### Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

#### Submissions Received

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<th>Date Recd</th>
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<td>08.02.10</td>
<td>Redbank Creek Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Michael Jess, Chairman</td>
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<td>Mr Jon Jessen, 1st Officer</td>
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<td>Marburg District Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Ms Andrea McNicol, Secretary</td>
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<td>Mr Bryan Cifuentes</td>
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<td>Ms Rosemary Clark, Secretary</td>
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<td>Mr John Stuart, Fire Warden</td>
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<td>Mr Ian Lindenmayer, Chairman</td>
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<td>Mr John Robertson</td>
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<td>Qld Fire and Rescue – Senior Officers</td>
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<td>Hinchinbrook Shire Council</td>
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<td>Mr Tony Longman</td>
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<td>Mr Neil Allen, Director Infrastructure Services</td>
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<td>Mr Peter Edwards, 2nd Officer and Secretary</td>
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<td>Mr Greg Hoyes</td>
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<td>Qld Audit Office</td>
<td>Mr Val Manera, Acting Auditor-General</td>
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<td>Ms Sheree Osborne</td>
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<td>Mr Tom Seiler, Chairman</td>
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<td>Turkey Beach Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Graham Luck, 1st Officer and Treasurer</td>
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<td>Mr Michael Fraser</td>
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<td>Ms Bronwyn Burnham, Secretary</td>
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<td>Ms Christine Hancock, Manager</td>
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<td>Barcaldine Regional Council</td>
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<td>Bundoora Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Peter Cook, Secretary</td>
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<td>Cooberrie Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Waine Scott, First Officer</td>
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<td>Adelaide Park Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Jamie Mulholland, First Officer/Mr Tim McCall, Secretary</td>
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<td>Tanby Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Michael Scott, First Officer</td>
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<td>Fitzroy Rural Fire Brigade Group</td>
<td>Mr Darrel Kelly, Chairman</td>
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<td>Mr John Thomson</td>
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<td>Mr Gary White, CEO</td>
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<td>Mr Charlie Smith, First Officer</td>
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<td>Keppel Group Rural Fire Brigade</td>
<td>Mr Gary Dash, Group Officer</td>
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<td>Ms Anne Wells, Hon Secretary</td>
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<td>Volunteering Queensland</td>
<td>Mr Jelenko Dragisic, CEO</td>
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<td>Mr Paul Cauchi</td>
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<td>Department of Community Safety</td>
<td>Hon Neil Roberts MP, Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services</td>
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<td>Ms Grace Crees, Secretary</td>
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<td>Mr Bruce Beasley, Secretary</td>
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<td>Mr Dick Irwin, CEO</td>
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<td>Mr Andrew Ireland, Director Corporate Services</td>
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<td>Mr Tim O'Brien, Manager Parks and Conservation</td>
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<td>Gold Coast City Council</td>
<td>Mr G Potter Director Organisational Services</td>
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<td>Mr B. Finlayson</td>
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Cooberrie Rural Fire Brigade

Submission
In Response to Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
'Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion Paper,
November 2009'

First Officer:
Cooberrie Rural Fire Brigade
Mr Waine Scott
Phone: 0749397698 / 0407397698
Email: calstonia2@bigpond.com

Secretary:
Cooberrie Rural Fire Brigade
Mrs Janet Scott
PO Box 553, Yeppoon, 4703
Phone: 49397698
Cooberrie Rural Fire Brigade is located to the north of Yeppoon and as well as the approximate 300 landholders is also responsible for fires on the Iwasaki Property.

Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

The current model of Rural Fire Brigades is suitable provided the Rural Fire Manual is followed. Our Brigade has witnessed instances when paid Rural Operations Staff have had their own interpretation of the Manual and or shown little knowledge of the Manual.

Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

If the procedures of the Manual are followed with Brigade finances Audited by an accredited auditor, a twelve month budget and a three year operational plan submitted to the relevant Area Director the use of the levee system works very well. The system is let down when the Area Director has made little or no effort to record the details of each Brigade with reference to the information sent to him. A simple data base could record this information and be then transparent to QFRS and Government.

Brigades need to plan well for replacement of appliances with 20% of the cost coming from Brigade funds. The difficulty arises when the cost to Brigades of replacement is not actually known until the appliance is ready for delivery, the need for a Crystal Ball through lack of communication.

The need to have a central supply store is rapidly disappearing with Brigades having to outsource items that two years ago were available at a subsidised cost to Brigades by ordering from Rural Operation QFRS. This apparently is due to cost incurred by Rural Operations to store these items.

What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

With the growing Urban areas the Brigade area is reduced minimally but the increase in fire activity is increased, especially where larger urban blocks are not maintained and become a risk to the surrounding residents. Many of these Urban interface blocks reduce the access of appliances to contain and extinguish fires if they occur.

To alleviant this problem Local Government needs to take action to create and maintain clear access to the rear of this type of property.

How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

The change to Rural Operations when Rural Regions were aligned with Urban Regions, a dramatic increase in paid staff was evident.

Rural Operations went from two Regional Managers to seven, the addition of Brigade Training and Support Officers (BTSO).

In the Rockhampton Office there was a District inspector, a Training officer and a half time administration assistant.
Today the same office has a Regional Office consisting of a Regional Manager, an Administration Assistant and recently a Mitigation and Education Officer. The District Office has a Area Director, a Area Training and Support Officer (ATSO) two Brigade Training and Support Officers (BTSO) and two Administration Assistants.
This change has increased the workload and demands on Brigades by approximately the same percentage. The increase in staff has not helped Brigades, but simply increased the demands with more hoops to jump through.

With the amount of staff in the Regional Offices and the District Offices, managing to record the amount of information and forms collected from Brigades could surely be streamlined and checks made and communicated back to Brigades with the simple use of technology. For example our brigade has always had Safety Certificates / Inspections done on Appliances and then forwarded to the Rockhampton Office where the information should be entered onto a database so that an easy check can be made and transparent to QFRS.

What does happen to this information we send to the District Office?

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

The current need for a Brigade that collects a Levee to have the Financial Records audited by an accredited auditor, the production of a twelve month Budget and a three year operational plan we believe is appropriate to show transparency to QFRS and Government. This system works very well, except where some of the Rural Operations Staff are vindictive and want to hold grudges with particular Brigades.

Our Brigade was demanded in 2009 by the Regional Manager and the then Area Director to produce the previous five years of Financial Bookwork to be re Audited (which took six months) as they both stated that our Brigade was Fraudulent and needed to be looked into.

The Audit found no problems and showed the Brigade to be acting as it should and the budgets were correct. We have a detailed report on the reaudit.

This fiasco has meant that through the actions of the then Area Director, who has since left the service, and the Regional Manager our Brigade has lost eighteen months of Levee Money. The first six months were frozen, somewhere never to be seen again and the next twelve months, where the Area Director did not pass on to the Local Government the need to collect a Levee for our Brigade as he was still having the accounts reaudited. This will inturn affects the Brigade when Appliances need to be replaced and any other major repairs to appliances.

What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The Fire Warden needs to be part of the Rural Fire Brigade and not a separate entity.

The Fire Warden needs to have local knowledge of the topography, weather, fuel loads and fire behaviour of the area. Without this knowledge a true and accurate permit to light fire is not possible as specific conditions cannot be included.

Our Brigade works alongside the Fire Warden. The First Officers contact details are added to the permit so that the Brigade is contacted and knows a permit has been issued before the fire is lit. This is a condition on the permit similarly to the permit holder notifying Fire Com before the fire is lit.
Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

- The ability for some Rural Operations paid Staff to actually do the job they are employed to do?

- Do Rural Operations paid Staff possess the ability to work with volunteers or should they stay behind closed doors propping up a desk wasting tax payer money?

- What selection criteria is used to show that staff have had a good working relationship with volunteers prior to employment with Rural Operations and what checks are done to show this?

- Is correct policies and procedures always followed by Rural Operations Staff or do they follow their own interpretation of the policies and procedures, especially the Code of Conduct?

When a comment is received from a staff member “that he does not have to know the volunteers in his area, they are just employees of QFRS”. (Area Director) It makes volunteers wonder if any respect is received from the paid staff.

- We believe that Volunteers need recognition from paid staff for what they do and the time that is spent for the service and not to be treated with contempt, distrust and the lack of skills. (This is the message conveyed from the Central Region Office)

The excellent skills of Rural Volunteers in the Rockhampton Area were shown during the October fires of 2009.

- After fires such as the Mount Archer Fires (Rockhampton) October 2009 we feel that a debrief must be held and include all involved parties. Our Brigade is still waiting for the time, date and location of the debrief. TOO LATE!

From the Rural Fire Bulletin, March 2010, page 23
Region Snapshots
Central Region
Deb briefs for this period of fire activity have been undertaken and the results and lessons learned are being incorporated into a Major Incident Report.

How can an accurate report be compiled if all parties involved were not notified of the debrief:

- There needs to be an improvement in the communication between Rural Operations Staff and Brigades / Volunteers. The office staff need to be reminded that fire may be their career, where as volunteers have lives, families and jobs outside of fire and are volunteers. This is one reason why it is becoming more difficult to encourage community members to join as volunteers, when they see the way present volunteers are treated by QFRS.

- How much correct information is passed onto the Minister, Director-General, Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner and so on down the chain? It appears that
they are told what they want to hear and not what is actually happening on the rural
fire ground.
Adelaide Park Rural Fire Brigade

Submission

In Response to Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

‘Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion Paper, November 2009’

Contacts:

Adelaide Road Rural Brigade

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Secretary:

APRFB

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Mr Tim McCall

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E: tmccall@dss.com.au
Background

The Adelaide Park Rural Fire Brigade (APRFB) is an organisation of volunteers who service a rural residential and rural area adjacent the town of Yeppoon in Central Queensland. The brigade is managed by a Committee of 9 people including operational and non-operational personnel. Each Committee member has experience in one or more areas of business, personnel, land, and finance management.

The Operational team consists of 20 trained volunteer fire-fighters who have a sound knowledge of local topography. The topography is hills to undulating grasslands interspersed with sub tropical forests and open grass country used for primary production.

The APRFB area is classified by QFRS as “F” zone or an intermediate zone between rural and urban brigades. The area has become more densely populated over recent years with smaller acreages being developed from older development approvals which allowed unscaled road accesses. We believe with this mix of semi rural and rural properties, adjacent to the town, the risks have increased as the population & infrastructure has increased.

Summary

It is the view of this Committee that the checks and balances in place now are transparent and accountable and provide a clear audit trail. The Brigade Constitution and the Brigade Manual quite clearly define the requirements for the management (particularly financial management) for Rural Fire Brigades and the APRFB adhere to those requirements. Our decision making is recorded in detail and QFRS, the Area Group, and the community are involved in the process. Forward planning, by means of an Annual and a 3 year Operational Plan are developed and forwarded to QFRS as required by the Constitution.

The APRFB has a levy in place which is voted upon at a public meeting annually by ratepayers and forwarded to Local Government and QFRS for approval. There has been no difficulty with this arrangement. It is an arrangement that allows a community to provide and budget for its own particular needs. It is fair and equitable for all ratepayers, it allows the Brigade to concentrate on the more important issues of operational readiness.

The Auditor General’s Report 3 to Parliament 2008, Audit Opinion, stated;

“Within QFRS there is a lack of comprehensive forward planning and risk management processes as well as inadequate systems to effectively assess funding and resource requirements of the brigades”

Another issue The Auditor General maintains requiring “urgent clarification is the financial accountability framework of rural fire brigades”
The problem from this Committee's perspective rests with QFRS's inability to analyse and process the information that is provided to them in accordance with the Constitutional requirement of running a Rural Fire Brigade. There is no disagreement that Rural Fire brigades are part of the QFRS structure. Rural fire brigades are managed as separate entities as defined by Constitution but they are not operating independently of QFRS. QFRS may be responsible for the liabilities of the Brigades but sufficient financial and operational detail is provided for QFRS to do the checks and balances necessary to identify and correct any problems.

It is considered by this Committee that QFRS does not have the ability currently, or the resources to undertake this task effectively now, let alone if the system was changed to add to the QFRS workload. Unless resources were increased to manage any change, then those inefficiencies would be compounded. If resources were to be increased, the current procedures are considered sufficient to achieve accountability and transparency. Any change to the current structure of Community involvement and accountability would have a disastrous effect on morale in the volunteer force and the sense of 'community ownership'.

Public Accounts Committee Issues:

* Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigade suitable

The current model is considered suitable if managed IAW the rules and Constitution. Community knowledge and involvement is essential for successful management both administratively and operationally of Rural Fire Brigades. It has the spin offs of providing community reliance, discipline, the feeling of giving something back. In short, it sets a good example to younger generations; it reduces the cost to the Government through a volunteer force, and through the local knowledge the best outcomes are achieved for operations.

* Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

No one knows better than the community of what the risks are, or what resources are needed for a particular area. The existing One year and Five year operational Plans and the annual requirement for audited financial accounts to be submitted to QFRS is a sufficient check for QFRS to assess the needs and/or processes. In the view of this Committee these processes have not been managed in detail by QFRS in the past, which has caused some of the problems being addressed today. If managed properly all accountability and transparency requirements would be met and areas of deficiencies identified.

* What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on rural fire brigades?

There is a higher workload and call out for both the urban and rural brigades in these areas. There is closer cooperation and team building and respect between the urban and rural Brigades and there are clear lines of responsibilities and management which seem to be working well between the town brigade and the rural Brigades. Experience has shown that when the regional QFRS managers become involved in an incident tensions rise. Neither the urban nor the rural can service such an area on their own because difficulties in both terrain
and access. Different types of equipment are needed in semi rural "I" zone areas and full rural areas.

- How can the increasing demands of Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

The reason the current model is functioning as well as it is, is the fact that volunteers feel part of a local community organisation and are giving something back. Most volunteers do not know, nor need to know and do not care whether the local Brigade is part of QFES by legislation. The important thing at this level is the local chain of command, the level of efficiency through sound training, and the fact that the brigade is seen as a central activity of the community. If changes are implemented that affect those responsibilities and attitudes, volunteers will leave in droves. Volunteers need to be encouraged and recruited. One identified problem is employers will not release a willing volunteer to attend a fire at his/her cost. Similarly self employed people cannot always afford to drop tools to attend. Consideration should be given to compensating (at least key personnel) for time spent away from employment.

- Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

The problem, from this Committee’s perspective, rests with QFES’s inability to analyse and process the information that is provided to them in accordance with the Constitutional requirement of running a Rural Fire Brigade. There is no disagreement that Rural Fire Brigades are part of the QFES structure. Rural fire brigades are managed as separate entities as defined by Constitution but they are not operating independently of QFES. QFES may be responsible for the liabilities of the Brigades but sufficient financial and operational detail is provided for QFES to do the checks and balances necessary to identify any problems.

It is considered by this Committee that QFES does not have the ability or resources to undertake this task effectively now, let alone if the system was change to add to those inefficiencies. Any change to the current structure of Community involvement and accountability would have a serious affect on morale and the volunteer pool and would add significantly to costs and budgets.

- What should be the role of the Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The Fire Warden must be an experienced member of the community with sound local knowledge of topography and weather conditions. He should be supported and legally backed by QFES structure and be given clear and precise information to support his actions. He should be trained to become an educator and be able to explain the reasons/ need for issuing fire permits. It is important that the Fire Warden is a respected and experienced member of the community and has the local knowledge to undertake the task.

- Are there any other matters the committee needs to address?

The important issue here is that Rural Fire Brigades should remain rural "owned". Costs, morale and mass exiting of volunteers would occur if the current model is drastically changed. It may be a little damaged in places, as identified by the Auditor General, but it is repairable and communities and volunteers are willing to take on responsibilities if treated with respect and trust. It is considered this has not occurred in this region in the past. To support this statement one claim by a regional manager referred to a volunteer as "an
employee of QFRS which was grossly inflammatory. The last 2 years have been a very testing time both for QFRS management and voluntary operations in our region. What are needed now are stability, good leadership, and accountability practices which are acceptable. Any change should seriously consider the impact on the enthusiasm and future availability of the volunteer force and the involvement of the community.
Response to

Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion Paper Nov 2009

Submission made by:

Michael J Scott
1st Officer
Tanby Rural Fire Brigade

Contact:
Michael J Scott
P.O. Box 3360
North Rockhampton. QLD 4701
Ph 49 397106 or 0427196304

6th April 2010
Introduction:

I make this submission as an individual landholder and ratepayer. Although I am the 1st Officer of a Rural Fire Brigade and former Treasurer of that Brigade, the comments are not necessarily those of that brigade.

Let us look at the origin of the Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland their roots and the evolution that has occurred with development in the real estate sector and the technological sector.

Rural Fire Brigades were established by communities getting together when bushfires threatened their lands. Each had their own items of choice whether it be a truck with pump or just a wet bag and a load of determination. Combined forces of these concerned farmers made up a formidable army of volunteers that faded back into the woodwork when the job was done. They had no Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary or fund raising committee. They were just there when the chips were down.

Today’s Rural Fire Brigade has evolved into a following of a very few dedicated persons that put in for the community much more than they are ever recognised for doing. They are essentially running a small (or large in some cases) business albeit a non-profit one. They have assets that they are responsible for both maintaining and funding. They have a staff of volunteer workers that they have to train, equip and assume responsibility for their safety. They are also then responsible for raising the funds that finance this business, either through Local Government levies or fundraising efforts of the Brigade members. After this funding is raised, the Brigade is then legally bound to account for the use of these monies and put forward Profit and Loss statements to justify their accomplishments.

Many of these people are farmers and farm workers that just wanted a good reliable source of equipment on hand to fight fires with, not to become accounts clerks for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

What can change?

For a start, to remove the burden of ‘running another business’, the responsibility of funding and financing the Rural Fire Brigade be delegated to the Queensland Fire & Rescue Service (QFRS), a major stumbling block would be removed from the brigade. If the worrisome task of financing new sheds vehicles and equipment was borne by QFRS, then individual brigades could concentrate on the tasks of:

- Fire suppression in rural areas
- Community awareness of fire hazards
- Training
- Management of hazard reduction burns
- Management of prescribed burning

The ‘fire’ side (operations) of running the brigade could be accomplished with a lesser degree of inconvenience to the brigade due to the ‘finance’ side being alleviated.

The Urban fire fighters who are paid for what they do, don’t have to worry about the financing of the equipment they use. They don’t have to worry about funding for the supply or maintenance of their trucks, stations or equipment. All done by the QFRS.
For what benefit?
The benefit would be that smaller brigades would have a better chance of getting appliances and shed than on the existing system where they are under financed through the levy system due to lower rate payer properties in that region thus lower levy incomes.
Brigades whom now have multi tasking for positions such as Treasurer, Secretary, Chairperson and officer positions can have lighter workloads within the Brigade framework and possibly last longer in those positions. People tend to last one or two terms in the Executive positions, especially if they are multi tasking fire fighting and administrative roles.

What needs to change?
Rural Brigade Levies are gathered from the rural and semi rural landowners within the region that the brigade covers.
When fires encroach townships boundaries, the rural fire brigades are requested to help with these fires as well, although they receive no financial benefit from those urban areas.

If the ratepayers in the whole of Queensland, Urban, Rural and commercial, were to pay a fire levy and that combined levy were to be distributed throughout the QFRS Urban and Rural brigades, a more equitable financing policy could be adopted. The urban sector would be catered for as it is now with the "red trucks" and a larger dividend of funding could be directed towards rural brigade funding. The possibility of a dollar rate / hectare with a risk assessment, for the amount of rural land covered by that brigade, could be implemented.
The QFRS would be required to substantially increase personnel to cover this change, due to the increase in workload proposed.

What roles would each have?
QFRS
- Administer the collection of and distribution of funding with regard to the risk assessment carried out on each brigade area, and the actual amount of rural land covered. All in consultation with the brigades.
- Distribute funding for the running expenses of each brigade to which they have the autonomy to use at their discretion. ie fuels, oils, tyres and maintenance of small appliances.
- Supply appliances, sheds, PPE, training, administrative help and auditing facilities for the brigades.
- Supply a mechanical repair facility for appliances such as trucks, pumping equipment and radio communications equipment.
- Tender out supply and erection contracts for the buildings either through local suppliers or through Q Build.
- Have auditors in staff positions that can facilitate the book keeping requirements of the individual brigades.
Rural Fire Brigade

- Fire suppression in rural areas
- Community awareness of fire hazards
- Training
- Management of hazard reduction burns
- Management of prescribed burning
- Maintain a register of equipment and servicing requirements
- Maintain a training register
- Fundraising or donations used for social activities for the brigade members
- Develop a rural (SES style) service for the rural areas during times of severe weather conditions such as flooding and cyclones. The SES will, due to population concentrations, look after the urban areas before the rural ones.
- Develop 'hands-on' training exercises for young members to encourage them to be members of brigades. These training sessions can be done with the supervision of experienced fire fighters prior to any formal training that is required by members of brigades. These activities can be advertised in the urban areas for a recreational exercise as well as hazard reduction burns.
1. Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

NO. The present system has worked well in the past with local brigades able to sustain the volunteers’ interest by making local decisions on:

- operations
- fire risk management
- training
- long term planning and -
- funding with particular reference to the Rural Fire Levy

The model, using directions as laid out in the manual, has been suitable, but with changing community involvement, changes are needed for the future. With the increase in rural settlement due to development of rural and semi rural estates, the number of residents entering the rural areas is increasing. However, the number of volunteers is not growing at a proportional rate. This is due to the dispersal of interests and employment that these people have.

The training factor has had an adverse effect on recruitment as well. The younger volunteers lose interest quickly if they do not get 'hands on' experience.

Meeting procedures have a detrimental effect on volunteer numbers as well. Although a regimented record of proceedings is required, a lot of volunteers simply drop out due to the 'weary' repetitiveness of meetings.

2. Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

NO. The current system has served some Brigades well. However there are problems:

- A small ratepayer base for some brigades means limited funding while others have funds that they could have done without if they had not required to save for the future purchases of appliances, sheds and facilities.
- The present funding model allows for semi rural brigades with a large ratepayer base to accumulate funding on the basis that they have more houses in that area to look after. However, when the number of houses in the area increases (as does the levy) the amount of rural land that is prone to fire attack is reduced at a somewhat proportional rate.
- The ideal of a brigade having to conserve and fundraise for the necessities to keep the brigade, and therefore the brigade area, with facilities while another brigade looking after a very much reduced area of rural land with more facilities, is most inappropriate.
- Capital expenditure and operational costs based on budget requirements should be the liability of QFRS, levies should be collected and allocated by QFRS.
3. What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Urban encroachment into brigade areas is having a devastating effect on the land, as these new areas are taking over rural properties that are not being burnt on an annual or biannual basis for both fodder production and hazard reduction. The small acreage properties that are developing this land tend to have a 'green' objectivity towards hazard reduction and refuse to participate. As was pointed out in the Victorian Bushfires Commission, this extract should be submitted and actioned by local authorities approving rural subdivisions.

By Jane Cowan (ABC News The Drum)

Updated Wed Mar 31, 2010 3:23pm AEDT

There was a lot of agreement in the hearing room during the six days of evidence on fuel reduction burning in the Victorian Bushfires Commission.

For a topic so seemingly controversial up until now, there was surprisingly a lot of agreement in the hearing room during the six days of evidence on fuel reduction burning in the Victorian Bushfires Commission.

A panel of seven experts assembled by the Commission's legal team came to the consensus view that Victoria should burn between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of its 7.7 million hectares of public forest annually - an ambitious target when you consider 1.7 per cent, or 130,000 hectares, is currently burnt each year. The scientists ranged from the CSIRO fire investigator Phil Cheney and forest ecologist Professor Mark Adams to the more cautious Dr Michael Clarke, an associate professor and head of the Zoology Department at Latrobe University, with expertise in conservation biology and Dr Malcolm Gill, a scientist concentrating on plant diversity. No-one was suggesting burning would prevent bushfires altogether but all agreed it would reduce the number of fires that broke out and lessen the spread and intensity of those that did ignite, making them easier to extinguish. Cheney said a good enough, large enough prescribed burn would "stop a fire" in a eucalypt forest for one or two years after the burn and still have an effect on flame heights, ember production and rates of spread for as long as two decades.

The opposition previously attributed to "green" groups fell away - or at least did not make it into the hearing room. The evidence of Jerry Williams, who's worked a lifetime in the US Forest Service, cut through the argument that burning was somehow bad for the bush. He pointed out the irony of refusing to burn forest in a planned manner only to later lose whole ecosystems in massive out-of-control infernos.

The recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Commission should also be a guideline for Queensland National Parks & Wildlife Service, EPA and Queensland Forestry.
4. How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Communication
- Between brigades and QFRS
- Between brigades
- Between brigades and landowners
- Between brigades and Fire Wardens

Financial Management
- Uniform funding guidelines and allocation to brigades
- Capital & operational funding management services
- Auditing and financial advice services

Manning QFRS
- 'On the Ground' Rural operations staff
- Training and risk assessors
- Financial services

Commitment
- Rural Operations more accessible
- Rural Operations consultation with brigade risk assessments
- Rural Operations having a greater interaction with individual brigades rather than with Brigade Groups
- Brigade input into Rural Operations procedures and policies
5. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

YES. However, the commitment of those brigade members to meet the requirement is an ever increasing campaign to keep up. We have to remember that the majority of smaller brigades are made up of farmers and their workers, who know the land, the ways to fight fires and to protect what is theirs, but are sometimes challenged in the ways of accounting software and Profit & Loss Statements.

The accountability of brigades was bought into question with the Auditor Generals Report

The Auditor-General tabled Auditor-General Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland in the Parliament on 15th May 2008. The report deals with the results of the performance management systems (PMS) audit on whether suitable systems were operating to ensure the efficient and effective management of Rural Fire Brigades.

and we have to remember that the individual Rural Fire Brigades are manned by volunteers predominately looking after their own assets. They took exception to the report not for the report itself, but by the way it was presented to the brigades.

The whole idea was rejected out of hand as an assault on their integrity. If the whole business had been 'sold' to the brigades without the Auditor Generals report being mentioned, a reform may well have been implemented by now.
6. What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The Fire Warden holds a strategic role in any Rural Fire Brigade. The warden should
- Be an integral part of the Brigade
- Be an executive member of the brigade
- Have a reasonable knowledge of the brigade area
- Have a minimum Rural Fire Brigade experience of 2 years
- Have an inspection regime and management plan for the brigade area
- Be financially compensated for the travelling and inspection regime that he or she has committed to.
- Be either an active fire fighter or trained as an incident controller

7. Other points noted.

- I do not feel that Rural Fire Brigade members need to be financially rewarded for their efforts in protecting their own land. Financial reward for attending an incident could lead to the incentive for that incident to occur.
- I do feel that some form of financial compensation must be offered to Fire Wardens for travel costs if they are to do their jobs correctly and inspect each property they have issued a 'permit to burn.'
- I do feel that Brigade members that leave their brigade area to attend fires in other areas, should not be out of pocket or otherwise financially disadvantaged.
- I do believe that the permit to burn must remain in place as a matter of litigation against those persons who cause large scale losses of property and or life.
- I do believe that a funding reform would be widely accepted if properly presented as a time saving tool and as a benefit to individual brigades.
9th April 2010

The Research Director,
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee,
Parliament House,
George Street,
BRISBANE, Q. 4000

Dear Sir,

Please accept our submission to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee regarding the inquiry into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

The Fitzroy Rural Fire Brigade Group has a membership of 18 Brigade's and as at 09/04/10 a volunteer base of 483 members. There are approximately 10,000 residents within the Brigade districts of the Fitzroy Group.

Yours faithfully,

Darrell Kelly
CHAIRMAN
FITZROY RURAL FIRE BRIGADE GROUP
142 Black Mountain Road,
KALAPA, 4702
Ph. 07 49 347115 or Mob. 0429 101 938
Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

- yes it is satisfactory, at the Brigade level and at the Group level.

Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

- No – the subsidy on appliances should be increased or preferably the Government should pay for the entire cost of the vehicle.
- the subsidised equipment list needs to be revised to include more equipment eg. commercial blowers and chainsaws.
- A command vehicle should be available for Groups to use during level 2 or higher incident fires.
- Brigade’s need to have a personnel transport vehicle available, so that firefighters are transported safely to the fire incident.
- The Brigade’s within the Fitzroy Group would certainly benefit from the provision of additional resources including additional appliances, command vehicles and personnel carriers.

What effect is urban encroachment within Brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

- Urban encroachment is having a very serious effect on Rural Fire Brigade’s…the workload has increased as urban boundaries have expanded.
- Hazard Reduction in the urban areas is increasing the workload of Rural Brigade’s as a majority of property owners of these rural lifestyle blocks (1 – 50 acre) lack the knowledge, sense of responsibility and initiative to ensure that their properties are safe from the threat of fire.
How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigade be managed effectively.

- By the provision of more resources to Brigades.
- An improved system of ensuring that QFRS and Rural Brigade personnel strive to work more effectively together, which would include using the knowledge of Brigade personnel and persons who live in the areas affected by fire.
- Increasing the number of administration and operational staff at the Rockhampton Rural Operations Area office, so that they can better serve, train and support the 138 Brigades in the Central Region.

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

- For the Brigade’s that are adhering to the accountability requirements as per the Rural Fire Service Manual, there are minimal problems, unfortunately there seems to be a lot of Brigade’s that are struggling with achieving these accountability requirements. These Brigade’s need immediate assistance.
- There needs to be more communication from the Area Office, to distribute information to all Brigade’s so that all Brigade’s receive up to date information. eg a regular newsletter.
- There needs to be more follow up from the Area Office to ensure that all Brigade’s with appliances do get the annual safety inspection done on their appliance as well as ensuring that other checks are regularly carried out eg first aid kits, fire extinguisher checks, if these have not been complied with a follow up needs to be done without delay.
- Brigade’s can become very complacent when there seems to be no follow up on the non compliant accountability, and more importantly disillusioned with the system of checks etc if nothing seems to be done with the information collected.
What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The role of Fire Warden should be retained, the position should be held by a person who is resident in the Brigade district that has extensive local knowledge of the area and is an experienced fire fighter that is conversant with all of the relevant rules and regulations.

- The Application for a “Permit to Light Fire” should be mandatory.
- During the Fire season there should be a system where there can be restricted areas in which all fires need a permit and property owners should be more accountable for any fire on their property.

Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

- There should be more liaison between Brigade’s, Government Agencies, Regional Councils and Real Estate Developers.
- The level of staffing both Administrative and Operational needs to be significantly increased at the Area Office, Central Region. The current level of staffing is insufficient to effectively and efficiently handle the workload of service delivery, administration, accountability conformation and training requirements of the 138 Brigades in the region which includes approximately 2600 volunteers.
Submission to Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

John Thomson,
Speewah Warden and
Cairns Peninsula Representative
Rural Fire Association Queensland

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Number of pages seven (7)
Appendix (2)
Ms Deborah Jeffrey,

I have given due consideration to the Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Report and hereby offer my submission.

The original Rural Fire Brigade model was a Community-based body of volunteers residing in that Community. It existed to protect lives, property and surrounding bushland from the ravages of wild fires in that particular area. This model was a working one. Most of these Brigades have raised funds, bought equipment and built sheds to house that equipment. Some of the equipment and sheds will have been subsidized by both Local and State bodies. These Brigades have a loyal following of supporters who need not necessarily be members but will assist in an emergency situation. The Brigade is part of the Community. Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) are taking the Community ownership from these Brigades. Brigades that manage their own finances and also strike a levy at a Public Meeting and have their own Local Councils collect those levies within Rates at no additional costs, should be well funded, provided they follow the guidelines in the Brigade Manual. These Brigades would be Class 4 village; iZone and Class 2 and will generally be in a position to purchase equipment and appliances that they require. Many of these Brigades enlist the assistance of Gaming Funds and the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland (RFBAQ). There is an unacceptable waiting period for vehicles and also equipment. Orders placed are not filled. Budgets of District Offices have been relocated to Brisbane QFRS and even Gaming Funds are only accessible through QFRS Brisbane Office. Cane farm and other agricultural and pastoral Brigades would probably not require a levy, provided adequate equipment remains available and also subsidized. The list of subsidized equipment has been reduced dramatically and RFBAQ representatives are continually requesting items to be reinstated for purchase.

Urban encroachment is having a massive effect in some areas where 40 to 50, two hectare blocks appear in a short space of time with one property development concluded. They do not pay a levy for service but expect one from Rural Brigades. A great number of these residents know very little if anything about bushfires and have a reluctance to use hazard reduction burns as a method of mitigating major wildfires. Regional Councils are still permitting subdivisions to progress without due thought to possible fire problems. Fire appliances need access to the rear of properties, especially those that border on bushland. There have been incidences where Rural Fire Brigades have been called upon to assist Urban Brigades with a fire in an Urban Levied area, because it was inaccessible to the Urban pumpers. Rural Brigades provided a service, free of charge, to residents who had previously paid a levy to the Urban Brigade.

Demands might be lessened by Councils conferring with Rural Brigade Officers who have a vast local knowledge of their areas. Some of these points of interest would include access, water, power and fire breaks before subdivision is approved. Councils need to take an active role in educating new residents of new subdivisions. Many of these residents have never lived in a fire prone rural area previously. In the event of Rural Fire Brigades being made redundant, will Council take on the responsibility of hazard reduction to prevent wild fires? Rural Fire Brigades require the active support of Councils.

12/04/2010 2
The Area Director's budget is now allocated from Brisbane and needs to be reinstated. Our Directors know what we require and should not have to go 'cap in hand' with every small request. Brigades are required to follow procedures set out in the Brigade Manual and if this is adhered to accountability should not be a problem. Finance must be left with Brigades. QFRS must NOT take control of finances of Rural Brigade Areas. These Brigades have ownership of their areas and will relinquish their roles should this happen. There are many more personnel being employed in Regional offices but are the Brigade Volunteers any better off? The money available to Rural Fire Operations is being syphoned off and very little ends up benefiting the fire fighter on the fire front. We now have our own Volunteer Brigade and Group Trainers. A number of Officers have taken up higher duties elsewhere, probably as a step in their career paths, but in doing so leave Regional Offices understaffed.

Fire Wardens should remain in the Brigade Areas, with an Area Director as Chief Warden. They know the area, understand the conditions of that area and know when to say no to permits. The proposed system, designed by someone with very little knowledge of the bush, for the whole of Queensland and signed off by the Commissioner to look into is a joke. One rule does not fit all circumstances. Would someone in Brisbane know local conditions on a day to day basis? I myself have a situation where one side of a roadway is rainforest and the other side of that same road is open forest. The rainforest residents may have permits issued almost 12 months of the year, but not so for residents of the open forest side of the roadway.

Give us back our Rural Fire Service autonomy, run by Rural Fires personnel, not Urban, for Volunteers who understand what a bushfire is. Understand hazard reduction and know when to leave it burn and when to stop it. As I look at the situation now, we are following America step by step and these people are beginning to say "stop any fire at all costs" may not be the right way. Are we to make the same mistakes and learn the hard way? (Roger Underwood’s Aust. Bushfire Management: a case study in wisdom verses folly)

The Government's Blue Print for the Bush says that no services would be curtailed. We now have Rural Areas not staffed and other Areas combined to reduce staff.

Regards,

John C Thomson
Cairns Peninsula Representative
Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland
GLOSSARY:

Fire Management Groups: To my knowledge Groups were formed to support Brigades in the event of emergencies. These Groups were not formed to distribute fire levy funds. A Fire Management Group which is working well in conjunction with the Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) includes representatives of all major stakeholders in the management of fire in the Tablelands Region. Two areas of the TRC have been working well for the past four years.
For a detailed explanation please contact -

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CEO Minute Secretary and HR Administration Support
Human Resources Group, Corporate and Community Services
Tablelands Regional Council
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Rural Fire Levy: This is correct. This is what happens in the Northern Part of Queensland – Funding for equipment, is collected by Local Councils and forwarded to the Brigade in each Division in which it is collected. Provided the Brigade follows the guidelines laid out in the Manual, the process is beneficial to all parties.

iZone: No mention of distance from Urban or Auxiliary Stations (This would be at the Area Director’s discretion)

SECTION 1 Executive summary:

I notice in the Executive Summary that the QFRS is responsible for the RFS. When did this happen? The RFS has lost any say in what happens to the Rural Brigades. We were promised autonomy by Premier Beattie for the Rural Fire Service (an Election Promise, Min. Emergency & Min. Assist. Premier, 7 Aug 2002 – see enclosed appendix)
The Audit Committee needs to realize that Rural Fire Brigades are manned by Volunteers. These Brigades were formed as a local self help for people and Communities where they were responsible for their own fire safety.
Fire starts – Brigade is called – fire controlled, left to burn out or is extinguished if required – Brigade members go home.
Brigades need to control their own finances. Brigades need to adhere to the rules in the Brigade Manual. Brigades do not need interference from QFRS personnel on how to run their Brigades.
1.3 Key findings

**Forward planning:** Most working Brigades do forward planning. They don’t sit down and conference for hours. The planning is done by Brigade Officers as weather conditions improve or deteriorate. Probably 6 to 12 months in advance. The Volunteers will do hazard reduction when the conditions and members are available. NOT TO A TIME TABLE.

**Risk management:** Land holders manage fire risk to their properties. The RF Brigade helps. The Brigade is not there to provide information and planning for QFRS.

**Training:** Volunteers will attend when they can or when they want to. They are not on the payroll. Most training should be done at night and weekends because most volunteers are in the workforce or own their own businesses. It is difficult enough to have time off during work days to fight fires let alone have to take time off to go to training. Very often this training is offered by paid staff during their working days and when there is poor attendance, it is seen to be as a lack of interest by Volunteers.

1.4 Recommendations

**Forward planning:**
Once again we have QFRS this and QFRS that, instead of RFS. Since 2006 a lot of Area Managers, Area Training Officers and Brigade Training Officers have been replaced by either Inter-State or Urban personnel. Good people in their own right, but how many understand the RFS and its Volunteers? The need to formulate and measure is for the Government bean-counters. Little will be achieved by demanding that Volunteers “fit the QFRS mould”.

1.5 Department of Emergency Services response

Rural Fire Service started in 1947. Last year we had our 60 year Calendar. We have come a long way without QFRS involvement. What have we achieved since 2006? Are we happy? Do we need a land manager to run the RFS?
YES! Some person who understands the land, the bush and a running fire.
We have lost the area budget. Brisbane controls every last cent that we have to literally beg for.
We have more high ranking officers on top pay,
Our net gain in the field, on the fire line is no more than we had before.
Now we have heaps more paperwork to please the high ranking officers, who sit in air-conditioned offices and tell us what we have to do and how to do it to maintain our Brigades.
If our Quarterly Review is not up to standard, will we be sacked?
Perhaps the answer to that will be to employ more highly paid paper pushers.

E Learning: Looks great on the computer, but very different when the wind is 20 knots and the combustible vegetation is 6 tonne per hectare and the flames are 4 metres high. On the ground training by experienced local personnel is a must, or Volunteers will be killed! Experienced Volunteers are getting a little tired of being "put down" by so called experts, who have theory learning and usually heaps of certificates and epaulets on their shoulders, to back that learning up, but very little on ground experience with a running fire.

Fire Wardens: If the fire wardens’ role is so important to the RFS why would the QFRS need major changes to the system. I attended a seminar in Cairns in 2006. Some changes to the Permit form itself were recommended, such as 3rd copy, more room to write names and addresses and also for the signature of the permittee, showing that he/she understood the conditions on the permit.

Executive Briefing Note: General Ref 09/15267, “That the Commissioner endorse centralised electronic issue of permits to light fires”, WILL NOT WORK from a centralised location.

See last paragraph, page 7 of the PAC Report. Why does QFRS need to know why and when a permit is issued by a Fire Warden? When I issue a permit in Speewah I cross out “...” notify Cairns Fire Com and also the First Officer of Speewah Brigade before lighting the fire. This was one recommendation made at a Wardens’ Seminar in Cairns in 2006 and has not yet happened. The local Warden’s job is to ensure that permits fit the situation.

SECTION 2: Audit focus

2.1 Audit Objective: The Government needs to produce a TV Commercial to emphasise to Rural Residential land holders in Rural Fire Districts that –

This commercial should be planned in a fire prone area, in the dry time and not like the last attempt, where the lawns were emerald green on a 5 degree slope somewhere in Brisbane. Australia has been burning bush for the last five hundred thousand years. Nobody lived in areas permanently so it did not matter. Now it does. Aboriginals first, then white man, now we need to control how, when and where so we have some way of mitigating wild fires. That is the PERMIT SYSTEM as it is and hazard reduction burns at the right time.

12/04/2010 JET
2.2 Reasons for the audit: Bushfires are an inherent part of the Australian environment. You got that right! That is the reason Hazard Reduction Burns need to be carried out at the right time of the year to prevent wild fires occurring in the worst time of the year. Fuel reduction controlled burns save flora and fauna, because they are timed for the cooler time of the day to coincide with a later dew fall that dampens the end of the black out watch. Wild fires kill flora and fauna because they are hotter, cover larger areas and usually occur at the hottest time of the day and year.

2.3 Audit scope: My understanding is that 8 Brigades were contacted and interviews were carried out with these RFS Brigade members. Is this correct? If this is correct, out of 1,500 Brigades, it is hardly a thorough coverage for the size of Queensland.

2.3 (2) Risk modification: Urban planning practices do not often consider or understand a wildfire scenario. Councils are still approving subdivisions with only one combined entry and egress point. Canberra fires had deadly consequences and the reports gave warning about this practice.

2.3 (4) Response: Who responds? In most cases RFS responds and with a skeleton crew of Volunteers, usually to do what is necessary and then go home. Either to let it burn itself out safely or to control if needs be. When Urban arrive, their edict seems to be “see a fire, put it out!” That’s fine for their structural fires but it is not always the right action in rural area fires.

2.3 (5) Field work for PAC was done from January to April. One needs to find out the conditions and what happens in October to December.

Audit procedures: There are 700 to 800 Primary Producer brigades on the Coast and also out West, who look after about 70 percent of Queensland and only one Brigade was interviewed. They are important Rural Fire members.

2.4 Organisational context: Referring to the last paragraph on page 11 which refers to applying for a levy through QFRS Area Director – This has never happened in our Brigade or Group. We have been collecting a levy since 1997 as per the Brigade Manual. This entails an audit of our financial books, drafting a three year proposal plan and budget. These are passed at our AGM and copies of the Minutes, Audited Statement, Three year plan and Budget all forwarded to the local RFS Office.

John Thomson
Speewah Warden and Cairns Peninsula Representative
Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland

12/04/2010 7
LOOKING AFTER RURAL FIRE FIGHTERS

The Rural Fire Service comprises many dedicated volunteers, from all walks of life who donate their time and resources for the protection of the community.

Rural Fire Service Officers put their lives on the line every time they are called on to respond to emergencies. Under the Coalition Government, the Rural Fire Service has been subjected to senseless managerialist refocus. Efforts have been directed towards the production of videos and displays rather than fighting fires.

Returning the Right to Free Speech

Rural Fire Service Officers are dedicated, community members who donate their time to serve their community. They should not have corporate managerial directives imposed upon them, that seek to remove their rights that speak about problems they perceive in the service. Labor believes that the volunteers of the Rural Fire Service should be accorded the respect they deserve.

Getting Rid of Time Wasting Managerialism

Labor will not subject the men and women of the Rural Fire Service to the petty managerial directives issued by the Coalition government. The volunteers of the Rural Fire Service deserve due recognition and support. Labor will maintain and support the Rural Fire Service, as a distinct organisation and will halt any moves to incorporate the Service with the urban component of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. A Beattie Labor Government will also clean up workers' compensation and insurance arrangements to ensure that all officers who act in good faith to protect a community against a fire hazard are adequately covered.

Funding

Labor will get back to basics. We will direct budgeted funds to the operational front-line. Funding of $1 million a year for three years will be spent on purchasing new equipment and appliances rather than frittered away on expensive and unnecessary reviews. Labor will enhance and improve the recurrent base funding of the Rural Fire Service by consolidating its various special grants and programs which are due to expire under the Coalition in the next year.

Equipment

Labor believes that the equipment supplied to the Rural Fire Service Officers should meet the requirements of the officers who utilize it. It is unacceptable that Rural Fire Service Officers feel unsafe and under equipped when they go to fight a wildfire or structural fire. Labor recognises that some equipment may not be suitable for particular brigades and will ensure that all new equipment gains the approval of the Rural Fire Services which will use it.

A Beattie Labor Government will establish a seven year rolling capital replacement plan for the upgrading of Brigade equipment to a satisfactory standard for fire prevention and control. Funding under a Labor Government will not be allocated on the present 'first come, best dressed' basis but rather on a needs basis. Equipment purchases will be made after consultation with individual brigades to ensure that money is spent to the best effect.

In particular, Labor believes the present situation involving Brigades with design defects is unacceptable. Through proper consultation with the members of volunteer fire brigades, Labor will ensure that any vehicles purchased match the needs identified by the men and women who will use them.
Training
Labor will improve training for the men and women who dedicate their time to the Rural Fire Service. Training provided to Rural Fire Service volunteers will recognise the distinct needs of firefighting in a rural context. Resources will be reallocated from red-tape to training. Labor will make use of innovative distance education technologies to ensure that the available training dollars are spent to the best effect.

The Rural Fire Service under Labor
The men and women who are willing to risk their lives in the Rural Fire Service to protect the community in the Rural Fire Service deserve more than hollow managerialist directives. These are people who are volunteering to serve the community - they deserve to be asked about the problems and issues facing them in their roles. Labor will ensure that the people of the Rural Service are consulted on all appropriate matters so that these dedicated men and women can be confident that the training and equipment supplied supplements their land management skills and enables them to safely undertake the range of tasks they normally encounter,
10 April 2010

The Research Director
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE Q 4000

Dear Ms Jeffrey,

Please find enclosed herewith a submission in relation to the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion Paper.

It is regretted that the quality of our submission may not be of the standard or format required by the Committee and is a direct reflection upon the lack of such skills by the undersigned.

Annexures have previously been shared with members of other Rural brigades, QFRS Rural Operations staff and other interested parties, where applicable.

Many documents alluded to in the submission have not been included, but are generally available upon request.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Lund.
Calioran Rural Fire Brigade

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Discussion Paper

SUBMISSION

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Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

As the model has evolved, up to the present time, it is not suitable for all Rural Fire Brigades, being mainly oriented toward iZone (and perhaps to Village) brigades. This submission excludes the other more specialized brigades, generally referring to the rural brigades (mainly rural and primary producer) who face grass or forest fire as their major threat to life and property.

The current model appears to be based upon imposing the Urban model on to all Rural brigades so that eventually there will be few, if any, true rural brigades in areas near the coast and their skills and knowledge will be lost to the Rural Fire Service. By extension, the imposition of Urban based training on to all rural volunteers implies that all volunteers will be compelled, in the future, to attend fires in or near urban areas.

Training Manuals for rural brigade members are based mainly upon Urban methodologies and are delivered by people who sometimes have far less “hands on” experience than those members being “trained”, and contain errors of fact and misleading information.

Whilst this may appear to be suitable for urban people making a lifestyle change to rural living (and who have no experience of wildfire or fire-fighting in general and know no better), it does not give them the experience base or local knowledge that is so badly needed, with the result that these brigades are then populated by members who, whilst qualified “on paper”, are operating at less than optimum skill levels.

In any organizational structure this is poor business practice and is a flawed approach, as Urban and Rural fire fighting require entirely different approaches and training regimes, with overlap in the iZone (Urban / Rural interface) and Village type brigades.

Urban fire fighting is basically performed at a static point on a fire (e.g. house fire) that is generally predictable in its progression due to the small number of variables that can affect it and it can have large numbers of resources thrown at it, in a frontal attack, in a relatively short period of time, with damage generally limited to the site.

There appears to be a practice in place that assumes such property is insured and that it is of little consequence if the property is partly or fully consumed by fire, and it may be let burn whilst adjoining properties are protected.

Urban fire fighters may well be qualified “on paper” to fight rural fires, but in practice this can be observed to seldom be so.

An analogy would be a bushie going to Brisbane and telling urban crews how to fight a high rise fire - ludicrous!
Rural fires can be much more unpredictable because of the large number of variables that can influence their progression, waxing and waning as terrain, flora and weather influence their progression and a much greater physical area may be damaged or under threat.

One of the observed problems with both urban and inexperienced rural fire-fighters is their lack of understanding of micro climate, variability of flora by areas and how these affect rural fires and their inability to "read" the local weather conditions, be it something as simple as wind strength and direction. Bureau of Meteorology data will NOT give them localized information, and conditions could vary dramatically within a short distance and within a short time frame.

True rural brigades, with relatively fewer resources available to them, are usually capable of minimising damage to livestock, machinery, outbuildings and other assets, crops and native fauna and flora and they clearly understand how to utilize fire to fight fire, unlike urban brigades (and, increasingly, some rural brigades) and seldom would they simply sit and wait for a wall of fire to approach them and then throw large quantities of water at it in an attempt to extinguish it.

