_foundation and download the Application Pack. Alternatively you can send an email to racqfoundation@racq.com.au or call 131905 and ask to speak to the Sponsorship and Events Manager.

New Training and Development available

How would you like to learn new skills that apply to your life outside the Rural Fire Service (RFS) while helping your peers within the Service? You can, with the FireCare Peer Referral and Liaison Officer role.

A Peer Referral Liaison Officer, otherwise referred to as PRLO, is a specially trained RFS volunteer who supports the work of Peer Support Officers (PSO) in their area. You act as the first point of call for your peers who need support, and then liaise with the PSO who will provide counselling and advice. (A PRLO does not act as a PSO or provide counselling; however training opportunities are available for you to progress to the role of PSO.)

Two days of valuable training are organised and delivered by FireCare and Rural Operations, giving you the skills you need to be a vital part of the FireCare network, your brigade and your community.

You will learn:

- Essential communication skills, such as active listening and open questions.
- The core elements of recognising, supporting and referring people at risk – such as those with anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.
- The framework for Critical Incident Response and the provision of psychological first aid.
- The ethics and values of being a PRLO.
- The framework of the FireCare program and its networks including the role of the PSO.

But the support doesn’t stop after your training days. All PRLOs are provided with ongoing supervision and training sessions, all conducted by qualified counsellors.

Be part of something bigger. Become a Peer Liaison and Referral Officer and support your fellow volunteers.

Expressions of Interest

Contact the FireCare office on (07) 3635 3130

- Download the application form from the FireCare website: www.fire.qld.gov.au/firecare
- Speak to your local Peer Support Officer. Don’t know who this is? You can find a list on the Volunteer Portal under Brigade Essentials then FireCare.

www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au
Implementation of the new Work Health Act

On 1 January 2012 the new Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 was implemented in Queensland. Supporting this Act and Regulations are new Codes of Practice. There are currently 11 new Codes of Practice, 23 preserved Codes of Practice and four withdrawn Codes of Practice. This new legislation and codes of practice can be viewed on the DEIR website – www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/law/legislation

What changed on 1 January 2012 that affects Rural Fire Service volunteers?

The following is a summary of the changes that Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers may need to be aware of:

- Volunteers are clearly defined under the broader definition of ‘worker’ and therefore have the same WHS obligations as a paid ‘worker’ and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) has the same WHS obligations to all volunteers as it does to a paid employee.
- Changes have been made to the definitions of ‘notifiable incident’, ‘dangerous incident’ and ‘serious injury or illness’ and some changes to notification procedures.
- When a serious incident occurs, the scene must be preserved undisturbed until a WHS Queensland inspector attends or Workplace Health and Safety Queensland directs otherwise.
- Changes have been made to the roles of health and safety representatives and health and safety committees.
- Preventing a person from being involved in workplace health and safety by discrimination, coercion, inducement and misrepresentation is expressly prohibited.
- Increased penalties and a wider range of penalties for breaches of legislation.

Some frequently asked questions are:

**Question** – Can a Rural Fire Service volunteer be classified as an ‘Officer’ under the new legislation?

**Answer** – No, an ‘Officer’ is defined as “a person who makes, or participates in making decisions that affect the whole or a substantial part of the business of the corporation”.

**Question** – As a volunteer can I be prosecuted under the new WHS act?

**Answer** – Yes, but is highly unlikely. While performing tasks for the Rural Fire Service, volunteers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and take reasonable care not to adversely affect the health and safety of others. If a volunteer fails to comply with their duties they may be prosecuted under the WHS Act.

**Question** – Can a Rural Fire Service volunteer be classified as an ‘Officer’ under the new legislation?

**Answer** – Yes, but is highly unlikely. While performing tasks for the Rural Fire Service, volunteers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and take reasonable care not to adversely affect the health and safety of others. If a volunteer fails to comply with their duties they may be prosecuted under the WHS Act.

**Question** – How can a volunteer ensure they comply with the new WHS Act and therefore not risk being prosecuted?

**Answer** – Yes, the best way to ensure you are compliant with the new WHS Act is to take into consideration your own health and safety by discrimination, coercion, inducement and misrepresentation is expressly prohibited. Follow all Rural Fire Service procedures and directives and apply the training you have been given.

What do Rural Fire Brigades do?

The answer to that question could take a very long time and cover many areas of providing service to the widely varied communities of Queensland. Primarily though, rural fire brigades (RFBs) prepare for and respond to the threat of fire in our communities.

The range of emergencies that can cause a fire to threaten a community is quite broad. Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Fire Communication Centres receive calls to many different emergencies and must quickly determine the best response and then dispatch the brigades or stations.

To ensure RFBs are responded to emergencies that may include a fire threat or be of a nature that the closest RFB will be the best appropriate resource, a review of the Emergency Services Computer Aided Dispatch (ESCAD) system has been undertaken.

From March 2012 RFBs will be responded to not only vegetation fires and fires in buildings, but also to all reported fires involving vehicles in their district. This includes car, truck, caravan and other vehicles. Brigades will also be responded to reports of fence fires. All of these fires regularly come from, or end up being grass or bush fires. Brigades need to be called early to have the best chance of combating the fires.

There is also a range of calls received by Firecom which can be easily and best handled by brigades. These include assisting with rescuing animals, helping people locked in or out of their houses and assisting other agencies such as Ambulance Officers where they need additional people to lift and carry patients. Brigades will also be responded to assist with these calls.

The emergencies and calls listed above have traditionally had to wait for the arrival of an urban resource from the nearest station. Now brigades can provide a community service to deal with the emergency or stabilise the situation until the technical services arrive.

Some brigades may want to also provide a supporting role to assist at road crash emergencies. To undertake these activities brigades must comply with the requirements of the RFB Manual and discuss the need with their Area Director. Where a need exists and requirements can be met, the Area Director can arrange for brigades to be responded to these emergencies.
The OMS Support Centre is currently participating in a trial of assisting with the completion of Incident Reports for all attendances by Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) in both Townsville and Ipswich Areas. A 1800 number has been introduced to assist brigade personnel report incidents in a timely manner at the cost of a local call.

The OMS Support Centre is currently receiving in excess of 350 calls per month from the two RFB areas. The below figures show the number of calls particularly relating to the completion of Incident Reports since September when the trial began.

- September 2011 - 110
- October 2011 - 402
- November 2011 - 369
- December 2011 – 267
- January 2012 - 225

In respect to vegetation fires, the responsibility of reporting the incident falls to the first crew in attendance regardless of urban or rural status. For all other incident types, urban, if in attendance, are responsible for the incident report i.e: structural, hazardous materials and mobile property. RFBs are only responsible for these reports if they were the sole responders. However, in all circumstances, there is a responsibility for the rural brigade to report their crew information.

What we need from you
For the Ipswich and Townsville Areas participating in the trial, contact the OMS Support Centre on 1800 062 632. Please endeavour to have the following information available;

- Incident number (if call routed via Firecom)
- Date and time of call out
- Incident address
- Call sign or signs in attendance
- A breakdown of the crew attached to each call sign.
  - Full name of each member
  - Volunteer number
- The name of the Officer In Charge
- Type of incident you attended
- The action taken by your crew
- If a vegetation fire, the area burnt

All of the above information is required for the accurate completion of the Incident Report. In the cases of mobile property, hazardous materials and structural fires where Rural’s were the only attendees, more detailed information is required as depicted in the RF14B.

The OMS Support Centre is staffed Monday to Friday from 07:00 – 18:00 (excluding public holidays). If all staff are taking calls you will be directed to the message bank. Please leave the details as outlined above, including a contact name and phone number in case additional information is needed. In most cases relating to vegetation fires, the information supplied is enough to complete the report.

If you are completing an RF14 you also have the option to email it direct to the OMS Support Centre. Our email address is OMS.SupportCentre@dcs.qld.gov.au

RFB Manual Changes for March
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.