Many Rural Brigades (volunteers) are increasingly being compelled to undertake traditional (paid) Urban tasks as well as rural tasks - no doubt at a much lesser cost to the State, and it appears that brigades with appliances (vehicles) are being increasingly treated as "de facto" Urban brigades in many ways.

There is a growing trend by QFRS staff, compelling rural volunteers to attend fires, even more so if that brigade happens to have an appliance (light attack or medium attack vehicle, but not a trailer or slip-on unit) - if there are not enough volunteers available to crew the vehicle it is simply removed by senior QFRS personnel, or at their direction. NO thought is given to protection of that particular brigade area should a fire break out and there is no vehicle or other fire fighting resource immediately available - this type of action is reprehensible and displays total disregard for the residents of that particular brigade area.

This is not applicable to where a brigade has joined with another brigade to assist them to more easily control a fire, whether it is in an adjoining or nearby area, although it has almost reached the stage where adjoining brigades can NOT assist each other UNLESS directed to do so by FireCom, contrary to the previously accepted practice of helping neighbouring brigades in need, where time is of the essence.

There has also been a recent suggestion that rural volunteer fire fighters who do not respond to a call for attendance at a fire should be deregistered as members of their brigade.
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran
Rural Fire Brigade

The Rural Fire Service is staffed and controlled by ex-urban personnel, with few, if any, experienced ex rural staff and they do not appear to exhibit an understanding of rural asset protection or care, talking “down” or “at” volunteers, not “to” them and thus not making them feel part of the process.

It is a major error of judgement by the Commissioner to appoint people to positions of authority, without such persons having demonstrable skills, experience and/or qualifications. Is the Commissioner so lacking in expertise?

This also demonstrates the obvious contempt that is held toward rural fire brigades and their volunteer members.

Persons in charge fail to instruct rural brigades under their control not to deliberately allow fires to burn under fence lines (with the obvious repercussions for high tensile barbed wire, steel or wooden posts) or under yard rails nor to leave gates between grain crops and adjacent stocked grazing paddocks open, should they have lost a “controlled” fire into adjoining private property. These brigade members SHOULD know better, but apparently don’t, because they haven’t been trained correctly.

They don’t think landholders on adjoining land to where a “controlled” fire is being lit need to be kept fully informed, at all times, of their proposed actions.

Most don’t appear to actually comprehend how rural people make observations of, and understand, their environment - whilst it may be taught in part, most of the skills are obtained through experience and with the effluxion of time, although most rural people may not be able to articulate their observations step by step.

Urban personnel with or without appliances turn up at rural fires and take control of same - yet they don’t know the country and their vehicles are not generally suited to the task at hand. This appears to lead to fires that take much longer to control than if experienced locals were left in charge of operations.

Control of urban fires should remain with urban personnel and control of rural fires should remain with the First Officer of the area within which the fire is situated and he should have control over any urban personnel attending such fire, unless he relinquishes such control to another person. Letting an Area Director (Inspector) or an urban Officer with demonstrated inexperience take control is also a recipe for disaster.

A similar situation exists where a rural brigade from another, distant area is sent in and takes control over locals - what is alarming is that they don’t seem to understand that their lack of local knowledge and subsequent decision making may be actually making the situation worse, not better!

It is obvious that suppression of fires comes a poor second to the exercise of power.
FireCom operators will often call out an urban appliance to a rural fire (in response to a '000' call), yet the rural brigade within whose area the fire is situated may not be called upon. FireCom seems to have little understanding of rural brigade areas, calling out distant brigades to fires whilst local brigades situated a short distance away are ignored, with obvious results. Looking at a map on a computer screen is no substitute for having a mental image of an area (local knowledge) and using the map as confirmation, something that appears to not be part of the QFRS system of training.

They have even been heard instructing a rural brigade to attend a fire that is purportedly only a few kilometres away, yet the FireCom operator was completely unaware that there was a large river and no bridge (the closest bridge was over 40 km away) between the brigade vehicle and purported fire. (It was only smoke, the fire was 30+ km away).

As a call-out centre, FireCom is no doubt generally suitable for an urban setting, but for many rural areas it is a disaster in so many ways.

For rural residents situated some distance from urban centres, the utilization of '000' for a primary fire call may not be in their best interest, and they should all be made aware of the telephone contact numbers and UHF CB radio channels of their local brigade members - a response time of 5 minutes versus 15 minutes (or considerably more, in many instances) can mean much in a rural area, perhaps more so than in an urban setting.

A rural crew arriving promptly upon the scene should be able to make a suitable assessment of required resources, far better than a FireCom operator taking a '000' call from a distraught person, plus they can commence action that may make a vast difference to the outcome of the fire.

Urban crews will be called to a fire in a rural area, attend and extinguish it and then return to their station - they don't seem to understand that a crew with suitable resources has to remain on site until it really is safe to leave, and that the area has to be monitored continuously, often for many days.

Fires, supposedly extinguished and made safe, seem to have an uncanny knack of jumping "containment lines" and re-igniting - sometimes creating a much larger problem than the original fire.

How many urban appliances (Red trucks) carry backpacks for use at rural fires, let alone the urban officers knowing where or how to best utilize them?

Other than Rural and Primary Producer brigades, it is suspected that other brigades do not carry a pair of fencing pliers, 10 metres or so of plain wire and a simple wire straining device to ensure any fences that may be cut for fire access can be quickly, if temporarily, repaired when leaving the paddock - nor are they instructed or trained to so do. Unless the landowner is present and undertakes to repair the fence, it should be repaired immediately.
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran
Rural Fire Brigade

They don’t appear to be trained nor understand that there may be livestock in such a paddock and that cutting a fence and leaving it open after the fire has been extinguished will enable livestock to stray - with possibly fatal consequences to animals or humans or damage to adjacent crops, affecting people’s livelihood.

Because they don’t see any livestock doesn’t mean they aren’t there, and many don’t recognize what a crop is or how fire may affect it.

There appears to be nothing in the training that makes people aware that cattle (in particular) will be upset by strange people or vehicles and may rush.

Training doesn’t extend to understanding how to conduct a back burn off a cattle pad, a slashed break or even unmown grass (including where and how to light the grass and how to suppress excess rate of combustion), let alone cutting a fence near a strainer post wherever possible.

Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

The current funding model is appropriate, providing the procedures and guidelines (as currently in print) and Acts are adhered to, notwithstanding the fact that Councils have control over some of the functions, without the responsibility for fires. There is no reason why this should not remain so into the foreseeable future, from a brigade perspective, although the procedures could be streamlined considerably.

What IS of some concern is the fact that the provisions of the various Acts and the relevant sections of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual (1/7/2007) are being selectively (or deliberately) ignored, relevant to the raising and distribution of rural fire levy funds.

Of further concern is the QFRS attitude to brigades having reasonably healthy cash reserves - yet any brigade that doesn’t have such reserves will not be able to function effectively in the short or long term, nor meet its obligations should an emergent need arise (as was evidenced during the 2009 fires). They would be technically bankrupt if QFRS continue with this policy of not making provision for future needs.

Resource allocation is a different matter, apparently subject to the whim of QFRS staff, as the Auditor-General correctly points out that QFRS haven’t captured sufficient data to make a valued decision on so many matters.

There is a distinct difference between “needs” and “wants”, an analysis of which appears to be often overlooked in the decision making process.
It is the observed inability of QFRS staff to liaise closely with the individual brigades that remains the problem - something that simply did not occur prior to 1994, when the local inspector was in very regular contact with brigades and seldom missed a meeting of a brigade.

Without intimate knowledge of the needs of an individual brigade, a good working knowledge of the brigade area and a good working relationship with brigade members, poor (and sometimes rash) decisions are made.

Capture, analysis and reporting of the levels of brigade funding is really a simple matter, although formulating a suitable procedure appears to be beyond the capability of QFRS staff who should be responsible for same.

Any competent method would utilize actual and projected figures for any given period or timeframe.

Such method should be kept to a simple, easily understood, standardized format that is relevant across the whole of the Rural Fire Service.

If Local Government has been able to successfully utilize such a function for so many decades, there is no reasonable excuse for QFRS not to so do.

The Auditor-General has apparently overlooked a number of important matters in his report, which seems rather unusual.

The Rural Fire Brigade Manual 2007, Secs. D7.5 & D7.6;
Fire and Rescue Service Act 1993, Sec. 128A;
Local Government Act, Secs. 971 & 972,
are referred to in the raising and disbursing of a rural fire levy by a Local Authority.

QFRS, relying upon only one clause of the Auditor-General’s report (cl. 4, p. 20), has instigated the formation of numerous Local Area Finance Committees in Local Government Areas for the raising and disbursement of rural fire levies for all rural brigades in the respective Local Government Area. LAFC’s are apparently exempt from the provisions mentioned in the above paragraph (Acts & Manual), yet there appears to be no legislative provision for same.

In cl. 4, p. 20, the Auditor-General appears to have confused a Rural Fire Brigade Group with Finance Management Groups (now known as Local Area Finance Committees) - his observations are imprecise and unclear.

[A Rural Fire Brigade Group is formed (or continues) pursuant to Section D9.1 of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual 2007 [with their constitution per RFB Manual (August 1999), Annex A, Chapter 13 & following the provisions of Chapter 13]. A copy of the constitution was not included with the 2007 Manual].
It is considered that such Committees (LAFC) and their appointment by a Local Government are not complying with the provisions as outlined in the various Acts and Manual as noted above, notwithstanding the fact that a Local Government may be providing funding from either their General Fund or from a Rural Fire Levy.

It is thus assumed that they also fail to comply with the provisions of Sections 452 to 464 of Chapter 6, Part 1 of the Local Government Act so that any such committee (LAFC) and any Council appointing same may be acting ultra vires, and that the Local Government Act, Chapter 4, Part 3, Sec. 237 may also be relevant.

How did the Auditor-General miss this?

It has been noted that at least one Local Government has raised a Rural Fire Levy on all land within its area and then provides a form for objection and possible refund - but there did not appear to be any legal provision for them to undertake refund action on a Rural Fire Levy, nor would the brigade have an accurate understanding of its funding level.

Auditor-General’s annual audits have apparently missed this, as well.

In the matter of a rural fire levy and the way in which control of same is slowly being transferred to direct QFRS control at the instigation of the Commissioner, reference should be made to the intent of the legislators and to the form and effect of the legislation as it currently stands.

The “Queensland Bushfire Strategy Report” presented to Parliament on 9 September 1994 is extremely relevant in these matters and appears to be the basis for much subsequent legislation.

Whilst the thrust of the report appears to focus on the need for compulsory rural fire levies for the rural-urban interface zone, QFRS seem to be relying upon clause 5, page 16 of that report, in isolation, to justify their current actions - whilst ignoring the clear observations outlined in clauses 3 and 4 on page 15.

Although the above references appear to be most relevant to the current situation, the whole Queensland Bushfire Strategy Report 1994 should be read and understood, whilst also recognizing that some parts are now outdated.

What appears to be overlooked in the matter of levies is that the rural-urban interface and rural residential type areas have a large ratepayer base, relative to their physical brigade area, unlike larger farming and grazing areas with a small ratepayer base and a much larger physical brigade area. An example would be 300 small properties levied at $20 each ($6,000) versus 30 larger properties at $20 each ($600).
A major stumbling block where a Local Government resolves to issue a rural fire levy is the wording of the resolution, especially where a LAFC has been involved. The larger rural properties could consist of multiple parcels of land, held under multiple titles but operated as a single enterprise - yet each parcel may attract a levy, depending upon the wording of the resolution.

It is also far more likely that owner of a large enterprise will have suitable fire fighting equipment “on property” than would a small rural residential block owner, thus effectively paying multiple times for the same level of “service”, and may be active in the local brigade, unlike the owner of the small rural residential block. The wording of fire levy resolutions, in all instances, is critical (as are all resolutions).

All brigades, with judicious planning, should be able to self fund, in conjunction with their local community, most of their requirements for equipment, but if QFRS wishes to utilize urban brigade units as the first line of fire defence then it may be that such areas will have to be taken under the urban fire brigade levy area and additional fire stations and equipment provided so that response times stay within acceptable limits.

Only those brigades so affected would know the answer, but such action may not be acceptable to the community.

Raising a rural fire levy over the whole of a Local Government Area to subsidize the urban-rural interface brigade needs (or wants) unjustly penalizes those rural brigades that live within their means and who function efficiently, seldom (if ever) having large, uncontrollable fires to contend with.

In many rural and primary producer brigades (and possibly other brigades) there is usually much fire related expenditure that is unaccounted for. Use of private vehicles, private fire fighting equipment, telephones, computers & internet access, parts for emergency repairs, UHF CB radio usage, fuels and oils, staked tyres on vehicles and machinery, etc are often unquantified in brigade records and are met from individual members’ resources.

How does one provide a piece of documentation (for reimbursement) for a brass fitting that may have been purchased 10 or 15 years previously, as part of a bulk purchase?

*The Auditor-General failed to quantify and report on such matters, having failed in his duty of care to so do.*

*QFRS, with their usual lack of comprehension, are no doubt also unaware of same.*
What effect is Urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Greater demand upon the services of the affected Brigades, necessitating better equipment and enhanced, urban based training combined with a need for more volunteers. Brigades in some of these areas are essentially operating as de-facto urban brigades, but unpaid.

The inability of urban dwellers making the tree change (to a rural environment) to appreciate the complexities of fire and the necessity to take greater preventative action is a major problem, further compounded by the actions of the Commissioner in effectively reducing easy resident participation in their local brigade.

Notwithstanding the fact that such an observation may be refuted by QFRS, it is glaringly obvious that brigade volunteer numbers have been reducing, sometimes alarmingly, since the 1994 high.

In the past, brigades that actively encouraged all residents to attend meetings, training days and social events had strong, active memberships and community involvement. Membership was approved by each brigade, not by the Commissioner. Local brigade members generally knew who the local people were that had a fascination with fire and a close eye was kept on them, resulting in very few major fires. By encouraging them to join the brigade they could be kept under a tighter rein and they got to light fires legally and sensibly, but they were seldom promoted to a position of authority.

With the running down of brigades in recent years, many of the older, more experienced fire fighters have resigned from the brigades (some in utter disillusionment), to the detriment of the community - especially in areas where urban encroachment is taking place and that experience is most needed.

Another interesting phenomenon that may be observed is the rise of people with an apparent fascination with fire to positions of authority within some brigades - this should be identified and discouraged.

How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

The answer to this question hinges upon what classes of brigades are referred to, but, given that this question is undoubtedly based upon brigades in the rural-urban interface (iZone), the answers should relate to same.
Some brigades (other than in iZone) may see only slight demand increase and can either manage quite effectively within their existing structure or they may require a minor upgrade of their resources and a slight increase in funding, both easily achieved. Training and resourcing, relevant to the needs of an individual brigade, may be one answer, or a classification approach to training as well as resourcing. This would necessitate a change from the current “one size fits all” approach, but it may mean greater acceptance and uptake by volunteers and brigades.

Training is an often misused terminology used to justify someone’s idea of what they think is needed - but they fail to appreciate that it has to be relevant and competent.

It should be noted that volunteers are seldom individually consulted, let alone kept fully informed, on a wide range of matters that affect them (and their families), yet they are major stakeholders. Instead of being compelled to do things that they may, as an individual, not find to be in their best interest they should be kept fully informed and allowed to make their own risk assessment upon the matters under consideration, in compliance with Workplace Health and Safety guidelines.

Many volunteers tend to follow without question, and don’t make waves (a “herd“ effect).

iZone (Village perhaps less so) brigades may need to be brought under the Urban levy umbrella, but those brigades (and specifically ALL their members) should be consulted prior to any such change - they may wish to resign from the brigade, partly based upon the fact that they no longer need be responsible for protection within their own community as such responsibility will pass to the Urban brigades that will service the area, or they may wish to explore other options.

This doesn’t canvass the thoughts of the whole of the community, which may or may not be thought to be necessary - it is suspected that community meetings are seldom called to openly gauge the wants, needs and perceptions they may have.

It is a relatively easy process to follow, to change the Urban boundary and make new classes of prescribed properties if the existing classifications are inadequate.

Large areas of rural land remaining could possibly be absorbed into adjoining brigade areas (along with existing personnel, finances and equipment), after consultation with all stakeholders and with the necessary brigade boundary amendments.
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran Rural Fire Brigade

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

Page 20, first paragraph of the Auditor-General’s report notes that Rural Fire Brigades are established under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990. However, upon perusing the Fire Service Act 1990, No. 10 (assented to 25th May, 1990) it is noted that Schedule 3, clause 9 on page 64 appears to enable a Bush Fire Brigade that was in existence, pursuant to the Rural Fires Act 1946-1984, immediately prior to the appointed day to continue in existence as a Rural Fire Brigade. Clause 20A of the Acts Interpretation Act 1954 was subsequently applied to this provision.

What the intended effect of legislative changes to the Fire Services Act 1990 as at 1 July 2007 were (becoming Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990), and how such changes materially affected Rural Fire Brigades is unknown as there appear to be no explanatory notes available - but there appeared to be no savings clause relevant to Rural Fire Brigades, unlike Urban brigades and Urban Officers.

It is known that, for individual brigades, there is a great variance in individual skills that produce results that are not always as good as could be expected or as may be desired, but generally they are open and transparent to both their members and their community.

As with all volunteer organizations, participants in office-bearer positions may have skill levels ranging from very high to almost non-existent, and it has always proved difficult to attract suitably experienced people to fill these positions. Socio-economic grouping and educational levels are also factors to be considered.

Although there is a form of training provided for Secretaries and Treasurers, some of the documentation provided is less than ideal and contains errata.

For QFRS Rural Operations the matter is of much greater concern.

It appears that most senior staff are ex-urban fire fighters, many of whom don’t have the necessary financial, administrative or interpersonal skills and/or qualifications.

Other staff employed to assist in administrative or other (sometimes voluntary) roles also appear to not have skills commensurate with their positions.

It is assumed that this may not apply in every district.

Forms, documentation and reporting methodologies could be streamlined to enable a possible reduction in office personnel and administrative time which would enable Area Directors and other personnel to have greater contact with brigades and a substantive increase in resources to brigades may even result.
Most increases in funding appear to go towards additional salaried personnel and very little towards much needed resources.

It may be necessary to re-deploy unsuitable staff to other positions within the organization and to employ people with the requisite qualifications and/or experience to ensure that the recommendations by the Auditor-General may be complied with, as well as ensuring a more effective administration.

The Auditor-General did not appear to recommend that basic financial and clerical training be implemented by QFRS to assist brigades requiring same, let alone to Rural Operations staff.

Those brigades that have office bearers without these skills may be severely disadvantaged, although it would not be all that difficult to produce pro forma documentation with explanatory notes, to assist in upgrading their skills or to assist them to fulfill their functions of office more efficiently.

The matter of Local Area Finance Committees has been addressed under the funding model heading, but transparency, openness and accountability of these committees is non-existent at the present time, operating in total secrecy.

Local Governments may not be as open and accountable as they should be in the matter of accounting to individual Rural Fire Brigades for fire levies raised and reimbursed. It seems strange that there is no provision for them to do so.

As it currently stands, a brigade does not appear to be entitled to receive documentation (a reconciliation statement) specifying the number of properties upon which a rural fire levy was raised and the quantum of same, the gross amount of such levy, the quantum of levies paid and the quantum of arrears for either the current or previous Financial Year, by property, plus funds retained as fees by the Council.

(But there may be individual Councils that do provide the same or similar information).

Without such data brigades would be providing technically incorrect financial information to the Area Director - Rural Operations, the members of the brigade and the community they serve (as well as to the Local Government, when applying for a rural fire levy).

How did the Auditor-General miss such an important point?

In fact, the Auditor-General seems to have had access to documents that differ substantially from those provided to rural brigades and under which brigades are supposed to operate.
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran Rural Fire Brigade

What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The retention of Fire Wardens in the current model, particularly within rural areas, is imperative for the efficient and effective management of areas under their control.

They are usually well respected members of the local community, experienced in local fire-fighting conditions and have a vast knowledge of local fauna & flora.

They are often active members of their brigade, or, at the very least, actively associated with the brigade in a close working relationship. (There may be brigades that have chosen to effectively ignore their local warden in an attempt to by-pass him, for reasons best known to them).

They are the first line of defence against legal misuse of fire (application for a permit to light a fire at an inopportune time and/or place), although their original powers have been weakened by QFRS and legislation.

Police Officers and Public Servants (or even QFRS Area Directors/Inspectors or Urban Officers) in the role may not necessarily have anywhere near such knowledge and experience and may choose to remain at arm’s length from the local brigade or brigades.

The response received by the Auditor-General in this matter may hinge upon what the question was and how it was put (or even if it was asked at all) - but it is noted that the sample of brigades by the Auditor-General was only one-half of one per centum (0.5%) of brigades - a statistically insignificant sample (in the percentages of: iZone - 4%, Village - 0.3%, Rural - 0.4% & Primary Producer - 0.16%) that may not truly represent the truth of the matter, let alone fully reflect the correct situations of all brigades.

Whilst QFRS Rural Operations may choose to deliberately leave Wardens out of the loop (for whatever reasons) most rural brigades do not so do.

Was the additional comment included by the Auditor-General to justify the prior decision by QFRS to do away with Fire Wardens as they now exist, notwithstanding the DES response? (removal of Wardens is apparently under way at time of compilation).
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran

Rural Fire Brigade

Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

Although the Auditor-General’s report has raised many issues, most of them have still not been addressed by QFRS Rural Operations, but it is noted that a few new forms have suddenly appeared on 16 March 2010. Given the actions (or lack of, to be more precise) by QFRS to date in response to the recommendations in the report, plus the quality of the report itself, one would need to be forgiven for thinking the report was actually an answer requiring a question.

Taking away the right of any resident to apply to his/her local brigade for membership and for them to be accepted or rejected by the majority of members present at a legally constituted meeting has created more problems than it has solved (although the need is seen in iZones), as has placing Rural Fire Brigades under direct QFRS urban control. Most rural people have weapons licences, yet they are still subjected to what, at best, appears to be a “fishing expedition”. But if they have never been caught and convicted, they will receive a clearance for membership - unless, perhaps, hearsay is utilized.

It would be interesting to peruse the total number of applications made versus the approvals and rejections and how many people have been caught and charged for whatever reason. Police should NOT be protected from providing false or misleading information, and should remain liable at law for any such incompetence.

The most intriguing part is that existing brigade members were not subject to the same investigation, provided they stayed within their current brigade - there may well have been open revolt had that occurred and all newcomers are now discriminated against.

It is unknown if existing Urban officers are subject to the same scrutiny, but given their positions in the community it is expected that they would all have to undergo such investigation - from the Commissioner downward. If they haven’t, they should be. They occupy positions of far greater trust than a farmer or grazier who wishes to join his local brigade for their mutual protection.

Exactly what is this “position of trust”? - it is not clearly quantified. If it relates only to children, they shouldn’t be within cooee of a fire, nor of fire training, but, as mentioned above, it could be a problem in iZone areas and Urban areas, where far more interaction is likely to occur.

A landowner with a large road frontage that is subject to malicious or other fires may be excluded from brigade membership and the legislative protection purportedly offered if he has a conviction for fishing in a protected area at the commencement of such legislation - yet he may well still hold a weapons licence. He may also have previously held property in an adjoining or nearby brigade area and is an experienced fire fighter with decades of fire-fighting experience.
It seems absurd that such a person can not be beside you when you are in a tight situation, yet an inexperienced person that has done a course and is "qualified" (and, unfortunately, assumes they know everything about rural fire-fighting) must be the one you are stuck with - potentially endangering your life unnecessarily.

As it currently exists, the son of a grazier may wish to join his local brigade - the property has been in the family for generations and all family members have a proud membership tradition with the brigade.

The fire brigade boundary is also the boundary of the grazing property. The son will have to undertake the police check, prior to submitting his brigade membership application. The results show no untoward outcomes and he is duly voted into membership of the brigade.

Eight months pass, and an adjoining grazing property, abutting the fire brigade boundary/father's property, comes up for sale. The son is assisted by his father to purchase the property as it has a near new homestead and substantial, well kept improvements - most suitable for the son and his new wife, as they have been married in recent weeks.

The son decides to now join the brigade that has responsibility for the area covered by his property - HE HAS TO GO THROUGH THE SAME PRE-MEMBERSHIP POLICE CHECKS as he did eight months previously for his old brigade - stupidity!

Whether urban fire fighters have to go through a similar process when transferring between stations is unknown, but it is suspected that they don't. If not, Why not?

[The current system is open to abuse and "empire building" by QFRS staff and could lead to "stacking" of a brigade or a group - there have already been instances of people being appointed by an Area Director to brigade positions (sometimes without the requisite police check), instead of that person being nominated, seconded and elected by the brigade members present at a duly constituted meeting].