MAJOR CHANGES
New business rules have been released and are included in this edition of the Bulletin for you to add to your Brigade Manual. These business rules are:

- A1.4 - Electrical De-Energising
- D3.7 - Brigade Grants (combines D3.7, previous D3.7.1 and D3.7.2)
- D3.7.1 - RFBAQ Grants (previously D3.7.3)

MINOR CHANGES
These business rules have been uploaded to the RFS Volunteer Portal.

- A3.8 - Brigade Members Role in Disasters
- D4.5 - Insurance of Private Equipment (other than vehicles)
- D3.7.2 - Station Grants (previously D3.7.4)
What is QEOC?

QEOC, the Queensland Emergency Operations Centre is a fit-for-purpose emergency operations centre and will ensure the Department of Community Safety can more effectively coordinate day-to-day emergency responses and improve the management of large scale incidents and disasters.

QEOC comprises of two core buildings – the Communications Centre and the State Disaster Management Centre. On completion, QEOC will accommodate up to 350 departmental employees during full deployment, 250 employees on a day to day basis including teams from QAS, QFRS, EMQ, Corporate Support Division (CSD) as well as a Telemedicine team from Queensland Health.

Relocations into QEOC commenced in December 2010. The first units to transition were QFRS Geographical Information Services (GIS), into the State Disaster Management Centre, and QAS Operational Support Unit (OSU), into the Communication Centre.

By July 2011 the following units also relocated:

- State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC);
- State Operations Centre (SOC);
- QFRS State Operations Branch (SOB);
- Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ);
- CSD Spatial Information Services (SIS);
- CSD Emergency Response Infrastructure Unit (ERIU);
- QAS Workforce Planning Unit (WPU); and
- QFRS Communication Support Unit (CSU).

This year QEOC has received Queensland Architectural Awards and an Audio Visual Award.
2011 Wildfire Season Incident Review

The 2011 wildfire season code named Operation Zephyr commenced on 1 August 2011 and ceased on 30 November 2011. The end of the official wildfire season didn’t signal the end of the fires and January 2012 saw the outbreak of wildfires continue.

From a workplace health and safety perspective the number of injuries reported was lower than previous similar wildfire seasons. The 2009 season was not a good result with 97 injuries. 2010 was a relatively quiet wildfire season and 34 injuries were reported. The 2011 season resulted in 44 reported injuries. Taking into consideration the number of wildfires and the size and life span of some of the fires during 2011 it is very pleasing to see a reduction of 55% compared to 2009.

This reduction demonstrates that we are becoming more safety conscious and taking a more calculated risk based approach to conducting our core business of containing wildfires. Congratulations to all Rural Fire Service members for this reduction. However we must not rest on our laurels with this positive result but continue to strive for the ultimate goal of ZeroHarm.

There were a few areas where injuries were sustained that could have easily been avoided had we done things differently and more safely. These areas are:

- Four injuries sustained due to volunteers riding unrestrained on or in the back of vehicles
- Five incidents of heat stress that required medical treatment
- Three burn incidents where full PPE was not worn.

Riding on or in the back of vehicles or unrestrained in vehicles has long been identified as a high risk activity. Had the circumstances unfolded slightly differently the injuries sustained from the four vehicle incidents could have been much more serious.

Unfortunately we lost one of our own when Graham (Butch) Walker of Eastwood Rural Fire Brigade suffered fatal injuries when he was struck by a truck while conducting a hazard reduction burn on his property. We must learn from this tragic incident and remain vigilant to the dangers presented by vehicles. Our 2012 calendar safety quote for March seems appropriate – danger foreseen is danger that can be avoided.

Regular rest breaks and maintaining fluid intake will help with the prevention of heat stress. It is important that the incident controller closely monitors firefighters and ensure they take regular rest breaks and have plenty of water available.

PPE is provided for our safety and it is paramount that it is worn on the fireground to minimise the chance of burn injuries.

Always remember – in order to protect the community we must first protect ourselves.
Vol Portal Mapshop Updates

Recently the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team has been redesigning and upgrading the look and feel of the Mapshop on the Rural Fire Service Volunteer Portal. The changes were made to provide you with better access to mapping products and provide an overview of what the team is working on. The front page for the Mapshop now has four subsections, with each giving an overview and download capabilities for the different mapping products available.

Rural Fire Brigade maps replace the Maps previously available from the Mapshop. They are in both A0 and A3 size, and are similar to the maps posted out to the brigades at present.

Fire Warden District maps also come in two sizes, a topographic overview of each Fire Warden District in A0, and an A3 size map which is mainly for administrative purposes with minimal details.

Oziexplorer maps and GPS maps

Since the beginning of 2011 the GIS team has been creating ECW files to be used with the Oziexplorer software and also IMG files to be used with the Garmin 78s GPS. These two new tools can be used in conjunction to provide brigades with the capability to capture and record incidents and the features of their patch.

This work is ongoing and so far ECW files have been created for most of the rural areas of Queensland. (The yellow shaded areas in Figure2 indicate availability). These files are created at a scale of 1:25,000 and are best used as an overview of each area. We have also started work on the ECW file for each individual brigade, with these at a scale of 1:10,000 or less showing a more detailed coverage of the brigade area. These are similar to the hardcopy Rural Fire Brigade maps (green and yellow shaded areas in Figure3 indicate availability).

GPS map files have been created for some areas and coverage is by either area or group depending on size. These files contain basic topographic and boundary information and have been designed for use in the Garmin 78s GPS. The areas in yellow shows where the maps have been created so far (figure 4).

Other Information

Links to some other websites of interest have been added and there is a feedback form to allow you to send us your views on improving the look and functionality of the Mapshop.

There are no changes to the way you request maps through your Area Office, we're just making our existing maps more easily accessible. We will continually add more products as they become available.
Review into the Permit to Light Fire System and Role of the Fire Warden

The implementation of the recommendations of the Review continues, with the focus being on initiating enhancements or developing products to support improvement in the three areas of:

- permits management
- system improvements
- Fire Warden support.

Most ideas and developments are sent to a member reference group created in April last year comprising Fire Wardens and Rural Operations and Urban staff. The Fire Warden contingent numbers approximately 18 members, drawn primarily from the volunteer network but also including Rural Fire Brigade’s Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) representatives and Fire Wardens from other agencies, such as the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM).

To date, the reference group have been involved in the development of the components that make up the 2011 Fire Warden Kit, the new Permit book, the new Application for a Permit to Light Fire form, and the two new brochures: Applying to Light Fires in Queensland and Obligations and Responsibilities of Permit Holders.

Future work for the reference group will involve commenting on the content of two more brochures, the review of the Fire Warden training programme and guides, ideas for Fire Warden identification and improved support, providing advice on how better to record the issue of permits and how to better inform the public about the permit system.

Roll out of 2011 Fire Warden Kit

As early as the Fire in the Landscape series (2000), Fire Wardens identified a need for more resources to help them in their work. Recommendations of the Review, backed up by feedback from the two consultation series held across the State in November 2010 and February/March 2011, reinforced the need for a kit for Fire Wardens that could contain a range of resources.

A basic tri fold binder (in high visibility yellow) was selected and then with the help of the reference group, components to fill the binder were developed. By September 2011, the first mock ups rolled off the assembly line and were taken to Fire Wardens to seek their advice. Production went into full swing and by the end of October 2011, with enough of the kits produced to supply one to each Fire Warden District within the State. The kits comprise of a permit book, Fire Warden’s Notebook, Fire Warden Guides, a pen, and room for brochures and permit application forms (see photo below).

In early February 2012 the roll out of the kit to all Area staff had been completed and Area staff are now working on issuing the kits to all Fire Wardens.

Above photographs show the roll out to the first group of Fire Wardens in the Charters Towers and Cloncurry areas earlier this year.
Brochures

It is planned to produce a suite of five brochures relevant to the Permit to Light Fire system. Three are already available and copies have been included in the Fire Warden Kit. Already available from your local Area Office are:

**Lighting Fires In Queensland** –
General information about the Permit to Light Fire system, Fire Wardens, Permits, exempt fires and Fire Danger Periods.

**Applying to Light Fires in Queensland** –
Specific information about how to obtain a Permit and the process involved. This brochure includes a blank tear-off application form and an example showing applicants how the form should be filled out.

**Obligations and Responsibilities of Permit Holders** –
Designed for both those residents who already have a Permit and those considering using fire. It covers the requirement to abide by the conditions on the permit, who to notify when lighting, when to light, managing the fire and what to do if the fire escapes. This brochure uses the motto – YOUR FIRE, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

The remaining two brochures in the suite will be (titles not yet confirmed):

**Burning Guidelines** –
Includes basic fire behaviour theory and fire management techniques. This brochure is designed to provide residents with a resource that will help them plan their fire. It will include information on types and sizes of fire breaks, impact of weather, lighting and where to obtain expert advice.

**Your Rights under the Fire and Rescue Service Act** –
Incorporating much of the information contained in the earlier Notes to Landholders brochure but with additional information about the rights of neighbours.

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Application for Permit to Light Fire

Shortly after the enactment of the Fire and Rescue Service Act in 1990, a Regulation was released (in 1991) which identified the information which must be provided to a Fire Warden by an applicant applying for a Permit to Light Fire. This Regulation became the basis for the form Application for Permit to Light Fire.

We often receive queries from Fire Wardens whether they should encourage applicants to use the Application for Permit to Light Fire form, instead of applying verbally. Rural Operations recently reviewed this form and the June 2011 version not only identifies all of the information required by the Regulation to be provided by an applicant, but also includes a number of questions designed to protect Fire Wardens and ensure that applicants understand their responsibilities.

Excerpts of the Regulation are contained within the Fire Warden Guides and the Permit Book included in the 2011 Fire Warden Kit and, copies are also being handed out to Fire Wardens during the roll out of the 2011 Fire Warden Kit. For those who haven’t seen the Regulation, the latest version is reproduced below.

**Extract from Part 2 – Control of Fires, Fire and Rescue Service Regulation 2011:**

### Requirements for an application for a permit to light a fire—Act, s 65(1)

An application under the Act, section 65(1), to the commissioner for a permit to light a fire on any land must include the following—

- (a) the applicant’s name and address;
- (b) the real property description of the land on which the fire is to be lit (the subject land);
- (c) the address or location of the subject land;
- (d) the location of the part of the subject land on which the fire is to be lit;

Example of paragraph (d)—

- giving a map or plan showing the part of the subject land concerned

- (e) the name and address of every occupier of adjoining land known by the applicant;
- (f) the steps taken by the applicant to notify every occupier of adjoining land about the application and when the steps were taken;
- (g) if the applicant knows an occupier of adjoining land objects to the lighting of the fire—
  - (i) a statement that the occupier objects; and
  - (ii) any reasons for the objection given to the applicant by the occupier.

Note: Fire Wardens are delegated the powers of and represent the Commissioner in determining an Application for a Permit. It is recommended that whenever possible, Fire Wardens encourage their residents to use the Application for Permit to Light Fire form as it ensures that:

- the requirements of the Regulation are met
- the Fire Warden is provided sufficient information to determine whether a Permit should be issued (or not)
- the applicant understands their responsibilities and that they confirm whether or not local council and/or government will allow them to have a fire on their land – thus removing the onus from the Fire Warden
- the applicant realises and agrees not to burn any toxic materials in the fire
- the time and date that adjoining owners/occupiers were contacted.

The form also has provision for the applicant to provide the Fire Warden with a map showing the location of the fire.
Air Operations during the Fire Season

Air Operations activities during Operation Zephyr were generally successful. The large fires surrounding Barcaldine in late October and Charleville in mid November was supported by four fixed wing bombers capable of dropping 3,000 litres of suppressant mix, and additional fixed or rotary wing observation platforms, all from the Call-When-Needed register. These resources were coordinated by Air Attack Supervisors who utilised their training and experience to ensure efficient and effective fire suppression and/or observation activities.

In the Far Northern, Northern and Central Regions, bombers and observation platforms performed approximately 95 missions ranging from fire detection flights to water bombing. A report back to the Air Operations unit from fire-fighters deployed to the Rockhampton fires in October held the use of aviation resources in high regard, further stating “With the addition of air support our I-C team had more time to keep focused on facts rather than assumptions of what the fire was actually doing.” Some fire-fighters deployed on these task forces to this region had not been exposed to the use of air support and upon discussion found them to be extremely useful.

In the North Coast and South West Regions, fire bombing and observation aircraft attended approximately 70 incidents to assist ground crews in detecting, monitoring and suppressing fires in affected areas.

South East and Brisbane Regions saw the use of the contracted Helitack aircraft on an almost daily basis to support ground crews in fire suppression activities. These aircraft are capable of dropping 1,000 litres of suppressant mix with a turnaround time of approximately three minutes, depending on the location of the water source and conditions on the day. Reports from ground-based units back to the Helitack Supervisor provided confirmation on the effectiveness of the Helitack units and the professionalism demonstrated by their crews.
The Air Operations Unit manage the high level of risk associated with ground support activities due to the volatile nature of aviation and the regulatory requirements to be maintained. The aircraft sourced to respond to incidences have been assessed by Air Operations Unit as fit for the purpose. The pilots are assessed for competency and are required to meet a high level of experience before being included on the register maintained by Air Operations Unit.

Air Operations also manage the deployment of resources to establish and maintain air bases where required. In the bushfire incidents at Barcaldine, Charleville, Gayndah and Gladstone, air bases were established and operated by trained QFRS personnel. Lessons learnt by Air Operations by the establishment of these air bases were related to logistical issues. These lessons have spurred the increase in projected training numbers for Air Base Managers and Air Base Operators, in conjunction with increasing the numbers of qualified Air Observers and Air Attack Supervisors.

The Air Operations Unit of QFRS has been building its capacity with regulatory and operational considerations requiring constant reviewing and implementation. For volunteers who feel that they would like to contribute to Air Operations within QFRS, contact the State Air Desk on (07) 3109 0129 for advice and apply to participate through your regional office. Air Operations believes in fostering interested and dedicated people. The roles are diverse and challenging with the skill-set provided being unique.

As mentioned, during 2012, the Air Operations Unit will be conducting courses for Air Base Operators and Air Observers. If you are interested in nominating for one of these courses please contact your local Area Office.
Following the successful use of social media by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) during the 2011 floods, the Queensland Government response to the Floods Commission of Inquiry Interim Report recommended ‘an enhanced social media capability for the Department of Community Safety including messages of preparation, resilience and response during disaster events’.

As a result, DCS implemented Facebook and Twitter in mid-2011 to engage further with Queensland communities.

While learning from the social media experience of QPS, DCS recognises Twitter and Facebook as great opportunities to deliver key information and messages to a broader audience.

With proven success as a tool to engage thousands, social media is quickly gathering momentum within government and non-government organisations.

Not-for-profit groups such as Volunteering Queensland and Green Cross have demonstrated the effective use of Facebook and Twitter with their respective ‘Million Stars’ and ‘Harden Up – Protecting Queensland’ disaster preparedness initiatives.

Public demand and consumption of information has shifted social media from a tool to engage the public to a ‘must have’ communications channel – as important as traditional media.

Statistics show nearly half of all Australians regularly use one or more social media sites. And while many use the sites as tools to keep in contact with family and friends, social media is rapidly becoming the ‘go to’ place for information.

Primary social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are traditionally a Generation Y networking tool. However, as the popularity and credibility of social media grows, so does its audience.

QFRS and SES have more than 25 000 Facebook ‘fans’ between them, ranging in age from 13 to 80 and older. Surprisingly though, the majority of fans are aged 25–40.

Engaging the community

QFRS and SES use social media in different ways – both with great success.

QFRS uses Facebook to post details of fire incidents across the state, while SES has developed strong disaster awareness by using Facebook and Twitter to promote its preparedness initiatives such as Survive 3 Days and SES Week.

Both QFRS and SES use Facebook as their primary social media tool, supported by Twitter and YouTube.

The Survive 3 Days campaign (featured on p10) used SES ambassadors NOVA radio personality Dave David and comedian Stuart Fisher to promote disaster preparedness throughout the region.