Many of the decisions taken by the Commissioner appear to lead towards absolute physical and financial control of the rural fire brigades with the ultimate demise of many due to volunteer dissatisfaction or particular brigade suppression/exclusion, but has very little to do with efficient and effective rural fire fighting.

This attitude is also beginning to infiltrate through many brigades - power and control, not performance (pandering to their ego which over-rides common sense), have become the criteria by which they function.

Whether there is a "secret" move afoot to create "super" rural brigades in many areas is unknown - but it is suspected from snippets of information received, the observed actions by various people and comments made.
Falling volunteer numbers should be a “wake up” call to anyone with an interest in rural fire brigades and their effectiveness - yet very few people can see that if there is a problem now it is going to be exacerbated with the effluxion of time and will cost the community dearly, and remedial action simply isn’t happening.

It is rather unfortunate that QFRS Rural Operations have a tendency to deal with both brigades and individual members on a less than open and honest basis - they either don’t know or don’t care that they are continually being caught out in misleading and deceptive conduct and communications and it certainly causes much concern to some volunteers - but there is no avenue, short of either revolt or resignation, to attempt to redress such a situation.

Such actions, from Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations downward, do not engender any form of trust in these people nor in the service as a whole, by many thinking volunteers. There does not appear to be any good reason for their actions, thus it may be assumed that their motivation must be questionable.

Another area of major concern is the inability of QFRS to keep all brigades fully informed, in a timely manner, on all matters that may affect them.

The current Rural Fire Brigade Manual is not of the quality that could be expected of a document of that type, and, although it is of a loose leaf arrangement, amendments and updates are not (or do not appear to be) filtering through to brigades in a timely manner, with far too many matters being amended by word of mouth or separate notification, if at all. [A critique attached as Annexure A]

It has been noted that some brigades may propose to light fires outside their immediate jurisdiction without a permit - yet with the full knowledge and consent of the local Area Director and senior training personnel, bypassing the warden for the area and the first officer of the brigade in whose area the fire is intended to be lit. Another problem area.

The Auditor-General makes little reference to Fire Brigade Groups and doesn’t seem to understand their constitution or function, yet they form an integral part of the fire levy process in many areas.

Many of these Fire Brigade Groups are acting in a manner not in keeping with their constitution (may be found in Rural Fire Brigade Manual [August 1999], Annex A, Chapter 13) or the instructional provisions of Section D9.1 of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual of 1 July 2007. It is noted that clauses 14.7 to 14.9 of Chapter 13 of the 1999 version of the manual were not included in the 2007 version.
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran

Rural Fire Brigade

Some Area Directors are treating these Rural Fire Brigade Groups as personal fiefdoms, appointing their own nominees to positions that are subject to nomination and election by the members of the Group and completely overriding specific administrative requirements.

Where Local Area Finance Committees have been formed in some Local Government Areas, some rural brigades have been forced to join a Fire Brigade Group under threat of losing their right to their local Council issuing a rural fire levy on their behalf - contrary to the specific instructions in the RFB Manual forbidding such action.

Coercion of brigades to join a Group should not be tolerated by Parliament, but apparently the Commissioner can (and does) get away with such actions, even if it is undertaken by staff to whom he has or hasn't delegated or given certain authority or instructions - the Commissioner remains responsible for their actions, having appointed them to their positions of trust.

Incident report forms are poorly designed (and described) and don't necessarily capture data that would reasonably be expected to be captured to assist in the QFRS decision making processes for brigades.

The March 2010 versions are still not suitable, and are actually less suitable than the previous version. [Current and previous forms attached as Annexure B]

A hazard reduction burn is hardly an incident that requires brigades to be called out, unless the burn has escaped, but the report form is of that format, and may be one example why much information is not provided by brigades to the Area office, as it appears to be unsuitable for reporting just such an event.

Another major problem for rural fire brigades is that QFRS apparently see local Councils as their primary area of responsibility, not the local communities and the brigades that serve them. This would indicate a conceptual problem that is alarming, to say the least, and is not within the designated functions pursuant to Section 8B (a) of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990. [Copy of ABC document attached as Annexure C]

Most rural brigades consist of people (volunteers) who have gainful employment outside of QFRS, or are self employed and either working on or off their property. QFRS doesn't seem to understand this concept in practice, nor do they seem to understand that rural people have rural and other pursuits that must take precedence over QFRS matters, other than in the event of a fire emergency in their local area.

Another area that is overlooked is that many rural fire brigade members may have already worked for anything up to 10 or 12 hours, yet they are compelled to attend a fire that may take many hours or more to extinguish - if they are instructed to be at the fire and actively engaged their work time limit may soon take them into a bodily state similar to alcoholic intoxication and they become not only a danger to themselves but to their fellow firefighters - yet they may be instructed to do a 12 hour shift - Why is this happening?
Whilst all property of Brigades vests in the Commissioner, there remains a major problem in the control of such property which needs urgent clarification. It should remain under the primary control of the brigade whilst ever the brigade exists, as in the past - ultimately vesting in the Commissioner.

Rural brigades, via their community, work hard to raise funds and/or raise a levy to enable them to purchase much needed equipment for the primary purpose of protecting their community from, or in the event of, fire.

The community and their brigade should not unreasonably expect that any equipment financed by them (either in whole or in part) and purchased for their primary benefit will, at all material times, be available for their benefit - similar to the expectation by urban levy payers who finance urban fire equipment.

What QFRS apparently doesn't realize is that much of their funding for Rural Operations appears to come from GST or Consolidated Revenue, so that, in effect, the people have already contributed more than the "subsidized" amount. There is, freely available on the web, a "confidential" document that purports to show that Rural Operations is partially funded from the Urban Fire Levy, as well as from consolidated funds - but departmental financial reports (also containing obvious errors) tend to contradict such erroneous & misleading information - if the "confidential" information was correct, the urban brigades would not be fully funded.

No reference is made to equipment that may be provided from sources other than QFRS, at no cost to QFRS - the Commissioner grabs that, as well. Perhaps the donor should retain ownership of the equipment, allowing it to be used by only the particular brigade, with such equipment being returned to the donor should the brigade disband.

If all the urban fire trucks leave a particular station to attend a fire, a back-up vehicle is brought in from another station so that the community still has some level of protection.

Why QFRS Rural Operations or Urban officers can have the power to demand all rural vehicles leave a particular brigade area to attend a major fire some distance away without a back-up vehicle being available for that particular brigade area is (or should be) of deep concern, especially in times of extreme fire danger.

If an area has more than one vehicle, at least one vehicle and a minimum crew should remain in that area to provide an equivalent level of service and protection as that afforded to urban residents - rural people are not second class citizens.

Such demand also fails to comply with the prudent requirement for a risk assessment to be conducted for the area the subject of the demand.
If the First Officer of the brigade has conducted a risk assessment and formed the view that at least one vehicle and crew (if not all vehicles and crews) should remain *in situ*, how can an Area Director, Area Manager or Incident Controller (via FireCom) who is not present, but is at a fire or sitting in an office a considerable distance away, over-ride such decision, in direct contravention of the Act? Abuse of power, perhaps, or simple incompetence?

Another problem that seems to arise is the habit of “leap frogging” vehicles out of their area, to a distant fire - a more sensible approach would be to stage or step them out so that crews most familiar with an area remain within striking distance of that area and can respond quickly and effectively.

There are cases on record of crews being tasked to fires and they simply have no idea how to get there let alone being able to determine the cardinal points from the fire location - and this problem is not confined to rural crews - urban crews often can’t find their way around urban streets and both rural and urban crews waste valuable time waiting for directions from FireCom - and FireCom operators will even over-ride correct directions that are given by a brigade officer familiar with the area.

There is a growing trend towards conducting hazard reduction burns during “office hours”, which is the most dangerous part of the day. Fires are lit any time between 10:00 am & 2:00 pm and taken through the hottest part of the afternoon, with winds increasing and humidity decreasing, yet with little thought to what the result might be if the fire can’t be controlled. Whether their local Fire Warden has issued a permit, allowing such action, is unknown.

Such fires take large numbers of resources and personnel to control and are frequently lost (but it is suspected that the loss of control is either not reported or is ignored).

It should be noted that a competent rural or primary producer brigade, having due regard for prevailing weather conditions, would burn a similar area with far fewer resources and personnel in far less time because they would not commence the burn until late afternoon or evening and would carry on into the night, until the moisture from the evening dew reduced the effectiveness of fire or the subject area was burnt out. If they felt conditions were not quite right the burn would not proceed, erring on the side of caution.

QFRS, along with many organizations responsible for fire control within their jurisdictions, appear not to understand cool burning in the earlier part of the year and that, if carried out correctly, it does far less damage to fauna, flora and the environment than much hotter burns conducted after winter frosts have occurred, although the later burns can be executed successfully, IF the weather conditions are conducive.
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calioran

Rural Fire Brigade

Many Rural & Primary Producer brigades operate with fire trailers and/or slip-on units, for 4 wd utilities, purchased from and supplied through QFRS, yet the Auditor-General made no mention of these. Why not?

Each year, as in other areas of the State, a major exercise is held for rural brigades.

Perusal of documentation reveals an urban influence and appears suitable for iZone crews and equipment, but not so much for Rural or Primary Producer brigades who do not normally carry such equipment as part of their inventory. These exercises do not replicate conditions in the bush, particularly at night.

Attendance at these events, whilst nominally voluntary, in many instances is compulsory as the Commissioner is directing (in writing) the Regional Manager, Rural Operations to direct people (in writing) to attend, with their (specific) brigade vehicles.

Whilst it may be a wonderful political and photographic opportunity for the Commissioner’s pleasure, the monies expended could be far better spent in doing hazard reduction burns in susceptible areas at appropriate times and this would also serve as training for inexperienced members.

No thought is given to the families of volunteers (having not intended to attend the exercise) and any plans they may have made as a family unit, well in advance of receiving the direction to attend. It is not a fire emergency. Under these conditions, these volunteers should receive adequate recompense. Self-employed volunteers may have to cancel previously arranged income producing exertions.

Hazard reduction burns may not be as politically exciting and they may not produce as many photographic opportunities nor give the Commissioner as many brownie points, but the paying public would be receiving value and a greater measure of protection for their hard earned dollar, and the fires of late 2009 would have far less chance of occurring.

It is particularly noted that many brigades in high risk areas (urban, iZone and rural) are not conducting any hazard reduction burns at all - in contravention of their prime objective and not in accordance with the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 - apparently the Commissioner doesn’t understand this, either.

Reference is made to the expected increase of wildfire in frequency and intensity due to climate change (global warming), not only in the Auditor-General’s report but in numerous other documents - such references conveniently ignore the fact that most fires are caused either directly or indirectly by humans (as a consequence of an action or actions done or not done), not always changes to climate, although that is one factor. Queensland (& Australia) has always had a variable climate - we have had far wetter years and far drier years than the average with severe droughts and excessive rain and flooding plus colder winters and warmer summers - but the only constant in all those years has been human stupidity.
To claim that an increase in either precipitation increasing the growth of flammable fuels or a decrease in precipitation creating a drought, let alone increasing temperatures, will lead to an increased incidence of wildfires is a nonsense - an oversimplification. There are many more factors that have to come into play to ensure the correct conditions are met, and there is no person or computer program that can reliably make such a prediction well in advance of the fact, only closer to the actual time.

A prediction is simply a guess - no more, no less! The quality of the prediction will depend upon many factors. We all hear about the ones that were subsequently correct (or substantially correct, depending upon the view of the observer), but those that were incorrect (or substantially so) seem to be conveniently ignored.

An interesting observation is the subsequent increase in illegally lit fires in areas where their increased fire danger has been extensively publicised in the media - a "catch 22" situation, trying to warn the public and extending an invitation to those people who have a fascination with fire, at the same time - almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Fire danger warnings should also include a warning for residents to be more aware of unusual or suspicious activity in their area, something that is seldom heard as part of the initial warning message.

The Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 (as in force at 1 July 2007) establishes QFRS, pursuant to Sec. 8.

Sec. 8A shows that the service consists only of the commissioner and fire service officers, but, upon reading, seemingly provides no legal protection to Rural Fire Brigade members, other than the First Officer, as Rural Fire Brigades apparently may now only exist at the pleasure of the commissioner.

Finally, blindly following the mistakes made by southern fire fighting authorities and introducing their policies and procedures (and employing staff from those states in senior positions to implement such policies and procedures) is a recipe for disaster. Does the Commissioner not read and understand what so many Reports, Inquiries and Royal Commissions have revealed?

Have thorough police and probity checks been carried out on all personnel from southern states that are employed or are volunteers within QFRS? If not, this should be done as a matter of urgency, and may reveal some surprises.

Policies and procedures driven by academia and not by proficient, experienced personnel is further compounding problems faced by experienced rural fire fighters. The much vaunted La Trobe based (?) Bushfire CRC is a case in point, with papers presented by people who appear to have little in the way of fire-fighting skills or experience.
Some papers do exhibit quite astute insights and others contain valuable information, although it appears that the iZone area is the only one of major research importance. Again it is noted that these researchers appear not to recognize the people within the firefighting ranks that have a fascination with fire - such people are hardly going to identify themselves and they really have to be identified by observation.

What tends to be overlooked by so many people in positions of authority is that fires are fought and extinguished on the fire ground, not by people sitting in tents or air-conditioned offices miles away, formulating plans that may or may not be based on accurate information - notwithstanding publicity or “spin” to the contrary, they simply cannot see (let alone visualize, if unfamiliar with the area) the fire ground or fully comprehend the situation and poor decision making is often the (non-disclosed) end result.

Sensationalist and/or misleading reporting by the various media is another problem area that has to be overcome - but factual reporting should not suffer - a difficult situation.

Urban brigades consume a disproportionately large part of their budget allocation responding to false alarms (mainly automatic equipment), unlike rural brigades that have few false alarms. This will change for rural brigades as more urban people shift to rural acreage living and see smoke (but not fire).

Mediocrity and perceived incompetence are rewarded within the QFRS structure, but I fail to see why this is so, unless as a form of inducement.

It is unfortunate that the Emergency Services Minister appears to be so unfamiliar with reality as it affects rural volunteers.

In the field individual testing of all senior staff by an independent authority (with the requisite knowledge and experience) should reveal the incompetency's revealed in this submission - fix that problem and there should then be a flow-on effect through the brigades, to the benefit of the organization as a whole. It would not be all that difficult to generate a questionnaire and to undertake some searching on-site practical questioning to determine their knowledge.

It should be noted that there are some senior staff (ex urban) who do acknowledge their lack of experience and knowledge of the intricacies of rural fire fighting, notwithstanding the fact that they will attend and take control of a rural fire - but whether they remain within Rural Operations is unknown at this time.

It is an unfortunate human failing that we often make the mistake of assuming everyone knows what we know, has experienced all that we have experienced and can do what we can do - and many don't, haven't and can't. This leads to confusion when a matter is under discussion and the parties see things from an entirely different perspective.
We all make mistakes, but not all people learn a valuable lesson to carry through life - some keep repeating their mistakes.

Some people observe or experience something new, recognize an opportunity and add it to their store of knowledge, whilst others remain oblivious to the fact.

Whilst we are all limited very much by what we do know or have experienced, it is what we don’t know (and don’t attempt to learn) that is of greater concern.

It is noted that many people (both rural and urban) have swimming pools on their properties - but how many have an independent fire-fighting pump and hoses set up for their primary protection, in the event of wild fire? Or tanks, for the same purpose?

Neither the Auditor-General nor QFRS can identify which rural brigades have privately owned and utilized resources, either in conjunction with QFRS supplied equipment or not. It is assumed that most brigades have not identified, let alone recorded, what measure of fire protection each property within their area has and the resources at their disposal - mainly because of the way the Privacy Act is structured.

Because many brigades now appear to be operating with less direct community involvement and within a more “closed” organization, factors such as tracks, fences & gates, firebreaks, dams and other water supplies and their access are basically unknown for the bulk of the properties within their areas. Greater community involvement would overcome, in part, this problem, but total community involvement would be preferable.

Many of them would have even less understanding of adjoining brigade areas.

Some don’t even appear to know where their own brigade area boundaries are situated, on the ground.

The reference to an “advanced standing program (Recognition of Prior Learning) for volunteers” is a pathetic joke - there are volunteers with over 40 years active fire fighting experience and brigade involvement who are classed as “support” and not “firefighter” within many brigades, who have to now undertake a course in Firefighter Minimum Skills, to currently be classified as active firefighters.

There are people who have been active firefighters and listed as brigade members for almost as many years that have suddenly been deleted completely from QFRS records.

QFRS staff have been indiscriminately leaving people (who have been previously advised, in writing, as having left the area) listed as members of brigades whilst removing others who have not left the area - not competent!
The further reference to volunteers who had undertaken training under previous training standards is also questionable - QFRS really has very little idea of which volunteers have successfully completed what training, and when.

Major events, such as at Mt Archer and those at surrounding areas in late 2009, should be investigated by an authority at arm’s length from QFRS - allowing QFRS to conduct an investigation into and of itself is not in the best interests of the community nor the organization, unless the intent is to hide as much as possible and not learn from the experience. [Copy of a Letter to the Editor of The Morning Bulletin, which was not printed, is enclosed at Annexure D]

Volunteers come under the Department of Community Safety umbrella.

The recent release of the “Revised Departmental Code of Conduct”, ethics principle 3 “Respect for the law and the system of government” and the following content is an oxymoron - very few people, either volunteers or paid staff, would have a working knowledge of ALL the laws and policies that apply to their work, let alone Government Policy, as is expected of them.

This would be a full-time job in itself, trying to stay abreast of QFRS policy, Government policy and relevant legislation.

Many, in fact, wouldn’t know which acts and/or policies are applicable, let alone know where or how to find them or begin to understand them sufficiently to have a “working knowledge” - QFRS doesn’t supply all such documents to brigades.

Despite a specific request to QFRS for some such (QFRS) documents, they were never supplied.

QFRS certainly doesn’t follow many of the five ethics principles, and it is noted that discrimination (amongst many other things) is still alive and well.

There is also the possibility that the code of conduct may also preclude various discussions (open and frank) at brigade meetings which will instead have to become more “secretive”, and comprehensive meeting minutes may no longer be permissible, with sections edited out to comply with legislative and policy requirements. Residents (prospective brigade members or otherwise) attending a meeting may be horrified when they perceive such actions.

Another (really annoying) oxymoron is “Zero Harm” - the only way this can be complied with is to do nothing and to remain ensconced in cotton wool - in the real world accidents do happen, despite all efforts to prevent them. Had the terminology been “Minimum Harm” it would have been logical.
Rural and Primary Producer brigade volunteer members have little free time available to undertake visits to schools or other community events to undertake fire education - nor may they wish to do so. This is really a function of paid employees.

There also appears to be far too great an emphasis upon volunteers "dressing up" (and the consequent cost of such dress uniforms that may only be worn occasionally) and too little emphasis upon supplying front line equipment. When all brigades have been fully equipped, then, and only then, may funds be expended upon unnecessary clothing. Looking pretty doesn’t help put out fires - it simply panders to people’s ego.

END
INCIDENT REPORT – LANDSCAPE FIRE (BUSHFIRE) / PRESCRIBED BURN

To be completed by the first attending Rural Brigade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*A3</th>
<th>Brigade Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Firecom Number |

*G1 Estimated date that ignition occurred

*G2 Estimated time that ignition occurred

A51 Date of Arrival

A52 Time of Arrival

A53 Return to Service Date

A54 Return to Service Time

*G3 The total area of bush, forest, grass or crops burnt in hectares

A6 Date of Call

A8 Time of Call

A9 Method of Notification

A23 Type of Incident

*G7 Vegetation Type

A24 Type of Action Taken

| Number of Aircraft Used |

A33 Number of Aircraft Used

A36 Weather Conditions at time of Outbreak

| Direction of prevailing wind |

| Temperature |

| Relative Humidity |

Velocity of prevailing winds

- Still
- Light
- Moderate
- Strong

G11 Was fire control line effective?

- Yes
- No

Type of control line used (only tick one)

- Direct attack
- Firebreak mechanical (ploughed, graded)
- Firebreak chemical (poisoned)
- Firebreak cut, slashed or mown
- Firebreak natural, bare earth or rock
- Fuel reduced area, previous fuel reduction burn
- Fuel reduced area, previous wildfire
- Other

*G8 Date of Call

*G9 Time of Call

*G10 Method of Notification

*G11 Type of Action Taken

*G12 Vegetation Type

*G13 Type of Incident

*G14 Date of Incident

*G15 Location of Incident Origin (decimals of degrees)

Latitude

Longitude

*G16 Vegetation Type

A20 Number of Fire Personnel at Scene

(please complete "Brigade Members Attending")

A21 Number of Vehicles Used

(please specify)

A22 Number of Aircraft Used

(please specify)

A23 Type of Incident

(please specify)

A24 Type of Action Taken

(please specify)

A25 Name

A26 Firecom Number

(please specify)

A27 Name

A28 Firecom Number

(please specify)

A29 Number of Fire Personnel at Scene

(please specify)

A30 Number of Vehicles Used

(please specify)

A31 Number of Aircraft Used

(please specify)

A32 Number of Aircraft Used

(please specify)

A33 Number of Aircraft Used

(please specify)

A34 Number of Aircraft Used

(please specify)

A35 Number of Aircraft Used

(please specify)
A42 Did you encounter any problems?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, what?

☐ Lack of cooperation from owner/occupier
☐ Delay in relaying information to scene
☐ Inadequate or poor technical advice
☐ Lack of water
☐ Poor radio communications
☐ Inadequate equipment
☐ Insufficient equipment
☐ Equipment failure
☐ Delay obtaining equipment
☐ Insufficient information given
☐ Insufficient manpower responded
☐ Difficulty gaining access to incident scene
☐ Other

(please specify)

*A43 Responding Brigades / Appliances (attach list if necessary)

Primary Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

A56-67 Did any of the following organisations attend?

(Mark all organisations which attended)

☐ Electricity
☐ Gas
☐ Water
☐ Police
☐ Ambulance
☐ SES
☐ Environmental Protection Agency
☐ Volunteer Rescue Service
☐ Charitable support agencies
☐ Government welfare agencies
☐ Other

(please specify)

E4 Could the cause of the fire be identified?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, what?

☐ Equipment exhaust
☐ Cigarette, cigar or pipe
☐ Match
☐ Lighter
☐ Camp fire
☐ Lightning
☐ Heat spreading from another hostile fire
  (i.e. Direct heat, flying embers, brand or spark)
☐ Escaped permitted burn
☐ Other

(please specify)
Administrative Information

R1 Is any further action required?

☐ Investigation

☐ No further action required

☐ Other

(please specify)

R2 Was any private firefighting equipment damaged?

☐ No

☐ Yes

(please specify)

A4 Incident Number

(Administration only)

Do you require any more forms?

☐ No

☐ Yes

*R3 Name

*R4 Rank

*R5 Signature

*Date

Notes Section

Brigade Members Attending
Annexure A - Cover Sheet.

This critique was originally mailed to the Area Director - Rural Operations at Rockhampton on 4 December 2008.

A slightly amended version was e-mailed to the Acting Area Director - Rural Operations at Rockhampton on 25 January 2010.

No feedback on the content has ever been received to date.
I have to preface my comments and opinion in this critique by observing that any Annual General Meeting conducted in the period between 1 July 2007 and subsequent receipt of this new Rural Fire Brigade Manual may not be a legally constituted meeting and the implications that holds for elected office-bearers, officers and members may need to be addressed. Any General Meetings also held within that time frame may also be subject to legal challenge at some future time.

For the new constitution to have been legally effective, it would have had to have been in the hands of all Brigade secretaries well prior to 30 June 2007 so that General or Special Meetings could have been convened to adopt same, prior to 30 June 2007, whilst still operating under the protection of their old constitutions.

Had the responsible officer had the foresight to send copies of the document to all secretaries well in advance of the cut-off date for final review, I would expect that some, at the very least, would have sufficient skills and experience to pick up many of the errors as I have done - obviously the current process is fatally flawed.

As it presently stands, I am of the opinion that no Rural Fire Brigade in Queensland is legally constituted (except any that may have had the opportunity to adopt the new constitution prior to 30 June 2007) and we are all operating illegally, given the content of the wording of the Constitution we were all required to adopt unaltered.

Because there was no savings or transitional provision in the new constitution and parent Act, nor an opportunity to undertake an exercise similar to this prior to 30 June 2007, this is the inevitable result.