The two survived for three days in a perspex living room in Brisbane’s CBD with only an emergency kit and basic food rations. They used Facebook to communicate with the public, respond to questions and post photos of their living quarters, while promoting the campaign and its key messages.

The event was a huge success, kicking-off the SES social media campaign. During the event, the QldSES Facebook site attracted 3800 new followers as well as a wealth of knowledge from members of the public posting tips.

While QFRS and SES have adopted different styles, the department has a uniform approach to social media guided by a series of principles set out by DCS Director-General Kelvin Anderson.
The principles outline the Department’s philosophy about how to effectively engage with the public. Since his appointment as Director-General in September, Mr Anderson has championed the official use of social media within the department, recognising its ability to foster resilience and promote community safety.

‘The Department of Community Safety is confident in its social media messaging, because it is credible and can be trusted – and because it listens to and engages with the community,’ he said.

‘Social media, along with all the Department’s other communications channels, has one purpose: to make the community safer.’

Moving forward

The Department’s social media presence is constantly evolving to better suit public demand.

So what’s next for DCS social media?

Building on previous success, QFRS is currently running the ‘If it’s flooded, forget it’ awareness campaign. As well as feature advertising, the campaign uses Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to highlight the dangers of entering flooded waterways to communities across the state.

To date, the results of the campaign have been overwhelmingly positive with a considerable increase in page visits.

The public response is reinforced by the number of people who have ‘shared’ the campaign ad video through their own social media pages or posted passionate comments and shared stories related to the initiative.

The official DCS social media sites are managed by the Media and Corporate Communications (MACC) team based at the Kedron Park Complex.

If you would like to get involved with the team on social media by providing regional insights, updates or images, contact MACC on 3635 3468.

A trusted source of information

To further broaden its online presence, DCS has developed the Emergency Service and Safety website: www.qld.gov.au/emergency/

This site is part of the whole-of-government ‘single website’ experience program and provides online disaster management, prevention and preparation information.

It also incorporates emergency services social media channels to reach the wider public.

The site has a Community Intelligence Map, which displays data from disaster management tools such as river and storm tide gauges and local emergency services information such as Rural Fire Brigade and SES group locations.

The Emergency Service and Safety website is designed to consolidate online information and act as a trusted source providing consistent messaging to the community on disasters and emergencies.

The site also makes it easy for the community and businesses to get involved in disaster preparedness and recovery through volunteering opportunities and the Community Inventory – a tool for businesses and not-for-profit groups to pledge offers of assistance.

– Desley Gilbey

This article has been taken from the December 2011 Emergency Magazine

It takes a lot less water than people think, as I found out. After a heavy summer downpour I went through a crossing that had water over it to avoid a two-hour detour in the middle of the night on my way home. The water wasn't deep and I thought it would be ok. It was in a big old heavy car from the Seventies. I don't think we'd have gotten out in a small modern car. It didn't quite make it through before the engine died, but luckily the front wheels had just made it to the other side. But the weight and speed of the water was lifting and moving the back of the car around a bit. I was able to get out my door and push the car up a bit higher until the engine dried out and we avoided disaster, but I was surprised by how little water it takes to lift a car.

– Facebook comment posted by a fan on the QFRS page
Rural Operations and Energex continue to handover more equipment to successful brigades as part of the 2011 partnership.

In November, a number of rural fire brigades in the Brisbane Region shared in $21,000 worth of new equipment.

Emergency Services Minister Neil Roberts said the handover formed part of a $75,000 pledge by Energex to benefit 38 brigades in the Brisbane and South Eastern Regions.

“The 11 successful Brisbane brigades received essential resources including marquees, large eskies, generator and lighting tower kits, portable fridges and pumps,” he said.

“Energex has been a long time supporter of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and this partnership gives brigades the gear they need to increase their operational and support capacity.

“The inaugural sponsorship program in 2009 and 2010 supported a total of 35 brigades with essential items, this time around the number has increased which is pleasing to see.”

QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson, who attended the handover in Samford in November, said the benefits of the partnership went far beyond the RFS volunteers who had received the equipment.

“Not only will these handovers give RFS volunteers valuable additional tools they need to do the best job possible but in turn it will impact on the communities they work so hard to keep safe each year,” he said.

ENERGEX Central West Field Services Manager Keiron Walsh said the grants program built on a range of initiatives put in place following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the QFRS and ENERGEX in 2007.

“The MoU included assistance to develop a comprehensive bushfire risk mitigation strategy which aims to greatly reduce both the threat of fire to electricity infrastructure and the potential of powerlines to trigger fires,” Mr Walsh said.

“Paid and volunteer firefighters do a magnificent job working alongside local councils and property owners in protecting their local communities.

“Hopefully equipment from the grants program will make that job just that little bit easier.”

The handover of the remaining $54,000 in equipment to South Eastern Region brigades took place in late February.

The Gatton group, which consists of 11 brigades, was presented with a trailer filled with equipment at a ceremony at the Gatton Springdale Rural Fire Brigade station.

Representatives from a further 27 Ipswich Area brigades were presented with at least one piece of equipment that they were successful in nominating for as part of the $75,000 partnership.

Rural Operations thanks Energex for their invaluable contribution to Queensland Rural Fire Brigades and hopes this important relationship continues into the future.
2011 Rural Fire Service Volunteers of the Year

Each year, the Commissioner's Awards for Excellence (CAFE) are awarded to recognise outstanding achievement or significant contribution by QFRS employees and volunteers to furthering the organisation’s values and goals.

In 2011, eight Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers were recognised for their outstanding service, receiving Regional Volunteer of the Year awards. Volunteers are judged on the performance of duties, delivery of programs, development and delivery of policy, business improvement, community engagement and education communication.

Congratulations to the following eight volunteers for this well deserved recognition:

Mr Ian Smith, Dalrymple Heights Rural Fire Brigade, Central Region

The Dalrymple Heights Rural Fire Brigade has significantly increased its capability and performance under the leadership of First Officer Ian Smith. Ian has increased this capability through providing training opportunities, improved equipment resources and increased community engagement activities undertaken by the brigade. Additionally to increase the safety of the Dalrymple Heights community, Ian has assisted with the development of a disaster management strategy for Dalrymple Heights.

Mr Steven Edward Brittingham, Elimbah Rural Fire Brigade, Brisbane Region

Mr Steven Brittingham has been the First Officer of the Elimbah Rural Fire Brigade since 2003. During the 2011 floods in South East Queensland Mr Brittingham volunteered his time to transport equipment and supplies from the State Operations Centre at Kedron to the various Incident control centres through to Toowoomba. Mr Brittingham also spent a further seven days assisting with the flood clean up around Brisbane. Steven is an exceptional leader, highly respected within the community and by his peers and staff within QFRS.

Mr James Colin Besgrove, Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade, Northern Region

Jim Besgrove is the First Officer of Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade. Jim is a dedicated and tireless worker who willingly attends every job involving the Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade to ensure its successful outcome. Jim is also recognised for the time and commitment he gives to mentoring his fellow officers and brigade members to ensure that suitable and capable persons are available to undertake the various roles and responsibilities.

Mr Derrick J Finlayson, Murray Upper Rural Fire Brigade, Far Northern Region

Derrick is the First Officer for Murray Upper Rural Fire Brigade and displayed excellent leadership skills during the impact of YASI on his local community. Through his leadership, the brigade cleared roads, ensured the Telstra communications tower was operational, maintained communications with local landholders and worked closely with other agencies in coordinating community efforts. All of this while many of the brigade members had damage to their own properties and were without power for many days.

Mr Anthony Dale Thompson and Mr Robert Ian Haigh, Mungar/Yarra Rural Fire Brigade, North Coast Region

Volunteer Community Educators Tony Thompson and Robert Haigh from Mungar/Yarra Rural Fire Brigade delivered Prepare.Act.Survive.(PAS) to the Maryborough Deaf Society on 28 February 2011. This initiative saw 10 members from the communities of Maryborough, Hervey Bay, Tinana and Childers, with a range of deafness from moderate to profoundly deaf, effectively delivered the PAS message and ensured understanding by all in attendance. VCE Robert Haigh delivered the presentation while Tony Thomson signed the entire program. Tony identified this need in the Maryborough community due to the high number of hearing impaired residents.

Mr Stephen Anthony Gardiner, Hattonvale Summerholm Rural Fire Brigade, South East Region

As a Volunteer Community Educator Area Coordinator, Stephen has demonstrated ongoing commitment and dedication to the training and mentoring of VCEs. His support of the program’s growth and development and his work in the education of communities across the South East Region has been outstanding. As the brigade First Officer he has demonstrated commitment to community engagement, his volunteers’ development and safety and the development of a hydraulic pump drive as a prototype.

Mr Bryce Ramon Duke, Orange Hill Rural Fire Brigade, South West Region

Bryce is diligent in the performance of his duties. His dedication and commitment not only to QFRS but to other volunteer organisations within the community are a credit to this young man. Bryce has, and continues to work tirelessly in all aspects of emergency services and is a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm, especially in an ‘all hazards’ approach to any situation. This was very evident in the Roma District floods of 2010 and 2011 as well as the bushfires throughout the South West Region during late 2009.

Northern Region recipient Jim Besgrove
A range of members of the Rural Fire Service were recognised this Australia Day, with 24 Rural Fire Service volunteers awarded Australia Day Achievement medallions at events around the state, for service to their brigades and their communities. Unfortunately some events were postponed due to bad weather, and will be held at a later date. Congratulations to you all for this recognition of the outstanding work you do.

Kevin Anderson
Christine Batt
Kathy Booth
Ginni Clegg
Brian Clerk
Damien Cooke
Deborah Flesser
Anthony Hayden
Mary Hegarty
Louise Hicks
Shan Hollowood
Norman Lewis
Kyle Mitchell
Hamish Murdoch
Raymond Pace
Malcolm Roache
Donald Schouten
Cassandra Sorensen
Darren Tisher
Lenny Toscanno
Edward Uebergang
Michael Welsh
Jane Williams
Sue Wyton
Election Commitment
Appliance and Equipment Update

As part of the Supporting our Heroes election commitment funding we are building another four new heavy tanker appliances for the state. This round of tankers will be allocated to Central, Northern, North Coast and South West Regions. These tankers will be built on an Isuzu FTS 800, 4x4 single cab-chassis and will feature a GAAM Mk 300 pump.

The heavy tankers will feature strong characteristics from both the urban water tanker and type two urban appliances whilst still having the ‘Mother ship’ characteristics of the previous build of rural tankers such as a collar tank and pump, portable lighting and spare PPE supplies. Being built on a 4x4 base, these appliances will be able to meet the operational requirements of a rural appliance. It is anticipated that these tankers will have an onboard water capacity of at least 4500L.

The design for these has been a collaborative result from Rural Operations Central and Area offices, feedback from the last build of heavy tankers and QFRS Engineering Services Command. To assist in the design of these appliances QFRS Engineering Service command created a new position specifically for Rural Operations which was successfully filled by Ian Baker a QFRS Brisbane Region Mechanic. Ian has been appointed for 12 months to the position of Technical Officer – Rural Fleet. Ian brings with him a large amount of practical and technical experience in the mechanical and particularly fire appliance fleet field.

These appliances are currently in build and will be in their respective regions by the end of June.

The retro fitting of diesel pumpsets and fire curtains is in full swing with over half of the appliances across the state currently fitted with diesel pumps and just under half fitted with heat reflective curtains. With this program due to end in June 2013 we will be working at full pace with multiple installers engaged to have these all completed.

For our appliance build program for this year we have had manufactured 10 new dual cab medium attack appliances and 10 new single cab medium attack appliances. These are now out in the field and being put to good use. They were allocated to brigades in the Townsville, Caboolture, Cairns, Charters Towers, Caloundra, Bundaberg, Innisfail, Ipswich and Toowoomba areas. These vehicles have followed the same design as the previous year. We also anticipate building the same quantity and type of medium attack appliances next financial year.

We were also fortunate enough to be able to build a limited number of light attack appliances this year. They were based on the same design as the Urban “Yankee” vehicle which is Nissan Patrol cab chassis with the suspension, brake, clutch and wheel upgrades.

To achieve optimum outcome for rural fire bridges a number of state committee's focusing on 4x4 appliances and pumps have been established. These are made up of rural fire brigade members, RFBAQ, QFRS technical officers and both urban and rural Staff. These are specifically focused on evaluating the job requirements of our fleet and how we require our appliances configured to achieve our required capacity across the state. These committees have had the first of their meetings with some of their recommendations to be implemented in the next appliance build.

In order to improve the operational equipment support to rural fire brigades, we have recently reviewed and lifted the stock quantities that are kept on hand in the Department of Community Safety warehouse, with particular focus on PPE items. We understand the frustration that some brigades have had delays in receiving PPE and are grateful in the understanding that you have had following the loss of our sole wildfire boot supplier. We ask that if issues arise in the future that you contact your local Area Office.
New Volunteer Application Kit and Changes to the Application Process

The recruitment of new members to brigades across the State is a priority for Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Rural Operations however, can often be a challenge for brigades. For many brigades the process and paperwork associated with becoming a member can be confusing. Although the process currently undertaken is necessary and similar to other volunteer agencies, we are striving to make it as simple as possible.

In order to assist, a new ‘Volunteer Application Kit’ has been developed along with some changes to the application process.

There will be two kits available, a Registered Junior Volunteer Application Kit and an Over 18 Volunteer Application Kit. The Over 18 kit will consist of:

- a covering letter explaining the application and Criminal History Check (CHC) process, and the steps they need to take
- the new Rural Fire Brigade Membership Check and Medical Self Assessment Form
- the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Consent to Check National Records and Advise a Third Party form
- the Rural Fire Brigade Membership Application form
- the Rural Fire Service (RFS) Awareness DVD
- a reply paid enveloped directed to the Area Office.

The Registered Junior Kit will be the same, excluding the Queensland Police Service form, as Registered Juniors are not required to undertake a CHC.

Each kit will come in an individual folder so when the brigade is approached by a potential volunteer, a full kit can simply be handed over.

What is the change to the CHC and Application Process?

The previous CHC and application process saw potential members complete the CHC consent form and the Pre-Membership Check form and forward them to the Area Office. Once CHC clearance was provided, the potential member needed to attend the brigade, be voted in, complete the brigade application form and send it back to the Area Office. This needed to happen within three months of receiving the CHC clearance, as a CHC is only valid for three months.

For many brigades, meeting this three month time frame was proving difficult. The revised process will now be:

1. A potential volunteer completes and signs their Rural Fire Brigade Membership Check and Medical Self Assessment form, ensuring all sections are completed and answered honestly.

They then tear out the Doctors Medical Assessment page and kept it separate to the other forms in case they are requested by the Work Place Health and Safety Officer to visit their GP for an assessment.

2. They complete and sign the QPS Consent to Check National Police Records and Advise a Third Party form, and attach a photocopy of their photo ID.

3. At this stage, the brigade votes to accept the applicant as a member and to allow their application to proceed. For Primary Producer Brigades, this can be as simple as a phone around to the Executive Group and to validate the voting process. The process meets the three month CHC requirement, and as such, voting is not required to happen again after the applicant receives their CHC clearance.

4. Once this is done, the applicant completes the Rural Fire Brigade Membership Application form and has an Authorised Brigade Officer sign it.

The completion of this form does not make them a member of the brigade, it merely indicates that should their CHC come back clear, the brigade has accepted them as a member. On the form the applicant and brigade must sign acknowledging they are not yet a member, and that they will not participate in any brigade activities such as meetings, voting or training until the applicant and the brigade have received the letter stating the CHC was clear.

1. The applicant then posts all the forms in the reply paid envelope provided in the pack.

2. When received by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Rural Operations Area Office, these forms will be processed and forwarded to the QPS.