As with other areas within the manual, I would suggest that Crown Law be given a copy of this document and a copy of the manual, and their opinion requested, as a matter of urgency. I can foresee the necessity for specific legislation to make good this negligence, even though I don't expect that every matter I have raised would necessarily be correct or be agreed with.

If this Manual is expected to be recognized as of legal standing (and I suspect it is), it is a disgrace.

Some of the following is subjective but most is objective.

Reference to the masculine gender also includes the feminine gender and vice versa.

Finally, as a volunteer, I expect that I have the right to attend or not attend any fire of any nature and that I have every right to ensure my own health and wellbeing and that of my fellow volunteers. I also expect that I have the right to not continue to attend any fire where, in my opinion, directions are given that I know will endanger either life or property.
1. **Green cover sheet:** Does not contain an effective date of the Manual coming into force. Ideally, this should be in large print so that there is no doubt as to same.

2. **General - Commissioner’s Foreword:** Contains, in very small print “Valid from: 01/07/2007”, which can be (and originally was) easily overlooked.

3. **Functions of QFRS Rural Operations Offices:**
   - **Relationship between a Rural Fire Brigade and the Government:** In part, states “A Local Government does not have any official role or responsibility towards brigades”. This clause will be referred to later in these observations, particularly in respect to the number of provisions requiring brigades to meet specific and non-specified criteria.

4. **A1.1 Protecting the Environment:** This section is the first that indicates, in my opinion, a basic misunderstanding of rural fire fighting, especially wildfire.
   - The reference to soil erosion by various causes refers to fire trails, a terminology I have not heard used in Queensland in over 45 years of fire fighting.
   - The same sentence makes reference to fires prior to major rainfall events which I find utterly ridiculous - it is my considered opinion, based upon past experience, that no person or organization can predict a major rainfall event with any certainty, although they may hazard a guess [make a prediction] based upon various known and unknown factors and with varying degrees of success.
   - Some of the requirements outlined in this section require expertise and qualifications beyond the scope that could normally be expected to fall within the average Volunteer’s level of skills and experience.
   - I would like to see a listing of all personnel so qualified, positions held within their brigades and the names and locations of their brigades.

5. **For the conduct of a prescribed fire, by an emergency service agency;**
   - **For conduct a wildfire response by an emergency service agency;** (sic)
   - The use of the term “any rehabilitation required” is far too general and could be interpreted to mean many different things by different people reading this document, and could well lead to misunderstandings between volunteers and the landholder, particularly of the quantum of same.
   - In any event, this is an area that would appear to me to be beyond the level of expertise required of volunteer fire brigade members and is more a specialist area.
   - If this manual is as it purports to be per its title, the above heading appears to refer to an agency of Government, not a Rural Fire Brigade.

6. **A1.2 Hazard Reduction Programs:**
   - **What I need to know:** Last clause, first line - delete the words “use of”.
   - **How I do it:** Here is a reference to control lines (see also fire trails in 4. A1.1 above), as well as environmental issues, which have been addressed above.

7. **Roadside Hazard Management:** Are Local Authorities fully aware of these requirements? I am of the opinion that they may be operating under entirely different policies and procedures.

8. **A2.4 Operations Doctrine:** In general, this section could be assumed to apply to Urban Brigades and has been carried over into the Rural Brigade area.
   - Standing Orders is a case in point - most, if not all, rural volunteers are exactly that - volunteers. Most, if not all, have gainful employment of varying degree outside QFRS and many of them may be employed some distance from their brigade base.
   - Many true rural brigades don't have fire sheds, let alone fire fighting vehicles.
   - Except for the really keen members, I would expect that very few would be checking the volunteer portal on a daily basis for Standing Orders, let alone anything else.
   - A broadband internet connection is an imperative - any rural person with only dial-up internet connection is at a severe disadvantage, timewise, and will also be continually kicked off the portal by the servers "timing out".

9. **A2.7 Property Handovers and Post Bushfire Procedures:** There are anomalous references contained in this section, and there appears to be some confusion by the author as to what constitutes a bushfire and the relevant clauses of the principal Act.
   - Again, the reference to environmental issues and advice.

10. **C4.1 Application for Membership:** This section mistakenly assumes that all Rural Fire Brigades have a Management Committee and the “How to do it” section is not in accordance with D7.27 Brigade Constitution, 16 (d) & (e).
    - Whilst I fully appreciate there is a need to have a specific provision whereby persons who are not considered to be “fit and proper” may be excluded from membership, the author of this section has not fully thought through the phraseology and methodology nor does that author appear to be fully aware of the provisions of the Brigade Constitution as contained in this manual.
11. C4.2 Membership Classes: I find these definitions particularly discriminatory and feel personally humiliated by same.

Because I have a wide range of skills and am able to undertake the position of Secretary/Treasurer within this Brigade (as have traditionally many other males in other rural brigades), it is also derogatory and offensive to me for the author(s) of these classes to assume that we are a lesser class of person without the requisite fire fighting skills or experience, when, in point of actual fact, the obverse may well be true.

*This whole section needs to be carefully reviewed and revised descriptions with suitable explanations must be provided.*

This observation would no doubt also apply to many brigade chairmen as well as to other brigades’ members.

It may well transpire that these classes of membership may need to be reviewed, particularly for Class 1 brigades, many of whom have limited membership resources available, and could possibly extend to Class 2 brigades in a similar position. (Note added 3 Dec 08 - and also the new Primary Producer Brigades).

Whilst on the subject of discrimination, it appears to me that any person who has difficulty reading and writing (due to various circumstance) is discriminated against in many avenues of QFRS - yet when it comes to actual fire fighting they could well prove to be far more competent than many "qualified (on paper)" personnel.

12. C4.6 Termination of Membership:

How I do it:

Voluntary Resignation: The second sentence of this paragraph conflicts with clauses 10 (b) & 18 (b) of the Brigade Constitution.

13. C4.7 Membership Roles:

What I need to know:

Members’ responsibilities: Fifth sentence refers to "this constitution" but should actually state "the Brigade constitution" as it is referring to another material component of the Manual.

Brigade Office-Bearers: This whole segment needs urgent review as a number of meanings and requirements are imprecise and unclear.

The first sentence of the first clause contains the prescriptive “shall” which gives no option in the makeup of a management committee and the second sentence of that clause indicates a minimum of three persons are to constitute such management committee.

The second clause then requires a fourth person to be elected (presumably if a joint position such as secretary/treasurer or first officer/chairman is held by one of the committee members), notwithstanding the fact that the first clause appears to have already addressed such a possibility. This clause negates the minimum requirement as outlined in the first clause.

Perhaps the author of this section was trying to achieve a “sliding scale” of persons but could not achieve same by using the written word.

This second clause also contains “(as required in clause 7(a) and 7(c))” but does not refer those clause references to a particular source, thus the wording "of the Brigade Constitution" should be appended within the enclosing brackets, even though clauses 7(a) & 7(c) do not appear to be the relevant clauses.

The fourth clause, second sentence makes reference to "...clauses 7 and 8(c) and 8(d) of the Brigade Constitution)." Yet there are no clauses numbered 8(c) & 8(d) in the Brigade Constitution and "office bearers" are not created under clause 7 of the Brigade Constitution, which deals only with Management Committee office-bearers.

First Officer’s Responsibilities: The fourth sentence begins with “They are...” but should actually read “He is...” as a Brigade has only one First Officer.

Reference Materials: Secretary/Treasurer booklet NOT RECEIVED until 22 MAY 2008.

14. Incident Report - Landscape Fire (Bushfire) / Prescribed Burn: Sample Form: Item A30 shows 7 vehicles attended the fire -

How many of them were brigade appliances and how many were private vehicles; were the private vehicles using brigade equipment or private equipment; how many persons attending were using privately owned items like knapsacks, pumps, etc?

Surely this type of data should be captured to facilitate future planning?

Item A43 doesn’t show that either a primary or secondary brigade attended the fire. IF AN ITEM IS TO BE INCLUDED TO ASSIST BRIGADE MEMBERS IN THE EXECUTION OF THEIR DUTY, IT SHOULD BE DONE IN A CORRECT MANNER - errors and omissions can lead to misinterpretation.

There is no suitable form for use in hazard reduction burns - use of the current Form RF14A is unsuitable.

15. 7. Brigade Administration: Second clause, second sentence - Please correct the incorrect English expression.
16. D7.5 Brigade Finances - General:

What I need to know: The sentence beginning with “All money handled…” is in contradiction with Clause 30 (c) of the Brigade Constitution, and the following sentence indicates that “QFRS is required to implement reasonable procedures to ensure accountability of those funds” and the definition of “reasonable procedures” needs to be clearly defined and added as an explanatory note.

The 10th sentence appears to assume that this directive can over-ride the provisions of a will, under which shares or property investments are bequeathed to a brigade - I think Crown Law advice should be sought and this matter clarified.

Refer to the clause that refers to the keeping of separate accounts on page 2 (of this section), as this clause appears to contradict the 10th sentence referred to above.

Financial Year and Audit Requirements: Appointment of an Auditor under the provisions outlined could change from year to year.

There could also be some confusion over which type of auditor should be appointed, depending upon which definition of “public money” is correct and from which Act such definition is derived.

Where a levy is received and an auditor is appointed, the second qualification to this appointment “a person satisfactory to the Local Government” could lead to some confusion in that “the Local Government” is the body corporate for want of a better descriptive, although I would expect the CEO of the Local government would be advising the members of Council. There is doubt in my mind as to exactly what the terminology really means and the lack of a format required to be followed to gain the Local Government approval leaves that process open to interpretation. There should also be a process that could be followed prior to any meeting at which an auditor is to be appointed pursuant to these requirements, so that the appointment may be made as required under the provisions of the Brigade Constitution. Refer also to para 3 above.

Where an auditor is appointed who “has demonstrated adequate bookkeeping skills to the satisfaction of the Area Director…” is the Area Director of any applicable area required to hold suitable qualifications in his own right that will enable him to make an informed decision in this matter, or is it simply a subjective process or does he have specific guidelines to follow?

Rural Fire Brigade Fundraising Activities: Third clause requires a Brigade to obtain a certificate of currency for valid public liability insurance - A much better administrative process would be to ensure that such certificates were automatically mailed to each brigade as is the current, more efficient, practice.

Reference Materials: Along with manuals that are not provided to the Brigade, reference is made to Associations Incorporation Act 1981, Section 5 (1) (d) (ii) - this simply refers to the matter that an association is not eligible for incorporation if that association is provided for in a special Act that specially regulates its affairs. Competence and efficiency would indicate that this matter could be addressed in the preamble to the manual, with suitable explanatory notes.

17. D7.6 Rural Fire Levy:

What I need to know: The second clause allows a Local Government carte blanche in the matter of a rural fire levy. Whilst it may not be currently applicable, it does leave such matters open to abuse. It also leaves open the possibility of overly harsh conditions being placed upon a brigade by a “hostile” council. There have to be some safeguards implemented.

It appears to specifically over-ride the prerequisite for a public meeting and the conditions precedent in clause 6.

A further requirement that should be added to clause 6 is that the Local Government Liaison Officer be required to attend such public meeting - Local Government should not be functioning in isolation in such matters - it is an absolute waste of hard won, finite resources to go through the public meeting process and reach a decision only to be subject to the whims of a council that has few, if any, members that understand the process and responsibilities of a rural fire brigade - this is all the more applicable with the creation of some of the new regional councils within Queensland.

Fourth clause should be altered to reflect the fact that not all brigades within its area may wish to raise a fire levy for a particular year or at all - the words “all brigades” appearing before the word “in” should be deleted and the wording “those brigades requiring a levy” inserted in lieu. [Note RRC rural fire levy fiasco 2009/2010]

Twelfth clause allows a local government to impose any accountability requirements and standards - again, this could not only be onerous but is open to interpretation and abuse, with the resultant costs to a Brigade being prohibitive.

How I do it:

Managing a Rural Fire Levy: First clause refers to a sponsoring local government, but a better terminology should be utilized in lieu of “sponsoring”, given their unprecedented control over certain functions of a rural fire brigade.

The third clause referring to a local government’s accountability requirements, standards and timeframes - relevant documentation should be provided, in a timely, efficient and effective manner, by the local government to the rural fire brigade when the brigade first broaches the subject of raising a fire levy.

Clause four mentions a local government representative being present at a public meeting to discuss and adopt a fire levy - contrary to the previous section, which is silent on the matter.
**ADDITIONAL PROVISION FOR ADDITION:** In addition to the requirements outlined in this clause, the Local Government shall (be compelled to) advise those present at such public meeting the quantum of monies proposed to be retained by the local government as administrative fees and the methodology employed to determine such fees.

18. Guidelines for the Collection and Disbursement of a Rural Fire Levy:

**Introduction:** First clause, second sentence, delete "...in readiness of fire" and insert "...in anticipation of fire and". I acknowledge that the principal Act uses the following wording in S 82 (3) "... fire prevention includes taking measures in readiness for fire....".

**Reasoning:** Urban Brigades hold themselves in readiness, up to 24 hours per day, and rightfully pride themselves on extremely short response times as urban fires are a constant threat, but they can't simply go and burn down a dwelling because it may pose a future danger; Rural Brigades do NOT normally hold themselves in readiness but take precautions, where possible, by anticipating areas of potential fire hazard and (proactively) taking necessary steps to alleviate same, but, should a fire occur their response (reactive) times can vary from minutes to hours, depending upon many factors, not least of which is that they are not all located in a station awaiting a call & a Brigade may wait years for a fire to occur.

**Finances and Accountability:**

Whilst it is noted that there is a sample Income and Expenditure Statement attached, there is no corresponding sample Assets and Liabilities Statement included, nor, indeed, a sample Depreciation Schedule - it (they) should be! (Although I don't see that a Depreciation Schedule is applicable, given that this is the responsibility of the Commissioner).

1.4 This matter has been addressed in 17 above.

1.7 This matter has been addressed in 17 above.

1.8 **INSERT NEW, additional sentence to this SUB-CLAUSE** - A reconciliation statement shall be prepared by the local government and given to the rural fire brigade not later than the Fifteenth day of July in each year, for the preceding financial year. Such statement shall itemise the name of the landholder, whether the levy remains unpaid or was paid in part or in full, total levy raised, total disbursed by the local government to the rural fire brigade, total retained as administrative fees by the local government and total arrears as at 30 June.

Currently there is no accountability requirement by the Local Government to the brigade and thus there is no easy way of determining the gross levy for a particular Brigade area and whether monies received are full or partial disbursement of such funds - if there are to be checks and balances they must be applied without discrimination.

**IN RELATION TO LEVY VERSUS RATE NOTICES** there currently exists an anomaly whereby some land within a rural fire brigade area will not receive a fire levy (if one is raised). This is brought about by The Valuation of Land Act whereby two or more rateable parcels of land in the same ownership any distance apart may be linked on the one valuation number and thus the Local Government levies rates & charges against that valuation number (which quite often forms the Council's rate book number/Assessment Number). One parcel of rural land may well fall within a designated town area and the other, much larger property may be some considerable distance away but the rates and charges will be raised on the valuation/assessment number for the designated town area block. A fire levy will also be raised on this same valuation for the brigade that services that particular area, whilst the second, much larger parcel some distance away (with, for example, some 3 or 4 brigade areas between the two) will not attract a fire levy, even if the area within which it exists also raises a fire levy.

Following on from this, any approach to the Council for names and addresses of all landholders within a specific Rural Fire Brigade Area (for service of notices, etc) may well result in all blocks (no matter the size) that are linked and rated outside that particular area NOT having any names & addresses provided.

The net effect of these actions is that only a percentage of landowners within such a brigade area will be shouldering the financial burden but ALL landholders may well expect assistance from their local rural brigade.

The only way this can be currently overcome is for the local brigade to seek donations from the landholders directly.

19. D7.7 Donations:

How I do it: *Official receipt books, in the first instant, should be (and should have been) issued to each Rural Fire Brigade as a matter of course, and thereafter supplied upon request.*

It is assumed there is a register of such receipt books maintained by the Area Offices as they are an accountable document, and a record should be available to determine those brigades that have not received official receipt books - This matter should be attended to as soon as practicable.

20. Code of Conduct: This is a direct print of the State Public Service C of C.

Page 34, I am a volunteer - does this code apply to me?

This is imprecise and unclear. Firstly it states that the code applies to all volunteers, then later states there are aspects that will not apply. The waters are further muddied by the statement that members and volunteers of the Rural Fire Service are managed under the Brigade Constitution.

*How would I (as brigade secretary) ever be able to offer assistance and guidance to my fellow brigade members when this document is so obscure in relation to RFB volunteers? After reading the document I expect that I would not experience difficulty, however, in advising a State Government employee...*
A specific Code of Conduct that is applicable to Rural Fire Brigades should be added to the Manual.

21. Brigade Constitution:
What I need to know:
The second clause requires all brigades to adopt the constitution unaltered.. notwithstanding the errors contained therein.

The fourth clause specifically states that all prior versions of brigade constitutions adopted before July 2007 are ineffective. This clause fails to give the date of 1st, although it may be implied from documentation as mentioned in 2. above and from the Act.

How I do it:
Whilst the first clause states that "On formation, a Rural Fire Brigade must adopt this constitution" - it is noted that formation of a brigade may only be undertaken at a meeting called for that purpose BY THE AREA DIRECTOR [contrary to the Rural Fires Regulations of 1948] if that is correct (and I have not seen anything that would cause me to alter my opinion), then clause 16 (h) CLEARLY precludes those persons (members is the terminology used, but is technically incorrect) present from voting to adopt the constitution, AND CLAUSE 16 (H) CLEARLY PRECLUDES ANY PERSON PRESENT AT SUCH FORMATIVE MEETING FROM VOTING upon any matter. NOTWITHSTANDING THE PROVISIONS OF CLAUSE 3 OF THE BRIGADE CONSTITUTION. In my considered opinion, a new brigade can NOT be legally formed under this constitution in its present wording.

I would suggest the opinion of Crown Law be sought in this matter, as the legal section within QFRS/DES apparently doesn't have the necessary capacity to ensure that this constitution is what it purports to be. if, however, they did tender correct advice and same was ignored, then that person/those persons who negligently chose to ignore such advice should be accountable for their actions or non-actions as may be the case as the lives and livelihood of volunteers could be adversely affected.

Clause 4 states that a copy of the constitution must be made available at all times (italics mine). This clearly needs to be reworded.

22. Constitution:
Cl. 2 In the third paragraph amend "readiness for" to read "anticipation of". [Readiness would apply to urban brigades whereas anticipation would apply to rural brigades, as explained in 18. above].

Cl. 3 c) This clause is in direct conflict with the following clause, 4 (a).

THERE IS NO PROVISION IN THIS CLAUSE REQUIRING ADOPTION OF THE BRIGADE CONSTITUTION at the formative meeting - HOW UNUSUAL.

Cl. 4 (a) As stated above, this clause contradicts Clause 3 (c) above, although it is the normal practice.

NOTE: The note segment assumes that all rural brigades can follow a structured path WITH REGARD TO MEETING DATES, which demonstrates to me that the author has a limited knowledge and understanding of some rural brigades and rural pursuits.

Cl. 5 (a) & (b) There seems to be a major misunderstanding of how quorums are calculated in specific circumstances. This needs clarification.
(d) This clause contradicts clause 4 (a) above.

Cl. 6 (b) This is a peculiar requirement and does not apply in any other organization, be it non-government, local government, state government, incorporated association or any organization in receipt of funds from the public. When all these organizations meet a similar requirement then I would be only too happy to oblige.

The statement that it is to ensure the accuracy of the minutes is a gross misstatement of fact - a nonsense - if such accuracy is required and there is some doubt that minutes are being recorded correctly the meeting should be recorded by electronic means (and, if thought necessary), backed up by a qualified stenographer who is independent and answers only to the Area Director, and the Area Director should be empowered to take appropriate action or offer the appropriate advice to the Assistant Commissioner.

Cl. 7 (a) & (b) These subclauses are in conflict with each other and need to be clarified by a competent person.

NOTE: This note segment refers to subclauses that do not exist in the constitution. The quorum segment is a mish-mash of errors and misconstrued references and demonstrates a distinct lack of understanding of the task at hand.

Cl. 8 It is extremely interesting to note that, although this clause purportedly refers to "other office-bearers and officers", it deals mainly with officers and remains relatively silent on office-bearers. This clause should really be addressing all office-bearer positions, particularly where a brigade resolves to function without a management committee - there is no provision for same, prior to the next clause.
CI. 9  Subclause (I), ii & iii. I find it a little unusual that nominations for office-bearer and officer positions have to be seconded, but do not object to same. The voting order has also been changed from what would be considered normal procedure as there are normally certain conditions precedent to be met.

CI. 10 (b)  There is no procedure for a secretary to resign, in this clause - it should be addressed. This subclause is also in conflict with C4.6, How I do it, Voluntary resignation, second sentence and clause 18 (b) of the constitution. There seems to be some confusion by the author of this document as to what constitutes voluntary resignation, voluntary termination or resignation by an office-bearer or officer, when, in some of the circumstances, they are all essentially the same action.

CI. 11; 11.1 (a) & (b)  The appointment and/or election of office-bearers to fill a casual vacancy seems to rely heavily upon decisions by a management committee and these subclauses remain silent in the matter of a brigade that operates without a management committee.

CI. 11.1 (c)  Makes reference to Rule 10.2 - as far as I am aware there is no Rule 10.2 within the constitution, and, as with many of the other errors I have uncovered, the copying process from some other document to produce this document has been less than creative and has led to a plethora of unnecessary errors.

CI. 11.2  This clause duplicates Cl. 8 in part. There is a distinct need to clarify both these clauses. Both clauses remain silent on matters that should have been addressed.

CI. 12 (ii)  Refers to the content of the constitution as “rules”, but my understanding is that a brigade may make rules pursuant to Cl. 26 of the brigade constitution, and that the content of a constitution is not referred to as “rules”, but as “clauses” & a specific clause would be named “Brigade Rules” or similar.

CI. 13  Subclauses (c) & (e) could be amalgamated. Subclause (g) raises the question of quorums yet again - refer 5 (a) & 7 “NOTE:” Subclause (m) deals with Minute book inspection and the word “reasonably” should be deleted and the word “reasonable” inserted. Subclause (n) raises the unique requirement for both the chairman and secretary to sign the minutes - dealt with in Cl. 6 (b).

CI. 14  No comment applicable.

CI. 15  No comment applicable.

CI. 16  Addressed in 11 C4.2 above. Subclause (a) (i), second sentence, needs clarification. Subclauses (d), (e) & (h) urgently need to be reviewed in their content and intent - refer also to 21 above.

CI. 17  No comment applicable.

CI. 18  No further comment applicable.

CI. 19  No comment applicable.

CI. 20  Subclause (b) does not state that Full names shall be kept, and the matter of birth dates for wives of active members who may wish not to fully divulge same should also be addressed. Some of these requirements appear to require more personal data than could be considered reasonable under the circumstances, especially for rural brigade members. Subclause (c) wording implies there are unofficial brigades.

CI. 21  No further comment applicable as it is essentially dealt with in 21 above.

CI. 22 (c)  The period within which the biennial or Annual general meeting shall take place should be extended to within six (6) months after the end of the preceding Financial Year - there is not sufficient flexibility currently available to address the necessity to feed stock due to the ravages of drought or the requirements to undertake rural pursuits like crop planting or harvesting and the effect that may have on the availability of members to attend meetings. These are matters that must be attended to until they are completed, and structuring meetings around members’ requirements is a necessity.

CI. 23 (a)  The order of business referred to is at odds with accepted meeting procedure and needs to be reviewed. Subclause (b) is addressed in Cl. 6 (b) above.

CI. 24  Needs re-wording, as does subclause (a), and missing components inserted.
CI. 25 **INSERT** A further subclause (a)(iv) worded "by the secretary, in response to urgent matters that may arise." [e.g. had a copy of the brigade constitution been received prior to 30 June 2007]

ALL correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary, in the first instant.

Subclause (e) again raises the difficulty and confusion with the number of members that constitute a quorum.

CI. 26 No comment applicable.

CI. 27 Subclauses (g) & (j) should have provision for those brigades that only hold one meeting either annually or biennially.

Subclause (n) causes some concern. Why does the local shire council have to be consulted with respect to making audited financial statements of the brigade available for public inspection, as this implies public inspection similar to Council financial statements? The cost of compliance will, in some cases, be prohibitive and will further reduce monies available for actual fire prevention & control measures, or will necessitate a greater quantum of fire levy than that which ratepayers may find acceptable.

The only people who are (or should be) legally entitled to view these accounts are the landholders [ratepayers] within the specific brigade area upon whose property the levy was raised, as they are the relevant stakeholders in this process, plus a copy for the relevant Council.