3. Once the CHC clearance has been received, the Area Office will be notified, the Area Director will co-sign the application form acknowledging the CHC clearance, then two copies of the acceptance letter and an RFS Welcome Kit will be forwarded to the applicant.

The process for a registered Junior is that they simply complete the Rural Fire Brigade Membership Check and Medical Self Assessment form and the Brigade Application form, get voted in and send the forms to the Area Office, as no CHC is required.

As outlined earlier, the change in this process is to allow brigades to vote in members subject to their CHC clearance, which prevents this issue of the application being completed more than three months after the CHC was conducted.

What are the changes to the forms?

A significant change is the former ‘Pre-membership Check form’. This is now the ‘Rural Fire Brigade Membership Check and Medical Self Assessment form’. All potential volunteers, including those aged 16 to 18 must complete this form. The Medical Self Assessment section of the form allows the potential volunteer to identify any health issues or concerns they may have, this will then be assessed by a QFRS Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) officer.
Both the Registered Junior and Over 18 application forms have had minor changes. There is now an area to write the name of the brigade the applicant is applying to join, and on the Over 18 form, a tick box to identify if it is your primary brigade (as some volunteers choose to become members of more than one brigade).

On the Over 18 application form, there is also now a declaration, for both the applicant and brigade authorised officer to sign, stating they acknowledge the applicant is not a member of the brigade until they receive their CHC clearance, and the applicant cannot participate in any brigade activities.

**Why is RFS Awareness included in the pack?**

As the CHC process can take a few weeks, the RFS Awareness program has been included in the pack to keep applicants engaged while they wait, and to also allow them to complete this program prior to becoming a member should they wish to. For Registered Juniors, who do not have to wait for CHC clearance, it means they can begin RFS Awareness straight away, rather than waiting for their Welcome Kit.

RFS Awareness is applicable to anyone joining the RFS, whether as a firefighter or a support member. Anyone joining a brigade is expected to complete RFS Awareness prior to or soon after becoming a member.

The RFS Awareness program is the basic knowledge required for working with a rural fire brigade. It is knowledge based and can be undertaken using the DVD provided to you, or if you prefer, you can ask for a booklet version from the brigade or the Area Office. The topics covered include:

- Working with the Rural Fire Service
- Safety in the Rural Fire Service
- Understanding Wildfire.

Remember, once the applicant is a member of your brigade, it is important they receive a brigade induction as soon as possible. The new Volunteer Application Kit and the updated business rules are being distributed directly to brigades however additional kits can be ordered through your Area Office. The updated forms and business rules are also available on the RFS Volunteer Portal. If you have any questions regarding the new process, please contact your Area Office.
Don Duffus
Nikenbah RFB

My current position in the Rural Fire Service is 2nd Officer at Nikenbah Rural Fire Brigade (RFB). I am also a group training officer at Hervey Bay as well as a casual trainer and Assessor for Rural Operations, Maryborough.

I first joined as a volunteer at the age of 16 years in the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Victoria and served until I was called up in the army. In the early days it was a total passion, as soon as you could sign up to join a local brigade you would.

After my discharge from the army I rejoined with my local brigade at Wesburn/Millgrove Rural in Victoria. I served 2 ½ years as 1st Lieutenant and later with Chum Creek Rural as 1st Lieutenant. Chum Creek Rural amalgamated with Healesville Urban after 57 years on 6 September 1996. I served as a lieutenant with Healesville Urban for 3 ½ years, retiring in 1999.

I moved to Queensland and joined the Nikenbah RFB on 1/9/1999 as Training officer. I guess volunteering runs in the veins, the comradery and team work, helping others, and doing your bit for your local community.

I volunteered for roughly 17 years in Victoria for the CFA, I spent seven years in the army and most recently, 12 years in the RFS.

What I enjoy most about volunteering is passing on knowledge in a team environment and helping out your mates. I love how infectious volunteering can be.

Through the years I’ve contributed by inspiring new volunteers and encouraging them to undertake the excellent courses now available. These courses allow them to go as far as they want in the volunteering career, or gain a foothold to progress into Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) paid employment.

My passion for volunteering in the RFS is also shared with my position as an ex-serviceman. I am also a welfare officer with Hervey Bay RSL where I visit veterans in private homes, hospitals and nursing homes averaging 40 hours a month. Finding a balance between fire duties, home and welfare work isn’t always easy.

It has been exciting over the last 12 years seeing changes in my brigade and the Hervey Bay region. The availability of equipment, appliances and training has been a result of team commitment from both past and present members. The Hervey Bay group was the first to be granted an Automatic External Defibrillator to equip our group support vehicle. This was an important moment as we believe in the safety for volunteers and the Department of Community Safety’s policy of ZeroHarm.

I am truly proud to say I am part of a volunteer group of firefighters that can stand shoulder to shoulder with other states and fire services.

VALE:
Charlie Smith
AFSM

In 2011 the Rural Fire Service (RFS) lost one of its most respected and charismatic members, a man who was the essence of the volunteer rural firefighter. Charlie Smith born in 1924 lived a life of a sailor, an African safari guide, a builder and many other roles, any one of which would be a singular occupation for the rest of us.

Charlie and Christine Smith finally settled at Coomera on the Gold Coast at an age where the quiet life would beckon to most. It would come as no surprise to those who knew him that after fires around the Coomera shores village in 1994 Charlie was inspired to initiate the formation of Wasp Creek Rural Fire Brigade.

At the age of 70, Charlie organised a meeting of community members at his home where a steering committee was formed. The first fundraiser was kicked into action by 19 February 1995 with a total of $3,500 raised by holding a fete. The brigade was officially registered also in February 1995 and Charlie was officially appointed Fire Warden on top of his role as firefighter and brigade Chairman.

A second hand Toyota was purchased and converted into a fire truck. For the next six and a half years training and brigade meetings were held regularly every week at Charlie’s home. The furniture pushed back to make room for each event. The amount of trucks operating from outside the brigades official headquarters at Charlie Smiths home grew along with members and community support.

The years of campaigning for a piece of land to build a fire station paid off with everyone in the community
from the Federal, State and Local Council representatives as well as business and individual community members becoming fair game for Charlie's approaches for money or services to assist in the building of Wasp Creek fire station. Charlie's vision of building a large fire station for the area was achieved. It was at this point that Charlie became the First Officer of the brigade.

Charlie always made it a brigade policy to involve the community in major fundraisers. The local community looked forward to the yearly fundraising fetes and Christmas Community days where the brigade worked hard giving a day of fun and a B.B.Q to thank the locals for their support. The Wasp Creek brigade always acknowledged the community that supported their efforts.

In 1999 Charlie said yes to taking on more area when South Stradbroke Island was added to the brigade's area. This was an additional and somewhat problematic responsibility for Wasp Creek with the Island as the name suggests, being separated from the mainland by water. This was a challenge that Charlie took on in his own inimitable style. The island had no fire trucks and crews had to rely on others to transport them to the Island, but to Charlie this was another challenge that required a solution. Initially a fire boat with a limited on water fire fighting capacity was obtained to transport crews. The first fire truck on the island presented yet another challenge that Charlie overcame. The members again backing and helping Charlie achieve the construction of Wasp Creek South Stradbroke Island fire station, another major achievement, Wasp Creek's second fire station.

Today the brigade's area has changed from a mostly rural community to many very large housing developments, boating complexes a train station, schools and shopping centres. The brigade boasts a diverse range of 50 active members.

When he received a volunteer award in 2011, he commented that no one person is the brigade. All members of the brigade should have the same award as the brigade cannot function properly unless everyone pulls together, but it was Charlie's vision, his passion, his drive and total dedication to the brigade, its members and the community for the past 17 years that enabled Wasp Creek RFB to become what it is today, a highly respected part of the local community.

Charlie Smith took on each challenge that he encountered. His passion never allowed him give in or back down. He gained a reputation as the tireless canvasser and worker on the Gold Coast all for the benefit of the brigade.

Charlie was known to federal and state parliamentary members, the QFRS Commissioner, local councillors, businessman and those with the wherewithal to get things done. When Charlie Smith came calling for funds, influence or resources (sometimes all three) the outcomes were never in doubt.

At an age when most are ready to enjoy a less strenuous life style Charlie Smith took on a challenge that would daunt many a younger person. He has achieved in less than twenty years what many would struggle to realise in a life time. He rallied the community and the brigade members, was a driving force in the administration and operational functioning of the brigade as well as ensuring the application and management of fire in his role as the local Fire Warden.

Charlie Smith was a man of passion and conviction. Those of us who had occasion to adopt an alternate position in some matters were never left wondering nor were we spared Charlies' forthright appraisal of what he saw as our recalcitrance. At these times Christine's calming words would smooth the troubled waters whilst Charlie considered another way of achieving his objective.

In early 2011, I nominated Charlie Smith for the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM), in recognition of his selfless hard work, determination, enthusiasm and unwavering belief in his community and the brigade.

Unfortunately Charlie passed away before the award could be announced and in keeping with protocol he was not aware of his nomination.

On Australia Day 2012 Charlie Smith was awarded the AFSM posthumously.

Charlie Smith is not just a firefighter to whom an AFSM has been awarded; Charlie Smith is a person who represents the firefighter for whom the AFSM is created to recognise, dedicated and tenacious, a person who gives above and beyond without seeking recognition or reward.

No person is more deserving of the Australian Fire Service Medal than Charlie Smith, someone who, to paraphrase President John F Kennedy, has said “I ask not what the community can do for me, but what can I do for the community”.

Superintendent Bernard Trembath
Regional Manager Rural Operations
Brisbane Region
Emergency Services and Safety Website

The new Emergency Services and Safety (ES&S) website was launched by the Director General of the Department of Community Safety (DCS) in December last year.

The ES&S site is part of the Q-Gov ‘single web’ experience and was developed by the Public Engagement Capability Project within the All Hazards Information Management Program at DCS, with assistance from Smart Service Queensland (SSQ).

The ES&S website is a ‘one stop shop’ for Queenslanders to access emergency and disaster related information, including links to popular, credible, trusted and well designed digital tools and websites.

Recognising the need for clear and easy-to-access information in times of crisis, the site features useful tools, guides and tips to help Queenslanders better prepare, respond and recover when disasters occur.

Queensland communities will now have access to localised disaster management information via the website’s Community Intelligence Map. This map aims to improve situational awareness with ‘layers’ of local information including storm tide gauges, school locations, and SES groups. As the map continues to develop, additional layers will be added.

The site also provides easy options for individuals and businesses to offer help before, during and after a disaster. Using the Community Emergency Inventory resource, businesses can contribute equipment, supplies or services that may be needed.

The ES&S website was developed in co-operation with Queensland Police, Queensland Ambulance, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland State Emergency Services, Emergency Management Queensland and Smart Services Queensland.

2012 Youth Recruitment Campaign

Over the past two years, Rural Operations has reviewed research into our youngest volunteers, otherwise known as Generation Y, to understand why they volunteer and what they want out of their volunteering experience, to better attract and engage new recruits. The Youth Summits held in Brisbane in 2010 and again in Townsville in early 2011 found that Generation Y needs to be constantly engaged to maintain their attention and interest. They want to follow the Rural Fire Service (RFS) on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, and they expect to see frequent updates.

The Gen Ys in attendance said sometimes they feel like they are the last to receive news and information from Rural Operations because it is up to the Secretary or First Officer to share the information. This point reinforces their want to access additional means of communication.

Most Gen Ys see the personal benefit to volunteering such as learning new skills or achieving social status amongst peers, as a major draw card. This segment value recognition of their time spent volunteering, whether it is a certificate, medal or a points system similar to that of FlyBuys (once enough points are collected from attending meetings, training or community events, they can be redeemed for a variety of rewards from Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) baseball caps or RFS t-shirts).

Current profiles show that a mere 1% of RFS volunteers belong to the under 18 age bracket, joined by a small 5% in the 18 to 24 years age bracket. However, when compared to other age groups, this group has the highest percentage of volunteers in operational roles, and the lowest percentage of volunteers in non-operational roles for both genders. 39% of males and 39% of females perform operational duties, whilst 60% of males and 60% of females perform non-operational duties.

These low statistics could be attributed to an insufficient online web presence and no social media presence. Gen Y isn’t aware of the work the RFS does because we aren’t communicating with them through the mediums they chose to listen to.

The importance of using social media to attract the Generation Y age bracket is stressed heavily throughout the National Conference on Volunteering, and also through the National Volunteering Strategy.

Social media is changing the rules for marketing and how we communicate with our chosen audiences. Social media marketing programs usually centre on efforts to create content that attracts attention, generates online conversations, and encourages readers to share it with their social networks. The message spreads from user to user and presumably resonates because it is coming from a trusted source, as opposed to the brand or company itself.

So what does this mean for the Queensland Rural Fire Service?

The overarching goal for this campaign is to increase RFS youth volunteer numbers across Queensland. Primarily, this is Generation Y or the 16 to 25 year old age bracket.

A secondary component of this campaign is to increase awareness of the RFS, repositioning the organisation with a young, fresh image, ultimately leading to recognition of the RFS as the volunteering organisation of choice.

This recruitment strategy aims to address four key points made in the National Volunteering Strategy - Engaging Young People section. These key points are linked via one central concept - what is in it for them? What can volunteering for the Queensland RFS give you? It gives you skills for life, new adventures, new friends and connectedness.

Key Point 1: Skills for life –
“Volunteering can be an important way for young people to develop confidence and skills, which can clear a pathway to future social and economic participation.”

Key Point 2: New adventures –
“Young people have different interests and expectations of their volunteer experience from those of older volunteers. Their motivations are often linked to their sense of identity and a desire to participate in new experiences.”

Key Point 3: Make new friends & be cool –
“In the UK it was found that some of the most successful and inspirational volunteering experiences for young people are those that are led by young people, and that a youth-led approach to developing volunteering opportunities for young people should be adopted wherever possible.”

Key Point 4: Connectedness –
“Young people are often much more linked to social media and online networks than older volunteers. Organisations that communicate with young people using the media they use, and create roles and experiences that appeal to them, successfully engage youth as volunteers.”

Did you know that studies have shown that Teens were four times more likely to volunteer if they were asked, and of those who were, 93% actually did! (Foundation for Young Australians, 2011).
Smartphone App to mobilise Qld volunteers like never before

The next generation of disaster volunteers will be mobilised with the touch of a button, thanks to a new Smartphone App launched recently.

Premier Anna Bligh said the free App, Ready Qld - developed by Volunteering Qld with the research assistance of the University of Queensland - would empower Queenslanders to be better equipped to work together in situations of disaster.

“This App will not only inform Queenslanders about preparedness for disasters - resources, checklists and advice - but will also provide real-time updates and information about volunteering opportunities in your local area.

“While our communities were devastated by the natural disasters of 2011, the outpouring of compassion was overwhelming.

“Immediately following the disasters, Volunteering Qld was inundated with calls from people around Queensland and Australia.

“Within three days of the floods striking Brisbane, 55,000 people had registered their desire to help.

“As well as that, thousands of people signed up for the Mud Army - who can forget the images of people dropping everything to help out perfect strangers in their time of need.

“These floods, while devastating, brought out the best in human spirit.

“We always hope that nothing like this ever happens again, but if it does, this new App will be a great source of real-time information,” she said.

Key things you can do on the App:

- Register with CREW (Community Response to Extreme Weather) to be an emergency volunteer;
- See current emergency volunteering opportunities;
- Access all the key contacts for emergencies in one place and save your own emergency contacts;
- Watch the short disaster preparedness and response videos;
- Find out what you need to have in your emergency stay/go kit (and check them off when you’ve got them); and
- Read the latest news from www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au

The project has been made possible through the joint State and Federal Government funded Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP).

Volunteering Qld CEO, Jelenko Dragisic, said the natural disasters of 2011 highlighted just how important technology and social media were when it came to rebuilding homes, neighbourhoods and communities.