The additional requirements under subclause (n) (ii) are a financial burden that must be accounted for in the original levy consultation process and is not addressed in 17. D7.6 above, and needs to be read in conjunction with that comment.

CI. 28 No comment applicable.

CI. 29 No comment applicable.

CI. 30 This matter is addressed in 16. D7.5 above.

CI. 31 No comment applicable.

23 D7.28 Meeting procedure:

How I do it: Sixth paragraph - this advice is absolutely incorrect. The chair has (and always has had) both a deliberative vote and a casting vote.

24 C7.29 Ambulance Levy:

How I do it: Change the figure “7” between the words “Sheet” and “Government” to an ampersand “&”.

Subjective Comment:-

Not all sections of the manual have been addressed, basically because it is not my job to undertake such a task and I do consider that my time is valuable to me, as it is to every other person. In fact, I should not have had to undertake any of this task. I would expect there are people within QFRS/DES who receive a handsome remuneration to undertake such a task and I am disappointed that they have neglected both their duties and their obligations.

It would also appear to me that the Commissioner has been negligent as evidenced by the "Commissioner's Foreword" in the manual. The Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations is in a similar position, as evidenced in his "introduction".

Both refer to the contributions that a large number of people have made to the development of this new manual, yet the quantum of the errors seem to belie these statements, and I find it difficult to comprehend that many people are supposed to have contributed, with this document as the end result.

Even more concerning is the possibility that neither the Commissioner nor the Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations have any real understanding of many of the matters that are contained within this manual. The information is not easy to understand and use, except, perhaps, for the initiated few.

Far too much of this manual appears to be an adaptation from Urban Policies and Procedures and has little relevance for the true Rural Fire Brigades, their operations and their volunteers, but does appear to be directed mainly at i-Zone Brigades.

It also appears to me that rural brigades are expected to become de-facto urban brigades so that many of the high costs associated with urban brigades can be avoided by the use of volunteers.

Perusal of the parent Act reveals that Rural Volunteers appear to have NO legal protection - only Officers of Rural brigades and Urban brigades receive protection, despite continuing advice to the contrary. This may also apply to ALL volunteers under the DES umbrella.
If QFRS continues on the path of following the models adopted by southern states, then I can see many more people losing their property and, worst of all, their lives - application of Urban procedures to a rural environment is a recipe for disaster.

Additional Comment 29 August 2008 - The requirement for Criminal History check upon new members appears discriminatory, especially as existing members are currently exempt whilst they remain with their current Brigade. It further implies that a landholder of a substantial area of rural land (who may have a past criminal history [perhaps from fishing in a prohibited zone on the Great Barrier Reef or other closed area]) is not a fit and proper person to be part of the community effort in property protection. He may well be an extremely experienced fire-fighter and an invaluable member of a brigade but will be excluded from volunteering. In sparsely occupied rural areas every available person will be needed in the event of a major bushfire. It is ludicrous to think otherwise and demonstrates a complete lack of awareness and understanding of rural fires. Does a person’s exclusion from membership also extend to directions by the Commissioner pursuant to S. 87 (2) (e) of the Act?

Further to the Criminal History check and a proposed volunteer’s supposed application “for a position of trust” and the indemnity for any incompetence by the Police Department, I suspect that this will further aggravate the lack of availability of new members and appears to be more about a “fishing expedition”. Are all Urban Fire Brigade members and full time staff of Rural Operations currently subject to such check? If not, why not? They are in much greater positions of trust than a rural landowner.

The standard of training that is provided appears to be based upon an Urban model where fire is generally located within a static environment and there appears (to me) to be a grave misunderstanding of rural fires - recent observations of incompetence and lack of respect for both landowners and for property safety on a “training day/controlled burn” have reinforced this view. Training documentation would tend to confirm this observation. The much vaunted ‘rule of law’ appears to be ignored by certain sections of the RFB community and provisions contained within the Manual & Act conveniently overlooked.

Additional Comment 26 November 2008: Group formation and operation seems to be a personal fiefdom for a few select people - Fitzroy group hasn’t (as noted during past attendance) observed the requirements of the enabling segment of the Brigade Manual or Group Constitution. Both Fitzroy and Keppel Groups appear to operate with “Management Committees”, contrary to the requirements of their enabling Constitution - why should a rural brigade be part of such a Group if the provisions of the Group Constitution are continually ignored and why can the Area Director call a special meeting of a Group when he is not empowered to so do?

THERE ARE NO FURTHER COMMENTS OR OBSERVATIONS IN THIS DOCUMENT. Page 9 of 9, excluding any covering letter.

12 HOURS TO COMPILE ON 9 NOVEMBER 2007, with an additional 75 hours spent trying to find (sometimes unsuccessfully) information and documents, on the internet & at the Supreme Court library, for reference purposes, re-reading the original Fire Service Act 1990 and some subsequent amendments as well as re-checking current documents and Acts and making any necessary alterations and additions to this critique.
Annexure B - Cover Sheet.

Form RF14A is required to be completed and returned to the Area Office after a hazard reduction burn and is also supposed to be utilized as a record of volunteer training.

This form simply doesn't provide for the necessary data relevant to a hazard reduction burn to be adequately captured - the previous version of the form is included for comparison purposes.

Unless a hazard reduction burn escapes, it is not an "incident".

Consider the case of a road reserve hazard reduction burn for a distance of 3 km.

The width of the area between the road pavement and the adjoining property boundaries may vary from hundreds to just a few meters.

The road and property boundaries may twist and turn.

The burn may be adjacent to one or more properties under separate ownership.

Adjacent landholders will be (or should be) actively involved with the brigade conducting the burn.

The burn will be lit by the First Officer of the brigade, when wind and other factors are considered to be within acceptable parameters and firefighters will be utilized to progressively ignite the area to be burnt, as needed.

The area burnt will be continually monitored in subsequent days - from 4 or 5 times per day to such lesser timings as may be required and for as long as is required.

Few Rural and Primary Producer brigades carry GPS equipment.

Private vehicles may be utilized to tow fire trailers, whilst other private vehicles may be utilizing privately owned fire fighting equipment - there may be no QFRS vehicles (appliances) involved.

The form appears to be inadequate to capture the necessary data.
INCIDENT REPORT - LANDSCAPE FIRE (BUSHFIRE) / PRESCRIBED BURN
To be completed by the first attending Rural Fire Brigade
RF14A
V.14 3 March 2010

FireCom Incident Number ____________________________ (If known)

Where the response and management of the incident/burn was monitored and supported by FireCom and FireCom Number is provided, completion of Part 1 is optional.

Part 1

☐ Prescribed Burn  ☐ Landscape Fire

☐ Other (please specify)

Street/Lot Number ____________________________

Street or Road Name or RP Number ____________________________

Town, Suburb, Locality ____________________________ Postcode ____________________________

 Latitude ________________  eg: 145° 19’S  Longitude ________________  eg: 75° 35’ E

Part 2

☐ Other (please specify)

(Please list all responding Brigades/Appliances)
(Mark off ALL organisations which attended)

- Electricity
- Water
- Ambulance
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Volunteer Rescue Service
- Charitable Support Agencies

Other (please specify)

- Government Welfare Agencies
- Gas
- Police
- SES
- Other

Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Accidental  ---  Suspicious  ---  Undetermined

Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

hectares

Number of kms fence line damaged  ---  Tonnes of hay/fodder lost  ---  Machinery  ---  Number of livestock lost  ---

Type of structures damaged/lost  ---  Other (please specify)

Type of mobile properties damaged/lost  ---  Other (please specify)

(if applicable)
(Injury is defined as requiring treatment by a medical practitioner and at least one day of restricted activity immediately following the incident)

- [ ] No injuries or fatalities
- [X] Yes
- [ ] No

Other (please specify)

Notes Section

Brigade Members Attending
Annexure C - Cover Sheet.

This document is provided to enable the committee to understand that QFRS appears to have in place a long term policy that is in conflict with the provisions of the Fire and Rescue Service Act (and the predecessors of such Act).

At a public meeting held at Alton Downs hall on the morning of 22 February 2009 (to discuss a proposed blanket rural fire levy over the whole of the Rockhampton Regional Council area), the Regional Manager - Rural Operations Central region, QFRS (Superintendent John Fisher) stated that rural brigades were only in existence to service the needs of the Local Authority (or words to that effect).

He was advised, in no uncertain terms, that rural brigades are there to primarily serve their local community and then the wider community (NOT the local council) and that we are all volunteers, not paid employees.

As well as members of numerous brigades, Mayor Brad Carter of Rockhampton Regional Council and the Member for Mirani (Ted Malone, MP) were also present.

Television footage of the meeting (unedited) should also be in existence, as should radio broadcasts and even emails and other communications.
CQ firefighters want management change

Posted Thu Aug 12, 2004 11:06am AEST

The Central Queensland Rural Fire Service is working towards having a local government approach to fire management.

District Inspector of Rural Fire Services Laurie Colgrave says firefighters need to start working towards shire control instead of just servicing their brigade area.

Mr Colgrave says between The Caves and Marlborough there are low resources, so the need for rural fire brigades in the shire to work together in the event of a fire is even greater.

"There are hot spots where we don't have enough equipment or the community isn't ready for further equipment or there aren't enough people," he said.

"So therefore equipment is restricted because of that."

Tags: CQ, rural fire service
Annexure D - Cover Sheet.

This Letter to the Editor was never printed.

Usually, letters may be (sometimes severely) edited, before publication, but not even that was done in this instant.

There is in existence a large body of data that would substantiate most, if not all, of such letter.

It appears that this letter (and perhaps the covering letter that accompanied it) was actually passed on to QFRS in Rockhampton.

One indicator was that, shortly after the letter was mailed, a radio technician was suddenly undertaking checking and repairing of QFRS radio repeaters (yet it was well known that some repeaters had been malfunctioning for many weeks) - when the Firecom operator said that she received him "loud and clear" he specifically requested a numerical designation on his transmission - this is unusual, as far as their normal radio checking procedures are concerned.

There was also a sudden flurry of activity with vehicles from all over the central area being taken in for radio checking and repair.

It would appear that there was a concerted effort by a number of parties, in collusion, to ensure as little information as possible was made available to the general public via media outlets.
Sir,

When is the major public inquiry into the recent fires at Rockhampton and environs to be announced, and will it be independent, headed by the likes of Fitzgerald? Internal would be a complete white wash, and the perceived incompetence during the recent fires needs to be aired in the public domain so that members of the public are no longer deceived by deliberately misleading statements and "spin".

Do nothing now and an even worse fire will eventuate at some future time - not because of "global warming" (a favourite, much abused, excuse), but through sheer incompetence & lack of foresight. This doesn't just apply to Central Qld, but is, I suspect, a statewide problem.

The whole structure, philosophy & incompetence of QFRS actually needs to be the subject of a Royal Commission with very wide powers, but I doubt the current government would have the will or the intestinal fortitude to allow same.

Residents of the North Rockhampton suburbs need to be very aware that QFRS had obviously decided, by 12 October, to sacrifice many of the homes fringing bush land.

What many would NOT be aware of was that such decision to take no preventative action (in the days after the Emu Park Road fire of 9 October escaped into the Berserker Range) would have been made at ROCC & ICC level, fully endorsed by their masters in Brisbane.

Was this inaction part of some grand "master plan" to put the fear of fire into the community, or was it simply gross incompetence bordering upon criminal negligence?

Where were all the hazard reduction burns that should have taken place at appropriate times during March to April (cool burns) or August/September (mostly hotter burns) to protect the community and the environment? No fuel, no fire - a forgotten, but very important principle.

There was more than ample time on 10th & 11th to construct a fire break on the western side of the range, from Emu Park Road to Yeppoon Road, or around the foot of the range (where or as needs be), and there were subsequently two perfect nights for conducting back burns off such a break (or even off a wallaby pad) - the loss of a home and the damage to various properties & livestock did not need to happen - AT ALL!

Why do none of the people in charge apparently understand the intricacies of fighting fire with fire? A bush fire is not a house fire, but it seems many in charge don't know the difference.

A Lack Of experience & knowledge is a dangerous thing in fire fighting.

Why were so many Urban fire crews unable to find Peltophorum Street & other nearby streets on 17th?

This is part of their area, yet they can't find their way around - WHY NOT?

This is not an isolated incident, and it appears many crews have little local knowledge.

Surely an important part of their training would be familiarization with their area of primary responsibility?

Are many of the Urban fire trucks unable to be effectively utilized in some of the newer subdivisions bordering bushland & have the supervisors ever bothered to inspect such areas for any future difficulties, especially with multiple vehicle attendance?

How efficient and effective were the fire spotter and the water bombers - were they utilized at maximum efficiency or were the poor pilots tasked on many occasions, by the fire spotter/controller, to drop their loads in the incorrect places?

Why is Firecom seemingly so incompetent on anything other than a "quiet" day?

Why does Firecom not have at least one operator tasked to stay in contact (or exclusively available for same) with personnel on a major fire ground AT ALL TIMES - failure to do so needlessly places lives in danger, especially when radio communications are less than desirable (as on the afternoon of 17th, when appliances & fire fighters on the ground were left without radio communications for far too long in the face of a rapidly advancing fire front). Or are all fire fighters on a fire ground "expendable"?

Why are so many radios (including Firecom and the repeaters) apparently not working efficiently? Too many users either don't know or aren't aware of the shortcomings of their transceivers and antennas.

Firecom advises far too many callers that their radio messages are unreadable, when in actual fact the signal is 5 by 7 in old radio language (clear and reasonably strong, albeit through a repeater).
Why do the Firecom operators appear to lack necessary local knowledge & continually give poor directions for access to incidents as well as continually failing to pass on all relevant information pertaining to an incident?

Why does Firecom call out rural brigades to rural fires from some distance & time away, yet they will totally ignore neighbouring brigades that can be on scene in only minutes? Is this some form of "exclusion", being practiced to the detriment of the community?

Why can a Rural crew turn out 1 and 1, but an Urban crew can not, and must wait for further crew - surely they could at least attend the site of the fire to relay relevant fire information to better assist the decision making process, and, if it is only a small fire put the darned thing out before it escalates into a larger, possibly uncontrollable fire? (There are the noted odd exceptions, like a reignited, burning stump in a school ground).

Why were so many Rural brigade areas left without immediate & effective protection during many of these recent fires, and when fires eventually started crews apparently unfamiliar with the area were tasked and couldn’t even find their way to the fire?

Why did so many fires that were supposedly contained and extinguished reignite and jump containment lines - are there some very basic actions not being undertaken because of lack of knowledge & experience?

Why are there so many urban & ex-Urban "wannabes" running around in charge of various facets of rural operations, and, for that matter, why are there so many rural "wannabes" popping up everywhere - are there only a few competent, experienced rural fire fighters left and have many "opted out", in disgust at the emasculation of what was once a very effective and proud service, or have they been "sidelined" because they dare to speak out about the lack of competence of so many within the system?

Why have so many rural fire brigades gone from having large, active memberships (all residents within a brigade area used to be eligible for membership) to being on the verge of collapse through lack of members - it wouldn't have anything to do with the way the QFRS Commissioner and his underlings have managed to arrange things, would it?

Why does it appear that there are many latent firebugs within QFRS, using their positions to legally light fires, often at the most inappropriate time of day and without due diligence? These people are a danger to their fellow fire fighters (who should know better, but many apparently don't) and to the community.

People really need to understand that the QFRS structure is about a pyramid of power based upon a lack of openness and accountability - a centralization of power within the hands of a select few with total control over every fire brigade, fire fighter and their equipment BUT HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT FIRE CONTROL AND PROTECTION OF THE COMMUNITY - they really couldn’t care less!

Only the actual fire fighters on the ground are the ones who really do care and who put in so much effort, in most instances. Most volunteers participate out of a sense of "duty" to their less fortunate or able fellow man, (often to their detriment) whilst there are others, unfortunately, who are participating mainly for the power and glory.

There appears to be far too much "political patronage" and appointment of "mates" into many positions within QFRS (both Urban & Rural) - observed competence is neglected and incompetence is conveniently overlooked, provided those people appear to be of the "select" grouping.

No doubt the next step in the "grand master plan" is to do away with Fire Wardens and centralize that function in the hands of a select few who wouldn't understand vegetation types, topography or even know where an application for a permit related to, other than on a map.

Further insane stupidity similar to the idea that people with more ego than experience can sit in an air-conditioned office or a tent, well away from the fire-ground, and make efficient and effective decisions for controlling a fire - it didn't work in Victoria and it didn't work here.

At present the warden is the only safeguard a community has against permit fires being lit at inappropriate times and places.

The Commissioner and his underlings have a lot to answer for, as do our politicians - "spin" doesn't substitute for competence, knowledge and experience and the efficient and effective care by all brigades, to the best of their ability, for their respective communities, as well as assisting other brigades in their time of need.

B Lund
Ridgelands
5 April 2010

The Research Director
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Q 4000

Dear Sir

Re: Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

After consultation with and on behalf of fellow members of the Croftby/Carneys Creek Rural Fire Brigade, I would like to submit our response to the issues raised by Management of Rural Fire Service in Queensland Discussion Paper, November 2009.

Terms of Reference

Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

- Our members felt that the current running of Rural Fire Brigade is excellent at ground level using the established office bearers of Chairperson, Secretary/Treasurer, First Officer, Second Officer etc. However it is felt that the upper administration is too remote and had no concept of needs of the actual local brigades.
- Communication between the Group and Area needs to be greatly improved with very little evidence of any between the two coming back to the local brigade. Often information (e.g. minutes of AGM, Annual Financial Reports and Audits, Membership details etc) which is required by the QFRS Area is sent by each brigade as requested, but the Group does not receive this vital information about the local rural fire brigades from QFRS Area. Instead it has to request it again from each brigade. This is a double up of the same information which should be shared.
- Often brigades receive the same communication twice from both Area and Group – again doubling up of the information required.

Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation appropriate?

- Our members felt that it was important to keep the current model of funding as is with local government control, passed out by Group with payment made by landowners with their rates. This allows the monies to stay in the district. It was strongly felt that it should not become a state tax.
- The current model of allocating funds according to number and type of fire fighting units used by each brigade is preferable to the proposed change where each brigade has to put in a proposed budget and 3 year plan as things may change according to events which may happen through the year i.e. severe fire season, equipment replacement and maintenance etc. Brigades with larger vehicles and sheds obviously need more money than those with mop up units on private vehicles.
It needs to be noted that each brigade has its own requirements according to number of members and areas of different types of terrain which they are responsible for. A blanket approach of 1 size fits all will not suit every brigade's individual needs.

**What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?**

- Urban encroachment is having a very large impact on Rural Fire Brigades. Smaller blocks owned by a larger number of people makes fighting fires harder to control. Owners on life-style blocks are often not permanent residents and are harder to contact with gates often being locked and more fences to go through. Properties are often not maintained properly for fire as new owners often need better understanding of obligations for fire control. It has been suggested that education is needed on burning appropriately and perhaps this could be done via the local government with mail outs in rates notices etc.

**How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?**

- The increasing amount of "red-tape" and need for accountability is putting more pressure on brigades which have already been running successfully for a number of years. In close knit communities, there is an existing understanding between rural fire brigade members and local knowledge is valued and shared. We don't want to see a repeat of what happened in Victoria with residents unable to burn off due to regulations put on them by higher authorities. It must be realised that fire can be friendly and if used properly can assist the land owner. It is more difficult to control on unmanaged larger blocks with inaccessible areas.

**Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?**

- Each brigade is already accountable for its own financial records which are sent in annually to QFRS for review. It must be remembered that Rural Fire Brigades are made up from volunteers who give their time freely and unselfishly in order to keep brigades running according to each local area's needs. If too much pressure regarding accountability comes from higher administration, then volunteers may not be as willing to provide their services as they may not be seen as valued. This would undermine the concept of Rural Fire Brigades as it exists now.

**What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?**

- The local fire warden plays a vital part of the Rural Fire Brigade and should be part of the rural fire brigade in order to keep in touch with the local area. The increasing demands on the local fire warden is not making the job any easier and it was felt that the appointment of a deputy fire warden would be useful in the cases where the first fire warden were not available due to other commitments. This means the work load could be shared. Fire wardens already attend Group meetings as well as Rural Fire Brigade meetings and care should be taken not to over regulate volunteers.

**Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?**

- Remember that many Rural Fire Brigades are self sustaining already – HANDS OFF! Give people credit for local knowledge and ability to manage own fire brigade.
We suggest that National Parks burn at other times of the year when conditions suit not just when it normally is done. If done then not so much man power is required to control burns.

Application forms for fire permits need to be available via email so that permits can be issued more quickly and made readily available for when small windows of opportunity exist. This would make life much easier for fire warden and land owner alike.

These issues raised much discussion at our recent 3 monthly meeting and the above points were recorded as our response to the Discussion Paper. Thank you for giving us at ground level the opportunity to provide feedback regarding a very important community identity which provides a very valuable service manned by local volunteers—the Rural Fire Brigade.

Yours sincerely on behalf of the Croftby/Carney's Creek Rural Fire Brigade,

Chris White
Secretary/Treasurer
Croftby/Carney's Creek Rural Fire Brigade.
1418 Burnett Creek Road
Mareeba, 4880
0463 68 36
12 April, 2010

Mr Wayne Wendt MP
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Alice & George Streets
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Mr Wendt

Re: Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Please find attached the Redland City Council’s submission to the subject Committee enquiring into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

Yours faithfully,

Gary Stevenson
CEO
Redland City Council
BACKGROUND

Within the Redlands City area Redland City Council has Queensland Fire and Rescue Services (QF&RS) Rural Brigades covering the Southern Morning Bay Island (SMBI) of Russell, Macleay, Lamb and Karragarra. These brigades come under the direction of QF&FS Rural Operations based out of Caboolture Area Office.

The rest of Redland City environs are covered by QF&RS Urban brigades (full time) located at Cleveland, Capalaba and Redland Bay Fire Stations and by QF&RS Urban Auxiliary Brigades (paid part time) located at Coochiemudlo Island and North Stradbroke Island.

The SMBI's are increasing in urbanisation with a local frequency of wildfires. The population of the Bay Islands is currently about 4,200 and is expected to increase to about 24,000 by 2031. This is resulting in an increasing in houses being built in and vehicular traffic on the island. As mentioned above there is a low incident of wildfires on the island. However, given the isolation of the islands, wildfire does have the potential to have major impacts. Hazard reduction burns on Council controlled land is undertaken by the Redland City Council Fire Management teams with additional resources provided by QF&RS Rural brigades.

The role of the rural fire brigades to assist with hazard reduction management of private land is invaluable as much as Council has in proactive fire management of the Council estate, management of fire hazards on private land is essential.

Fire management hazard reduction practices will also have significant benefit on the protection of the biodiversity within the City, if done appropriately and managed by a well trained and experienced brigades be that rural auxiliary and permanent officers.

ISSUES

The role of the Rural Brigades is changing with an increase in accountability, training provision and administration. This increase in work load is being taken on by a largely volunteer workforce. With the changing nature of the bay island the role of the Rural Brigades does need to be refocused as the incidents will move towards more Road Accident Rescue and Structural Fire fighting. The brigades on the Bay Islands are well resources however being a volunteer workforce are restricted in the level of emergency response that they can undertake. The brigades need to change to the QF&RS Urban Auxiliary model with the islands of Macleay and Russell having a full time Station Officer with paid part time Auxiliary fire fighters. The Queensland Police Service has recently appointed full time Police Officers to Russell and Macleay Islands as the increasing population service needs increase.

The role of community education for residents on the island need to be addressed and current Rural brigade resourcing and time commitments does prevent this from being effective. Education needs to be focused on the full range of emergency issues presented on the island and is best achieved by full time staff commitment.

Having a full time QF&RS commitment on the Bay Islands will lead to more proactive liaison with Council and assessments of risk areas.
Should you require any additional information or have any questions relating to this submission, Council’s point of contact is Mike Hyde who can be contacted on (07) 3829 8252.

Gary Stevenson
CEO
Redland City Council
SUBMISSION
TO THE RESEARCH DIRECTOR

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
MANAGEMENT OF RURAL FIRE SERVICES IN QUEENSLAND

FROM

MR CHARLIE SMITH
FIRST OFFICER WASP CREEK R.F.B
195, FOXWELL ROAD
COOMERA
QLD.4209

TELEPHONE  HOME 55733 589 / MOB 0412012954

COVER PAGE  PAGES 1 / 5

Dated 20TH MARCH 2010
I PUT FORWARD A PROPOSAL TO THE GOLD COAST RURAL FIRE BRIGADE GROUP IN 2006. THIS PROPOSAL COVERED ISSUES THAT YOUR COMMITTEE IS NOW INVOLVED WITH IN YOUR INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE RURAL FIRE SERVICE. THESE ISSUES 4 YEARS ON HAVE NOT CHANGED AND ARE VERY RELEVANT TO YOUR INQUIRY.