“Volunteering Qld has learnt much from the experiences over the last year, now providing better support and services for emergency volunteering,” Mr Dragisic said.

“We’ve enhanced our database of emergency volunteers, agencies and opportunities. Improved services means we can quickly register, search and match opportunities with volunteers easily and conveniently - and Ready Qld will take that to a whole new level.

“It was humbling to see communities coming together to volunteer and whose efforts helped to make the lives of those doing it tough better. Over the past year we have referred over 14,500 volunteers to agencies for disaster recovery work,” he said.

To download the App, search READY QLD on the App store or visit www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au for more information.
Caboolture Rural Fire Brigade Group Incident Support Unit

The Caboolture Rural Fire Brigade Group within the Brisbane Region identified the need for a support unit at major incidents or larger hazard reduction burns. Although the first responding appliance established a control point it was found that fire appliances were often not sufficiently equipped to manage a protracted incident.

The Incident Support Unit (ISU) is based on a 7x5 trailer with a fully enclosed box canopy and is fully equipped to manage most situations. The unit is fitted with both UHF and VHF radios and an extendable mast that enables the aerials to be raised to six meters. The ability to raise the aerials is advantageous in the western areas of the group where radio communications in appliances is often limited due to the terrain. A 12 volt power supply allows the radios to be used immediately the ISU arrives on site and the onboard generator can be quickly deployed to back up this supply. Two 12 volt portable base stations allow for the establishment of staging areas or other functional areas away from the main command centre.

The ICU is also equipped with a 24 volt LED lighting system which provides for a well lit working area around the unit.

The unit is also equipped with whiteboards, battle boards, folding table and chairs as well as 2 x portable marquees for additional shade areas.

The 240 volt system, supplied by either mains power or portable generator, provides power to the radios, lights, portable radio chargers, lap top and portable printer. The on board laptop is equipped with the latest version of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) Incident Management Forms and mapping software which is capable of interfacing with portable GPS units.

Future upgrades to the unit include the installation of a mobile phone antenna to facilitate broadband/fax/mobile phone connection.

Funding for the unit was received from the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland (RFBAQ), Rural Operations and fundraising events held by the Caboolture RFB Group and associated RFBs.

The unit which has already assisted at several prescribed burns in the group area is stored in a purpose built facility at a local station.
Cambooya Rural Fire Brigade Profile

Cambooya brigade covers 787 square kilometres of farming lands and several townships just south of Toowoomba. The brigade has 48 members.

Cambooya has one light attack, four medium attacks and one heavy attack appliance. To assist them in providing effective bushfire protection for the local community, the brigade recently looked into building a 91 unit.

To ensure the 91 was built to meet the requirements of the brigade, two Cambooya members, 23 year old Mechanic Brock Greer, and his brother, 21 year old Electrical Apprentice Rohan Greer, were enlisted to design and construct the internal and external fit out of the unit.

The Greer family is very committed to the local rural fire brigade with the boys father Gary the First Officer, their mother Marilyn a Volunteer Community Educator and another brother Nathan a Crew Leader.

The unit started out as a single cab Isuzu D – MAX with a tray and had an aluminium drop on canopy made up. Firstly the brothers started on manufacturing the aluminium internal drawers, map board and dividers followed by wiring in the front and rear radios, external work lights, internal lighting and emergency response light bar.

All up the fit out in the boys’ spare time took around a month and a half to complete, with all of their time and skill volunteered for the cause. Since having the 91 unit operational, the brigade’s capacity to attend and control larger incidents has certainly made for a safer community.

Issue and Wearing of PPE

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is issued to Rural Firefighters to minimise exposure to hazards and reduce the risk of injury during operational activities. PPE is the last line of defence for a firefighter and appropriate PPE should be worn at all times on the fireground. Appropriate PPE as a minimum should consist of:

- wildfire jacket and trousers
- helmet
- boots
- goggles and gloves.

There have been some delays in the supply of new or replacement PPE. Rural Operations is committed to ensuring this backlog of orders is cleared as a matter of priority and have implemented a strategy to achieve this goal. Rural Firefighters who have not yet received PPE, or who believe their PPE requires replacement, should contact their Area Office to arrange requisitioning of required items.
Bendigo Bank presents volunteers with a Training Trailer

As announced in the November 2011 Bulletin, Bendigo Bank placed donation tins inside their Central Region branches to raise money to purchase a Training Trailer for use by rural fire brigades in Central and North Coast Region.

The generous community have donated over $23,000 towards this trailer, contributing towards and important tool for the delivery of theoretical and practical training to rural fire brigades and the community.

The trailer was presented to representative brigades on 14 February. Brian Smith, Area Director Rockhampton said he is thrilled to receive such a valuable piece of equipment that can be shared amongst brigades across Central and North Coast Region.

“Actions speak louder than words, and being able to safely demonstrate fire behaviour to community members is invaluable,” Brian said.

“The trailer provides two unique education delivery methods – through the audio visual equipment such as the television monitor or laptop, or through the fire simulator trolley.

“When set up, the fire simulator trolley can be set up to suit many different landscapes over many different scenarios. The angle of the terrain can be adjusted, and by using different ground fuels it can mimic local conditions. This information can then be used to help find safe access and exit routes and safe refuge areas. Other observations include extinguishment and containment using different methods of attack.”

The Training Trailer was conceived by Corey Bock, Area Training and Support Office at Ipswich, and engineered by Barry Smith at AAA Engineering in 2007. As Corey says, “if it just saves one life, then it’s done it’s job.”

Have you snapped an amazing photo?

We would like to open submissions for amazing photos from our volunteers and staff. If you have taken a great shot while volunteering, simply send your image to Rural.Operations@dcs.qld.gov.au with a few details about the shots and maybe next edition you will see your snap on the cover!

Remember – if your photo has other volunteers in it who can be recognised, please get their consent before submission. A photographic consent form may need to be filled out for the picture to be published.
On 4 January 2012 Moreton Island Rural Fire Brigade (RFB) in conjunction with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) responded to a report of a fire near the Island village of Cowan. Upon arrival the responding agencies located a vehicle and adjacent vegetation well involved in fire.

Due to the inaccessible terrain and limited containment lines, the first priority and action of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) crews was to assist the local QPWS and SES personnel with the relocation of campers from nearby camp sites. This was followed up with the commencement a back burn activities around the township of Cowan. Water bombing aircraft assisted with reducing the rate of spread while the campers were relocated.

Throughout 2011, Moreton Island RFB in conjunction with the QPWS completed a number of strategic hazard reduction burns around the villages and resort on the Island. QPWS had also completed a number of large conservation burns across the island to remove ground fuels. However the combined high temperatures and volatile nature of the vegetation species found on the island made this unseasonal fire difficult to control.

As the fire spread, the southern end of neighbouring village of Bulwer became an area of concern, which resulted in RFS and QPWS crews working through the night to conduct a back burn around the village. By early morning the fire was contained to an area bordered by Middle Road to the south and Bulwer/Blue Lagoon Road to the north. The fire had burnt to the beach on the western flank. Over the next day crews continued to conduct back burning activities along Bulwer/Blue Lagoon Road to further contain the fire. Late on the third afternoon the fire jumped the containment line to the north and the township of Bulwer again came under direct threat.

Local resources were strengthened by the arrival of four light attack appliances and eight volunteers from Brisbane Region. Due to the nature of the terrain only light attack appliances or specially modified medium appliances could be used on the sand tracks and beaches of the Island.

These additional resources, along with the available QPWS staff, were able to conduct a series of back burns around the village of Bulwer and adjoining camping grounds. Crews also conducted a back burn along Taylor Bite Road to contain the eastern flank of this new outbreak.

Although the Island is in close proximity to Brisbane, one of the major issues in managing the incident was the remote location. With limited accommodation and other infrastructure available to responding crews, the practices of logistics and planning proved critical.

The QFRS benchmarks of no injuries sustained to firefighters or members of the community and no structural loss or damage was achieved. This was testament to the sound multi agency working relationship between the responding agencies.
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