AS FIRST OFFICER AND FIRE WARDEN OF WASP CREEK RURAL FIRE BRIGADE I HAVE GRAVE CONCERNS ON THE FUTURE AND SURVIVAL OF ALL GOLD COAST RURAL FIRE BRIGADES, AS AREAS DEVELOPE THESE CONCERNS WILL ALSO EVENTUALLY AFFECT MANY OTHER AREAS IN QUEENSLAND.

- IS THE CURRENT MODEL OF RURAL FIRE BRIGADES SUITABLE

THE CURRENT MODEL CANNOT SUSTAIN RURAL FIRE BRIGADES WITH THE FAST GROWING POPULATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL PROPERTIES THE URBAN SPRAWLOF LARGE HOUSING DEVELOPEMENTS ADJOINING RURAL PROPERTIES.

BRIGADE BOUNDARIES ARE BEING CHANGED FROM RURAL TO URBAN.
THE NEED FOR A FORMULATED PLAN TO ALLOW FOR THE COEXISTANCE OF BOTH URBAN AND RURAL BRIGADES IS PARAMOUNT.
URBAN VEHICLES STILL CANNOT ACCESS A VAST AMOUNT OF AREAS NOW COMING UNDER URBAN CONTROL NEITHER DO THEY HAVE THE MAN POWER

- IS THE EXISTING FUNDING MODEL INCLUDING RESOURCE ALLOCATION APPROPRIATE

THE OPENING OF THE NERANG FIRE STATION HAS IMPACTED IMMEDIATELY ON TWO RURAL BRIGADES FINANCIAL SURVIVAL.
THE ONLY WAY THESE BRIGADES CAN SURVIVE IS BY THE OTHER RURAL GOLD COAST BRIGADES AIDING THEM FINANCIALLY WHICH WILL ALLOW THEM TO STILL OPERATE IN AN URBAN LEVIED AREA.
THE TERRAIN STILL DEMANDS THE NEED FOR 4X4 BUSH FIRE VEHICLES AND CREWS.
WITHOUT FINANCES THESE BRIGADES WILL HAVE TO CLOSE DOWN.
A TOP UP OF FINANCES SOLELY FROM A RURAL LEVY TO THESE BRIGADES IS OF COURSE A SHORT TERM FIX. IF NOTHING IS DONE TO LOOK AT AND PUT INTO PLACE A LONG TERM FIX, THESE AND OTHER RURAL BRIGADES WILL HAVE TO CLOSE WHEN NOT IF AREAS OF OTHER BRIGADES NAMELY THE NORTHERN END OF THE GOLD COAST ARE AFFECTED IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE IN THE SAME WAY.

EVENTUALLY THE RURAL LEVIES DISTRIBUTION WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SUSTAIN THE VOLUNTARY RURAL BRIGADES WHO ARE NOW AND STILL WILL BE DESPERATELY NEEDED TO FULLY SERVICE IZONE AREAS.

FUNDING IS NEEDED TO KEEP BRIGADES FINANCIAL ALSO TO SUPPLY THE VOLUNTEERS WITH THE REQUIRED LEVEL OF TRAINING THAT IS REQUIRED TO ENABLE THE VOLUNTEERS TO SUPPLY A SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY. THE PRESENT LEVY SYSTEM WILL NOT ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN ONCE THE RURAL LEVIES ARE DEPLETED IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE COMMUNITY WILL SLOWLY LOSE RURAL BRIGADES AS AREAS CHANGE, THE BRIGADES THAT ARE LEFT WILL LOSE VALUED VOLUNTEERS WHO WILL FAST FEEL NEGLECTED. THIS IS HAPPENING NOW, WHY SHOULD VOLUNTEERS HAVE TO FIGHT TO OFFER THERE SERVICES TO PROTECT THE COMMUNITY. THEY THE ON GROUND FIRE FIGHTERS AND THE COMMUNITY KNOW THE NEED IS STILL THERE. THEIR EXPERIENCE AND DEDICATION TO THE COMMUNITY WILL EVENTUALLY BE LOST AT A TIME WHEN IT IS STILL DESPERATELY REQUIRED.

AS A VOLUNTEER WITH 15 YEARS SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AND FIRST OFFICER AND FIRE WARDEN OF WASP CREEK RURAL FIRE BRIGADE I FEEL THE ONLY WAY THE RURAL BRIGADES ON THE GOLD COAST CAN CONTINUE TO EXIST IS BY CHANGING THE CURRENT LEVY TO AN IZONE LEVY, AT PRESENT THE URBAN / RURAL LEVY CAN ONLY BE UTILISED IN THE AREAS COLLECTED BY THAT PARTICULAR SERVICE, IT REQUIRES A CHANGE TO LEGISLATION TO ALLOW RURAL /URBAN LEVIES TO OPERATE IN JOINT OPERATIONAL AREAS.

WITH AN IZONE LEVY IN PLACE IT WOULD ALLOW BRIGADES TO SURVIVE. ENABLING ITS MEMBERS TO SUPPLY THIER EXPERTISE SERVICE AS A MATTER OF COURSE. TO LOSE OR DEMISE THIS VALUABLE SERVICE WOULD BE VERY NEGLEGENT OF ANY ORGANISATION.

AN IZONE LEVY WOULD FINANCE MY SECOND SUGGESTION WHICH IS ATTACHED. I ORIGINALLY PUT FORWARD THIS SUGGESTION TO THE GOLD COAST RURAL FIRE BRIGADE GROUP IN 2006.WHERE FIRE LEVIES WERE BEING DISCUSSED.
A TRAINING SCHOOL PROVIDED WHERE COURSES AND QUALIFICATIONS TO BE SUPPLIED AND ACHIEVED PRIOR TO BEING ACCEPTED AS A VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTER.

THIS WOULD ELIMINATE THE CONSTANT ROUNDBOUGHT TRAINING WE HAVE TO SUPPLY TO MEMBERS AT PRESENT.

HERE ON THE GOLD COAST THE SUPPLY OF THE TRAINING SCHOOL CAN BE ACHIEVED BY UTILISING THE PLANNED GROUP HEADQUARTERS THIS WILL PROVIDE AN OVERALL IMPROVED STANDARD.

A CUT OFF AGE AS WELL AS HEALTH AND FITNESS REQUIREMENTS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION. THE LIKES OF MYSELF WOULD HAVE TO GO.

THIS WILL ENSURE ANY NEW INTAKE OF MEMBERS WILL ALWAYS HAVE A CERTAIN STANDARD TO ATTAIN.

THE NEW GOLD COAST OF THE FUTURE IN MY OPINION WILL REQUIRE THESE CHANGES TO ENABLE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS THE CHANCE TO PROVIDE THE ALL ROUND SERVICE THAT WILL BE REQUIRED FOR THE FAST GROWING GOLD COAST AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITY.

ARGUING ABOUT PRESENT DAY LEVY FIGURES OR BOUNDARY CHANGES WILL NOT ACHIEVE ANY IMPROVEMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER. IT IS AND WOULD BE ONLY A SHORT TERM FIX AND NOT A SOLUTION FOR THE SURVIVAL OF BRIGADES.

I REALLY BELIEVE THAT THIS IS WHAT WE AS VOLUNTEERS AND THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE SETTING IN PLACE FOR THE FUTURE.
• How can the increasing demands on rural fire brigades be managed

My Submission for future funding and operation of Rural Fire Brigades

AS PRESENTED TO GOLD COAST RURAL FIRE BRIGADE GROUP 2006

FROM CHARLIE SMITH FIRST OFFICER AND FIRE WARDEN WASP CREEK RURAL FIRE BRIGADE.

PERSONALLY I BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE LOOKING AT FORMING A PLAN FOR TWO YEARS / FIVE YEARS / TEN YEARS AHEAD. IF WE ARE REALISTIC ALL DISCUSSIONS TODAY ARE IRRELEVANT TO WHAT THE GOLD COAST WILL BE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. A LONG TERM ANSWER CANNOT BE ACHIEVED WITH ANY SUGGESTED FIRE LEVY CHANGE THAT HAS BEEN PUT FORWARD SO FAR.

IF WE REALLY WANT TO LOOK TOWARDS BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTERS WE HAVE TO CHANGE HOW WE OPERATE.
I SUGGEST ONE WAY AROUND THESE CONCERNS ESPECIALLY FOR THE SMALLER BRIGADES. IS THAT WE ALL COME SOLELY UNDER THE OPERATIONAL BANNER OF QFRS.

THE COLLECTION OF ALL LEVIES TO GO TO ONE ORGANISATION IT WOULD ELIMINATE ANY FUNDING CONCERNS FROM ANY BRIGADE INSTEAD OF BEING RURAL FIRE SERVICE WE WOULD BE VOLUNTEERS WITHIN QFRA.

BRIGADES WOULD BE FUNDED AS EACH AREA DICTATES. MOST RURAL BRIGADES WILL ONLY BE LEFT WITH SMALL POCKETS OF BUSH IN THE 2/5/10 YEAR FUTURE PLAN, THE NEED TO KEEP THESE BRIGADES OPERATIONAL AND TRAINED TO A SKILLED LEVEL IS WITHOUT A DOUBT VERY NECESSARY.

QFRS WOULD SUPPLY ALL EQUIPMENT, TRUCKS ANY BA EQUIPMENT INCLUDING REPAIRS AND OFFER ALL TRAINING COURSES TO KEEP SKILLS AT A TOP LEVEL.

TRAINING TO BE STANDARDISED AND INCLUDE ALL ASPECTS OF TRAINING INCLUDING TRAINING FOR STRUCTURAL FIRES ETC. RURAL FIREFIGHTER TRAINERS WITHIN QFRA TO COMPLY WITH THE BUSH FIRE TRAINING ELEMENT. QFRA TO PROVIDE THE APPROPRIATE P.P.E. FOR ALL ELEMENTS OF FIRE FIGHTING APPLICABLE TO EACH BRIGADES NEEDS.
Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find attached the Keppel Group submission for the inquiry into management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion Paper Nov 2009. We understand the date for acceptance of submissions was extended to 18th April.

W Thanks,

Peter Cook
Admin Officer
Keppel Group Rural Fire Brigade
Box 1606 Yeppoon 4703
Ph 4939 2491
Response to

Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion
Paper Nov 2009

Submission made by:
Keppel Group Rural Fire Brigade
PO Box 1606
Yeppoon  4703

Endorsed by the following member brigades:
Adelaide Park, Bondoola, Byfield, Caves, Cawarral, Cooberrie, Hidden Valley, Keppel Sands, Maryvale, Nankin, Nerimbera,

Contact:
Gary Dash
Group Officer Keppel Group Rural Fire Brigade
16 Spring Ck Close
The Caves 4702  Ph 07 49342792

13th April 2010
Introduction:

This Brigade recognises that we form part of QFRS and that we are accountable to QFRS for all our actions. We acknowledge that the brigade and local community receive many benefits from this membership and that there are further benefits to the community from the limited autonomy of local brigades.

We also acknowledge that we have accountability to Local Government who collect and distribute the Rural Fire Levy to our Brigade. We understand that QFRS Rural Office coordinates our information for Local Government as a standard procedure since the amalgamation of Councils in our area. Prior to the amalgamation our Brigade successfully liaised directly with Livingstone Shire Council.

We also acknowledge accountability to our local community, from which the Fire Levy is drawn.

The Discussion paper refers to the Auditor General's report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland. Brigade members express their disappointment that this report was drawn from a very small sample of rural brigades. We feel that the report therefore does not adequately represent the majority of Brigades in this region, their concerns and the factors affecting them.

This report was used as the basis of proposed sweeping changes in the financing of Rural Brigades within the Rockhampton district early in 2009. The changes proposed may have met some obligations of QFRS regarding accountability of Brigade funds but they did not consider the people involved in the Brigades and the sense of local identity that is inherent in the present Brigade system. The result was a threatened mass walk out of local volunteers (Refer The Morning Bulletin 16 Feb 2009 Appendix A.)

The sweeping changes that were proposed severely damaged the trust of the volunteers in the very organisation that is there to support them – the Rural Office in Rockhampton, and to some degree, the QFRS. As a local Brigade we wish to repair this damage.

The sweeping changes also set challenges for local brigades, to discuss what was happening and why, to their local communities. Communities didn't understand nor necessarily support the new model. The local Rural Fire Brigades were placed in very difficult situations to explain the changes; with limited information being made available to local Brigades at the time. Again, we wish to repair this damage.

These matters highlight the fact that any changes will need to be done in full consultation with local Brigades and communities. Only changes acceptable to ALL parties should then be developed, allowing adequate time for implementation so that the changes can be implemented in an orderly and systematic manner.

The opportunity to make a response to this discussion paper is one small step in this consultative process and we welcome the opportunity to make a response. We sincerely hope that we will be heard and that our suggestions will be seriously considered.
Why do people join their local Brigade?

The responses will vary, but in most cases there is a sense of local identity and community support. The Brigade is a group of local people working in the local area, responsible to the local community members that they meet in day to day situations. This sense of community can only be fostered at this level and our brigade does not wish to see any change to a more centralised model.

People also join because they have the skills and abilities to do the job, and wish to contribute to their community in this way. In this region, many people in Brigades are already Mines Rescue trained or retired Urban Fire Fighters. These people strengthen our responses and come to Brigades knowing they will be great assets to their communities.

People also join because they want to learn more about fire management. This enables communities to respond to local disasters, through active learning in a well established organisation.

People also join the Rural Fire Brigade to be part of the esteem that it enjoys amongst their local communities. In this way, people build a greater sense of belonging to their local community, which in effect, builds happier and healthier communities. Local residents have the local knowledge to assist in controlling any fire incident.

People also join Rural Fire Brigades because there is no alternative protection available. Many rural landholders are also part of their Rural Fire Brigade, to help shore up a response to a disaster should it occur on their land. By being part of their local Brigade, they can ensure that a response will occur if needed. They see their responsibility in being an active member of the very Brigade that is likely to save their land.

Notes to the 7 listed issues follow.
1. Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

YES. The present system has worked well with local brigades able to sustain the volunteers’ interest by making local decisions on:

- operations
- fire risk management
- training
- long term planning and -
- funding with particular reference to the Rural Fire Levy

The model, using directions as laid out in the manual (Ver 1.1 2007 edition), has been suitable, but with changing community involvement some changes may be needed for the future.

It is imperative that local brigades must maintain and strengthen interest at the community level.

- However with increasing rural 'lifestyle' choices, many residents work out of the area and have little commitment to the community. It may be necessary to set up some sort of SES style brigade in the city to support the rural brigades.
- Brigade forward planning needs to consider the ageing workforce with few young members joining.

The current model is suitable for Rural Fire Brigades in our region; as well as our rural communities. Given the changing political climate, the continued rise of ‘Risk Aversion’, and the Auditor General’s report; there possibly are elements of the current model that require some change to appease the concerns of the Auditor General; however, this should not result in disempowerment of communities and their Rural Fire Brigades; as was inherent in the Local Area Consultative Committee structure proposed for our region. Rather, there needs to be further investigation of the role of Local Government in the management of funds that belongs to Brigades. As they are the authority that collects and distributes the Fire Levy according to the Local Government Act, why are they so silent in all of this? Why can’t we have Local Government more involved with Rural Brigades; rather than having all our funds and self direction usurped by a blanket model that doesn’t work for this region? We have a great Local Government who, over the years, has proven a strong history of working with local Rural Fire Brigades to ensure accountability and professionalism of the management of public funds. Why can’t we investigate the model used by the Livingstone Shire Council that was in place prior to amalgamation of Councils?

Whichever model is proposed for the Rural Fire Brigades, it needs to be sensitive to the fact that it is volunteers that do the work of the Department. To continually centralise and disempower such people could lead to a reduction in morale and esteem and consequently, a drop in volunteers to run the service. People in rural communities are more likely to return to worrying about their own patch, rather than put in the additional effort to navigate some huge bureaucratic machine. The success of Rural Fire Brigades in this region is that they are local and locally driven.
2. Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

YES. The current system has served our member Brigades well. However there are problems:

- A small ratepayer base for some brigades means limited funding. (other sources of funding are available).
- The number of brigades receiving a levy over the whole state is only 25% of the total number of brigades. With the likelihood of increasing fire danger from climate change, the present system could be seen as inadequate. Our member brigades do not wish to see any change to the present levy system.
- The volunteers supply their time and labour for fire-fighting duties, maintenance of equipment and administration of their unit. Therefore we believe;
  a) Capital expenditure on vehicles, equipment and sheds should be the responsibility of QFRS and
  b) levies from the local ratepayers be used for operations.
- Capital expenditure on vehicles, equipment and sheds should be coming from QFRS and levies from the local ratepayers be used for operations. The volunteers supply their time for fire-fighting duties, QFRS should be able to supply the equipment.
- The removal of subsidised items from the QFRS equipment catalogue places an increasing strain on brigade resources and should be reinstated as a priority.

The current funding system is very inefficient. There is an unnecessary time taken in negotiating with Rural Office in Rockhampton, largely due to the low number of staff available to assist. There needs to be greater resources (people) put into this region, to support Brigades in the vital work they do. For example, for a region with a huge number of Rural Fire Brigades, our Rural Office is only funded for 1.5 administration officers who are responsible to process training records, budget collation, and general correspondence from Brigades including collating requests for equipment and updating of volunteer records; as well as supporting the running of the Rural Office itself. An example of the impact this has on Brigades is that often it takes years – yes years! – to get a certificate for any training attended that has been run by the Rural Office. There just isn’t the number of people in this regional Rural Office to handle the workload. Resourcing the Rural Office in Rockhampton better would be a great way to value local volunteers.

3. What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Urban encroachment is evident in the subdivision of large blocks into small acreage house blocks. We have more blocks in the area, with more owners but with less communication between the landowners. The fire risk increases with more buildings in the area and with increased fuel loads resulting from less controlled burning.

With the growth of the urban areas, many of the rural brigades are decreasing in area and may ultimately close or merge with an adjacent area.
However, there is an opportunity to strengthen both Rural and Urban brigades from the ever increasing encroachment. Rural Brigades have definite skills and abilities in fighting grass and other outdoor fires, and in protecting property until an Urban Brigade is on scene. As a first response, the importance of Rural Fire Brigades cannot be underestimated. Some Rural Brigades remain some 30 minutes from their Urban Brigades (under siren). For these, there is an opportunity for some of the larger Rural Brigades to be up skilled in Road Accident Rescue, First Response for Structural Fires, etc; to limit the risk of harm or further harm to people involved in an incident – which DIRECTLY aligns with the aim of the QFRS. Encroaching Urban Brigades means that there is a greater density of population, and given the vast roles of Urban Brigades, having a local Rural Fire Brigade that can manage a grass fire and enable an Urban Brigade to prioritise structural fires or road accidents, can only strengthen the response of QFRS to emergencies. There is a future for both to remain, despite urban encroachment, and for this to be a strong and positive relationship to the betterment of local communities.

4. How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Communication between brigades and Area Office needs to be improved. As an example - acknowledgement of correspondence would be appreciated particularly if a time frame could be given for action requested. Many Government departments have guidelines that all correspondence must be answered within a set time frame of about 21 days.

Information regarding brigade activities or planning also needs to be distributed to brigades in a timely manner. As an example - this report asking for our input was released in November, but only came to our attention in March, 14 days prior to closing date for submissions.

Increasing demands arise in 2 areas:
1 - more training and fire-fighting and
2 - more administration.

The use of volunteers means that a lot of time is required for training in appropriate firefighting skills.

With bad fire seasons, there is a need for relief crews. The structure of rural brigade groups, such as Keppel Group, needs to be maintained so local brigades (through Firecom) can call upon neighbouring group members to assist when needed.

To encourage volunteers, there may need to be a system of payment or financial assistance for volunteers who have to leave paid work to attend the fires. Many members are willing to give up time (and pay) to defend their home area, but they are not so willing to lose pay to work in an outside area.

With reference to the increased accountability (#5 below) more guidance and assistance will be needed to get the appropriate paperwork under way.
5. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

Financial accountability mechanisms are presently adequate but QFRS makes little use of the information supplied by brigades. The annual audited Statement of accounts submitted by our brigade supplies the required information on income, expenditure and reserve funds.

With increasing computerisation it should be possible to collect data electronically to be compiled into a comprehensive register to show total assets - operational funds, reserve and future funds, income and expenditure on an annual basis.

According to the discussion paper, only 25% of brigades currently receive a levy and hence need to have an annual audit. Information on the remaining 1133 brigades may not be available. These Brigades may function without a bank account, or with a minimal balance so that a full audit is not required. However QFRS should still be able to get at least an annual statement of Income & Expenditure and funds available for those Brigades.

Existing technology should be used within QFRS to improve communication so that brigades are notified when returns are due. As returns are forwarded by Brigades, they can be checked off on a comprehensive list where any omissions are immediately obvious and noted for action. This would prevent a repeat of the situation encountered by several Brigades when budget submissions were 'lost' and nothing was said or noted for 12 months or longer.

Equipment stock takes and inspections for condition and safety of brigade equipment also need to be incorporated to give a complete picture of resources available.

The main question would be who signs off on the equipment condition report. Should it be one of the QFRS personnel (Brigade Training and Support Officer?) or the Brigade 1st Officer who has ultimate responsibility for all Brigade activities. This task will add to the workload of the person(s) involved.

The current accountability mechanisms on Rural Brigades do not necessarily mesh with the expectation of the QFRS; but they are appropriate. The QFRS is very concerned with accountability of public funds (and rightfully so), and the changes proposed included for this to be managed in a centralised manner, independent of volunteers. However, this is not the best model for volunteers and their communities who want to remain empowered. The fact is, the current model where the money is distributed from Local Government to Rural Fire Brigades, is working because there is yet to be a Brigade fail their yearly financial audit. But there remains a desire to remove this function from local Rural Fire Brigades. It should be noted that local Rural Fire Brigades readily submit audits, both financial and equipment, on request; as well as supply detailed forward plans for their local Brigade based on public meetings convened by the local Rural Fire Brigade. The amount of responsibility and expectation placed on Rural Fire Brigades is not beyond their abilities, and this needs to be recognised and built upon rather than removed.
There are adequate accountability measures in place for local Rural Fire Brigades in this region; however, the chronic understaffing of the regional Rural Fire Office makes it difficult for some systems to be administered to the best of their ability. A lot of paperwork that is submitted can’t be dealt with in a timely manner, which leaves a difficult situation that often appears to be mismanagement or poor management; which isn’t accurate.

6. What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The fire warden for our district states that his role within the rural brigade area is not only to issue fire permits, but also to be an active member of the local brigade and to promote fire awareness and fuel reduction with residents and brigade members.

Our brigade feels strongly that the warden needs to be working closely with the brigade members and that this is best achieved if the warden holds an executive position of his/her local brigade. In this position the warden is aware of brigade activities and is able to pass information to & from the Brigade and Landowners.

It has been demonstrated by our Brigade that when the Warden and Brigade work together to conduct fuel reduction burns when weather conditions are appropriate, the reduction in fuel loads has led to reduced fire danger before weather conditions deteriorate. This has lead to a low uncontrolled fire incidence, even in severe fire seasons. This action will also be of benefit to the environment being a ‘cool’ burn, thus reducing the devastation of hot wild fires later in the season.

Any change from the present local administration of the permit system would be seen as a backward step.

Fire Warden’s are currently easily identified in their local community, and this needs to be continued and supported.

7. Other points noted.

The Keppel Group notes that member brigades have improved operations immensely since the introduction of the levy collected on our behalf by the local Council. This has removed the need for continual fundraising and allowed members to concentrate on the tasks of training, control burning, and fire-fighting response.

Brigades are able to plan for equipment purchases, and set aside funds for vehicle replacements. Any change to this levy system will have a big impact on the functioning of the brigade.

Once any part of the decision making process is removed from the Brigade, members lose their sense of ownership and pride in their work.
What is the biggest problem we see for the future?

Recruitment of younger members is our biggest worry. If the retirees were removed from the Rural Brigades there would be only a skeleton left. There is not much reward for younger members to give up hours of their time for training and for tactical response. Perhaps there should be a system of wages recompense for those members involved in large fires with extended response times.

Another great concern is that as we move forward, volunteers and their communities should be consulted about matters that affect them. There needs to be active consultation with Rural Brigades, not a move towards centralised decision making and management.
Fires fury: mass resignation threatened

QUIT MOSS: Rural Victorians may have to evacuate their properties yesterday following fires that flared up near Woodford, Hepburn, Castlemaine and Mount Beauty. Residents were warned to prepare for bushfire danger.

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Keppel Rural Fire Brigade submission
Samford Rural Fire Brigade
Submission to Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland
Discussion Paper November 2009

We are pleased to provide the following comments for the committee's consideration.

QRFS has the responsibility of protecting persons, property and the environment from fire emergencies. These tasks are managed with the Urban/Rural models of service delivery and the role given to the Rural Fire Service (RFS) is to protect 17% of the population and 93% of the land area of Queensland. The efforts of the RFS, over the last 60 years, have been directed to doing just this.

Thousands of RFS volunteers have, since the inception of Rural Brigades, been committed to protecting their rural communities and have taken great pride in being part of this endeavour. The audit identifies 1,525 brigades made up of 35,000 volunteers. It has been a persistent problem for the RFS to correctly gauge the number of support and active members within rural brigades, despite the onus being on the RFS to ensure each of these brigades are maintained as an effective and efficient unit within RFS.

It is imperative that there is appropriate training, commitment from both the volunteers and the administrative support from RFS, and the provision of adequate resources for the type of activities the Brigades are capable of. It is possible that the RFS organization does not as yet achieve the right balance between its “on the ground” volunteers and the administration that supports them.

Additionally, the RFS has to find ways to deal with the ageing volunteer component or we will have to face the prospect of fewer volunteers with less experience of firefighting.
If we are faced with a marked decline in volunteer numbers, it would be prudent to investigate the mindset of current volunteers in relation to these issues:

- Has morale declined?
- Have recruiting and retaining strategies been inappropriate?
- Is the model faulty?
- Is the RFS management failing in some way?

The importance of morale and has morale declined?

Every volunteer service has to attend to the health of the organization and the maintenance of high morale. Otherwise volunteers are going to stay home or do something more rewarding with their lives.

In our experience, the following generalizations about volunteers are pertinent:

- They like some ownership in the enterprise
- There is a need for them to engage collaboratively with their organization and be consulted in any decisions that affect them
- Every now and then receive thanks for their efforts in a meaningful way.

The RFS has, on occasions made decisions which have been seen as not having any regard for the wishes and aspirations of the volunteers, but despite this we believe that the operational brigades have been resilient and continue to maintain a smiling, friendly and co-operative work ethic.

An underlying problem is that this type of decision making does eventually strain the morale of volunteers, and raises the question that if this continues, will the RFS organization have the skills and experience to properly manage the dissatisfaction of such a large number of volunteers.

Have recruiting and retaining strategies been inappropriate?

The latest training requirements now prevent new recruits from active involvement on the fire ground until basic training has been completed. This protracted introduction has been noted as a cause of some new volunteers losing interest and discontinuing their involvement.

The preferred alternative would be to allow some active involvement immediately on joining up, but to ensure their safety, have them directly under the control of an experienced mentor.

Volunteers would then be able to decide if the inherently hazardous role of a fire-fighter satisfies their reasons for volunteering in the first place, before valuable time, money and resources are wasted.

Delays arising out of police checks, the timing of fire management skills training and the unavailability of a new issue of PPE can be frustrating for new recruits.

Unlike the very public, State Emergency Service (SES), the RFS does not promote itself well within the wider community. The RFS appears to lack public relations specialists, and as a result the Community recognition of the RFS, particularly for its volunteer status, has been steadily declining.
Virtually every media report from a fire ground is given by an officer who is not immediately recognized as a volunteer rural fire-fighter, compounded by the fact that they are invariably dressed in a blue Urban uniform and standing in close proximity to a red Urban fire appliance, even though several rural brigades may have been engaged for many more hours.

Emergency Management Queensland actively promotes the SES whilst the rural volunteer’s role has become quite diluted. With urban development in rural areas, invariably it brings with it a community that is familiar with the red appliances of the Urban Fire Service, and it is then necessary for the rural volunteers to promote themselves and demonstrate their capabilities as a competent and effective fire mitigation service.

It is quite obvious that the RFS is desperately in need of some publicity to promote the role and activities of the volunteer arm of the fire service.

Is the model faulty?

The RFS management, which is there to support the volunteers, appears to be gradually becoming top heavy, and this raises the question as to whether the volunteers are seeing any value from this management structure.

We are continuing to see the creation of new positions in the RFS management team and the subsequent costs of salaries, overheads, office costs and the cost of the fleet of vehicles supposedly used for operational purposes, leaves very little of the annual budget to improve the lot of brigades.

The face to face contact with all levels in the RFS management structure which was inherent in the old model seems to have disappeared, and the access and visibility of senior head office RFS staff is no longer evident. The question is sometimes asked: Are managers who can rarely afford to leave their offices and interact with volunteers, an improvement on the old way?

The longstanding rural flavoured RFS Administration has been changing in recent years to one that is heavily staffed by Urban fire service officers without the rural service background or the culture that is critical to the understanding and management of volunteers.

The volunteers are being further removed from the critical decision-making process through lack of consultation. There appears to be an increasing disconnect between management of RFS and the volunteer members.

Is the management failing in some way?

Volunteers are usually positive and supportive of any form of leadership. Unfortunately, our RFS “Leaders” making arbitrary decisions without consultation, make it harder to be so accommodating.

For example, at a time when the fire service is recognizing the toxicity of bushfire smoke, a decision has been made to eventually withdraw support for rural brigades with CABA capability. CABA is one of the most effective forms of respiratory protection for appropriately trained volunteers to use when aggressively attacking bushfires, motor vehicle fires and in structural fire situations.
Rural brigades with Breathing Apparatus have recently received instructions that they will no longer be supported in the use of this equipment when the next generation of CABA is introduced in three years time. We have been told that this is necessary to meet cost savings in the future. This decision has been made without any consultation with the affected brigades, and in the case of the Samford Rural Brigade, this is in spite of a 19 year faultless record of:

- Performing the required wears for annual accreditation
- Completing weekly service checks on BA equipment
- Furnishing weekly reports on the condition of the equipment
- Meeting all training requirements for a team of BA wearers
- Building a CABA cleaning station where BA sets can be cleaned in hygienic conditions

It is noted that the Auditor General, in his report states that "Rural fire brigades are increasingly dealing with incidents such as structure fires, motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies", and yet the RFS has decided to take this capability away.

The Samford Brigade also agrees with the Auditor General who has pointed out that in the current management model of RFS delivery there is the lack of an appropriate system to monitor the condition and safety of rural fire equipment. In fairness to the RFS, more recent experience now sees the development of a more robust management of major assets by RFS including onsite audits and regular follow up on vehicle roadworthy certification.

Despite this, more needs to be done at both RFS Administration and Brigade level to ensure accountability.

**Rural fire brigades and rural communities**

The success of the RFS depends on preserving the bonds between rural fire brigades and their communities. There is strong support for the comment made by the Director General, Department of Emergency Services, that rural fire brigades are community based organizations which are expected to assist with funding their own operations, purchases and expenses.

Rural fire brigades have always worked with their communities to raise funds and contribute to the costs of vehicles, operations and equipment. They have worked to establish and preserve community bonds.

Brigades serve their communities by quickly and efficiently dealing with fire-related problems. If we attend to the needs of our communities and we do this well, we get and hold the respect and support of rural communities. They really don’t care about interoperability problems, caused by power plays, empire building and takeover tactics. Our communities simply need us to respond quickly and efficiently to their calls for help and assistance.

**Get there early and get them out**

The main operational principle for rural brigades is to get to the fire at the earliest possible time and to contain it before it becomes a major incident threatening lives, livestock and property. The community being served would not be impressed if they knew about the current competitive response times and unnecessary delays caused by a system that favours urban responses over the involvement of rural brigades. To reinforce comments made previously, these same communities might find it difficult to accept that a rural brigade now has to stand back and let their houses or sheds burn down because they have just had their BA capability taken away.
We acknowledge that the vast majority of rural brigades would have little interest in or the capacity to operate in a BA environment but this should not exclude those brigades from having a BA capability if they can satisfy the required operational efficiencies.

Rural brigades provide the opportunity and the avenue for community service. We have attracted over the years many volunteers who primarily have a genuine desire to serve their areas in some way. We have no time for hoons, drunks or antisocial misfits bent on damaging society. In a very real sense we are a breeding ground for good community spirit amongst people. We work with those who have something to give and we give them training in teamwork, leadership and ways to achieve personal and social development. Rural fire brigades can do a power of good in every demographic in the land.

**SUMMARY**

1. **Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?**
   The current model of Brigades remaining largely autonomous with limited bureaucratic interference will best serve communities into the future. Focus must remain on the value of volunteers and their “ownership” of their brigade should not be diluted. A more robust governance of some brigades may be necessary, particularly those that draw their support and membership from a small demographic. Despite the political implications some review or rationalization of brigades that are unable to operate autonomously may be warranted.

2. **Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?**
   The current local government supported levy system works effectively, but some scrutiny should be put in place to ensure the prudent utilization of the public monies collected. The management of funds collected on behalf of brigades through the levy system should predominantly remain within the hands of the brigades. Brigades should have governance processes in place to ensure that resources (vehicles and equipment) and operating budgets are commensurate with the underlying servicing requirements of their community and that funds received are well and prudently used.

3. **What effect is urban encroachment within Brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?**
   Greater density of housing in the peri-urban fringes has resulted in a blurring of the areas of responsibility between the urban and rural services. This has led to a loss of identity of the volunteer RFS. Nevertheless our brigade has grown and continued to adapt to the changing environment without any diminution of service to the community.

   Those knowing people in the community continue to actively embrace the value of the volunteer service which is evidenced by the calls upon the brigade to assist landholders to manage the fire risk on their properties in a manner not available from the Urban fire service.

   There are increasing examples of unnecessary and costly deployment of urban appliances to many I-Zone incidents which could have been competently handled by our rural fire brigade.

   Urban encroachment has increased the risks of bushfires with mitigation and overall management best handled by an efficient and well equipped rural brigade. Access to higher risk properties is also best managed by rural brigades as the Urban appliances are unable to operate off road.

   The intellectual capital of local volunteers regarding the risks associated with their brigade area regularly proves invaluable in fire suppression.
4. How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Improved content and delivery channels for training will enhance operational management and effectiveness.

Introducing simple administrative functions/processes for brigades without sacrificing accountability will assist in reducing demands on brigades.

The opportunity exists for a greater level of use of technology to support brigade activities e.g. electronic lodgement of incident reports.

5. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place adequate?

Given the increasing level of public funds involved, it is important that robust financial accountability procedures and reporting are in place and assistance to smaller brigades may be necessary to ensure this outcome.

We support open and accountable processes but governance at RFS management level must be qualified and competent to deliver it to rural brigades.

6. What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

With the increasing importance of managing biodiversity and community expectations regarding use of fire, it is important that Fire Wardens are well trained and operate in close co-operation with local rural brigades.

Fire Wardens should receive an appropriate level of training to equip them adequately to discharge their increasingly onerous responsibilities.

7. Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

It needs to be borne in mind that in rural and peri-urban areas the Urban fire service is predominantly reactive, whereas the RFS is both reactive when the need arises and also proactive in working with the community assisting them with fire mitigation and hazard reduction. Continued strong support of the volunteer rural fire brigades is essential to minimize fire risks throughout our communities as any diminution of the role of this service including the subtle encroachment by the Urban fire service, will deliver increased risks at a time when climate change is signaling increasing volatility across our nation.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to present this submission and look forward to a positive outcome to the committee’s deliberations.

Submitted By:
On Behalf of the Samford Rural Fire Brigade,

Anne Wells
Hon. Secretary
Samford Rural Fire Brigade.
13 April 2009

The Research Director
Attn: Ms Deborah Jeffrey
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Ms Jeffrey,

Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

I am writing to you in response to the letter by Wayne Wendt MP offering Volunteering Qld an opportunity to comment on the current inquiry into the management of Rural Fire Services Queensland.

As the industry peak volunteering body in Queensland, we are certainly interested in offering a few points in respect to sustainable volunteering management, which subsequently impacts on service delivery of all agencies involving volunteers. We note that our membership roll includes three Rural Fire Service Brigade branches (or units) who, over the years, have utilised some of the services we provide such as the Linking Service which helps organisations find new volunteers.

Of particular interest to Volunteering Qld is the area of volunteer recruitment and dealing with an ageing volunteer workforce – one of the issues identified for the agency. For that reason we would like to make the point that the Rural Fire Brigade is in all probability experiencing a challenge common to many nonprofit organisations operating across the State. The trends in volunteering over the years have changed rapidly and continue to change in a direction that is not as clear cut as we would like it to be. However, as we are engaged with the nonprofit sector across the board, and with agencies that provide a diverse range of services, we are increasingly witnessing an increasing interest in the development of strategies that might attract new volunteers capable of delivering a sustainable level of service in the long term.

We would like to point out that one of the main issues affecting nonprofit sector agencies in attracting volunteers is the lack of integration of volunteers into the changing nature of the work and the brand of service individual agencies provide. Our own observation in respect to the trend, indicates strongly that people in general are interested in volunteering but increasingly look for opportunities where the voluntary work can be flexible and engaging, and can offer multiple rewards such as the opportunity to learn new skills, meet people, expand social and professional networks etc.
Overall we find that there are three vital indicators, or factors, that any agency involving volunteers needs to analyse and be able to integrate:

1. a sense of belonging
2. the flow effect
3. infrastructure.

A sense of belonging is the key aspect that each nonprofit needs to work out for themselves as something that they can offer to a potential volunteer. This is vital in terms of ensuring that the brand of service and the organisation is in sync with the profile of volunteers the agency wishes to attract.

The flow effect is a critical area and it is most often the major cause for high turnover among the volunteer workforce. It refers to the idea that each individual needs to experience a flow in their daily work, which is the type of experience one feels when there is a match between skills and challenge. This effect is well documented and supported but its importance for volunteers not fully appreciated. In other words, volunteers who are not engaged at that level tend to look for better opportunities.

Finally, the importance of appropriate infrastructure for volunteers has to be carefully examined and secured. This involves proper policies and procedures as well equipment, support and training.

The above are factors that we know from experience are detrimental to resolving key issues affecting a sustainable volunteer workforce. Additionally, it is important to note that the increasing demand for volunteers is adding to the general cost of recruitment, training, support, supervision and recognition. The cost of these activities in the past were often unrealistically undepreciated or not fully accounted for because the current culture of volunteering was built on old trends. The flexibility demanded by ‘new volunteers’ puts extra pressure on old business models of volunteering. However, this also opens up opportunities for innovation in the way volunteers are engaged.

We hope that these comments might be of value to the committee as it considers ways of resolving the challenge of ensuring a steady flow of volunteers in years to come.

Yours sincerely

Jelenko Dragisic
Chief Executive Officer
10th April 2010

Public Accounts and Public Works Comm.

RE: DISCUSSION PAPER

Dear Sir/Madam,

Firstly, I apologise for this late submission as this discussion paper has just come to my notice. To inform you where I am coming from, I am a member of the Hinchinbrook Fire Management Committee; on that committee I represent all Rural Fire Brigades within the Hinchinbrook Shire. Our task is to identify potential fire hazards within the shire, and arrange for the necessary authorities and permits to conduct these hazard reduction burns. The committee is purely an administration and advisory committee which means we are totally dependant on fire fighter volunteers who make up these Rural Fire Brigades. Without these volunteers, there would be no hazard reduction burns or anyone to control any wild fires that do occur during extreme fire conditions. Communities rightly depend and expect to be protected by these volunteers, they are necessary and essential.

I am also a Secretary, Fire Officer and Deputy Fire Warden of Toobanna Rural Fire Brigade. I have held the position of Secretary since its formation in 1993 when I was approached by the Rural Fire Service to call a public meeting with the purpose of forming the brigade. Since then, I have been heavily involved in all facets of the Rural Fire Brigade system. I say this to help you understand that the views I express are based on these seventeen years of Rural Fire Service involvement.

First and foremost I am sugarcane farmer and have been involved in this field for some fifty-five years. The first thirty years I was involved in the regular burning of sugarcane. Twenty of those years I was responsible for the planning and management of these fires. All in all, I have over forty-five years of involvement in cane fires and the Rural Fire Service of QLD. I say all this, only to highlight my understanding of fires and volunteers who increasingly are finding it more difficult to give of their time.

Outside the provincial centres most Rural Fire volunteers are primary producers, hobby farmers, semi-retired, or retired personnel. These groups have one thing in common, they are all well past the prime of their life and are being subject to increasing pressures and demands on their ever decreasing available time. As expectations of these volunteers increase, more volunteers are exiting. They are also exiting for reasons of age and health. Primary producers are being unfairly burdened by regulations and all the
accompanying plethora of paperwork. Primary producers are exiting the industry and are not being replaced by the younger generation because agriculture has become too difficult and lacks any financial security, without which, young families cannot survive. This in turn, has the effect on decreasing the number of available fire fighter volunteers.

I myself, give approximately one month a year to the Management Committee, Rural Fire Service, and Rural Brigades. This is time that I really cannot afford. More and more volunteers are echoing these views. Like most brigades, Toobanna Rural Fire Brigade is experiencing a decline in volunteers. State wide, the number of fire fighter volunteers during the early nineties totalled some fifty thousand, today there are just thirty-five thousand and decreasing. This should ring alarm bells, especially, when one considers the huge increase in QLD's population, this trend must be reversed otherwise there will be insufficient numbers of volunteers to maintain the Rural Fire Brigade system, not to mention the lack of effective control of wildfires.

Moving to the Auditor- General's Executive Summary – in Sections 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5; he says that there are serious limitations in the system to ensure training and Workplace Health and Safety Standards are met, and that there is a significant gap between Q.F.R.S. accepted minimum standards of brigade training and actual level, here, he seems to be implying that pressure be applied on all volunteers to be brought up to the minimum standard. Should the Rural Fire Service be forced to impose this compulsory training, the Auditor General would have to live with an immediate loss of 25% to 50% of fire fighter volunteers. I know this, because many volunteers have told me that the day training becomes compulsory, that's the day they will walk away and never return.

In reference to his recommendation that Q.F.R.S. provide guidance and support to brigades to develop one year operational plans and three year management plans, coupled with brigade hazard identification and reduction plans, this would virtually destroy the brigade system, as most of the remaining volunteers would never want an Executive Position. It is irresponsible to expect brigades to comply with these demands. I would remind the Auditor General that the Rural Fire Service has to deal with unpaid volunteers not paid personal, who have unlimited time on their hands. These plans are, and should be, the role of the Fire Management Committees, NOT your volunteer brigades.

I now come to the final stage of this submission – since the Rural Fire Service has been moved directly under the umbrella of the Q.R.F.S. and referred to as Q.R.F.S. Rural Operations, volunteers have seen a change that they are not comfortable with, as opposed to a "stand alone" service that they could relate to, a service that did not give them the feeling of being overbearing with increasing expectations and demands.

As well, volunteers have seen a service that has become too top heavy at the expense of a decreasing amount of subsidised fire fighting equipment being
made available to brigades. For instance, the majority of pumps have been abolished; the majority of tanks have also been removed and no longer appear on the list. Complete hose kits have also been removed, there is no longer ANY hose kits available in the equipment list. Fire fighting trailers are no longer available, and the availability of slip-on units has been drastically reduced. Each year brigades are seeing a smaller range of subsidised equipment being made available to them. In rural areas all this equipment that has been removed from the subsidised list is absolutely essential for the control of hazard reduction burns and controlling wildfires. This is viewed by brigades as a serious lack of support by Q.F.R.S.

There are also problems that affect Rural Brigade Fire Officers. Under the previous system, if a brigade was fighting a wildfire the Fire Officer could call on the “Red Truck” to be on standby to protect neighbouring landholder’s structure while the brigade could concentrate on the wildfire. Because a Fire Officer (in charge) made this request, the neighbouring householder would not receive a bill for having the “Red Truck” on standby. The situation now, is reversed, and the householder will receive a bill. This puts the volunteer Fire Officer in a dilemma at a time when he can least afford it. This puts more pressure on the Fire Officer at a time when he has to make critical decisions to control the fire at hand.

Another problem that Fire Officers are faced with, is the situation where a volunteer is hurt, or worse still, die because he followed a direction made in “Good Faith” by the Fire Officer. If circumstances changed beyond the control of the officer, such as an unexpected wind change causing the fire breaching a break, the Fire Officer now will find himself in a Court of Law defending himself without the support of Q.F.R.S. Previously, if the same Fire Officer made a decision “in Good Faith” (The Official Term) but circumstances changed beyond his control or expectations, he was guaranteed protection under the act. This, no longer applies. As a consequence of this change, Fire Officers have relinquished these positions and many current officers are telling me they will not remain in their roles for long, as it is too stressful. Fire Officers need and deserve increased legal protection.

This concludes my submission and in doing so, I must stress that I have NOT taken the time to compile this submission to have it treated as a worthless and negative statement. I would not waste my time to have it treated as such. The driving force behind my taking the time to put pen to paper is not because I enjoy “bucking” the system, rather, because I care, about the Rural Fire Brigade system and the many unpaid volunteers who make it all work as well as it does. In the meantime, we are witnessing an increasing drift away from this most essential service. The more that leave, the greater the burden on remaining volunteers.

I implore the powers to be to get out of their air conditioned offices and talk and listen, to the people they purport to represent. Recompensing volunteers for their valuable time would go some way to slow down the drift away, if this is not to be, then the burden of responsibility and expectation has to be
removed. My own belief is that it has to be a combination of both. If the powers to be to leave the system continue to diminish as it currently is, because it is just too hard, then it is they, who will knowingly be presiding over the demise of the QLD Rural Fire Brigade system. It will also be they, who will have the unenviable task of explaining to Queenslander's "What Went Wrong?" and at what cost to the many communities of this state. Hoping this submission is taken with the seriousness it deserves.

Yours faithfully

Paul J. Cauchi
Mr Wayne Wendt  
Chair  
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Wendt,

I write in response to your inquiry into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

I note that the inquiry is part of a further investigation into the findings of the Auditor-General’s Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

My department has prepared a single-agency submission which describes the operation of rural fire brigades, their relationship with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and their current funding arrangements. A copy of that submission is attached.

I trust this information is of assistance to your Committee members in conducting the inquiry. Should you require any further information please contact Ms Corinne Mulholland, Senior Policy Advisor, on telephone number (07) 3239 0199.

Yours sincerely

Neil Roberts MP  
Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services
Submission to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee by the Queensland Government.

Inquiry – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

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Attachment 1 - Rural Fire Services in Australia – Interstate Comparison
Attachment 2 - Rural Fire Brigades by Type
Attachment 3 - A Summary of Progress Achieved by Rural Operations (as at February 2010), Queensland Fire and Rescue Service on Queensland Auditor – General Recommendations
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Executive Summary

- In Queensland, the management of rural fire services is a responsibility shared between local communities, local governments and the State Government.

- Volunteer firefighters are the fabric of fire fighting capacity in rural Queensland. Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) are made up of a diverse group of landholders and volunteers who come from all walks of life with a shared belief in the value of community.

- The true measure of the active participation of Queenslanders in rural volunteering is the increasing number of new recruits and active members.

- In June 2008, there were approximately 6500 fully qualified volunteer firefighters and by February 2010 that number had increased by more than 2900 to approximately 9500. There are now around 1500 RFBs with approximately 34,000 volunteers covering non-urban areas, over approximately 93% of Queensland.

- The functions of RFBs are fire prevention, community education and fire fighting.

- The founding principle of RFBs is a commitment to self-help and mutual assistance. RFBs are characterised by strong local loyalties, a high degree of self-sufficiency, and a willingness to help protect neighbours and land from fire.

- Queensland communities have traditionally required a flexible approach to RFBs. To support this, the State Government encourages RFBs to be largely responsible for the day to day running of brigade business while providing a framework within which to operate. This is part of a broader framework for fire response and prevention across Queensland, through the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS), within the Department of Community Safety (DCS).

- Under the Queensland model of fire service delivery, the Commissioner of QFRS has command and control responsibility of both the urban and rural arms and in a major fire event all of the QFRS resources, such as urban fire fighters, aerial support and interstate assistance, may be utilised to assist at the local level. This combined and coordinated approach to fire management is undertaken through the efficient and effective service delivery of QFRS and its rural branch, Rural Operations. Rural Operations works closely with local governments and volunteer fire fighters to achieve a depth, capacity and immediacy to preventing, mitigating and combating rural fires.

- RFBs do not operate under a 'one type fits all' model due to the fire risk profile of areas, the varying landscapes and local environment in which the RFBs operate and the disparate functions that may be required within the local context.
While volunteer RFBs typically operate outside of urban fire brigade areas, due to population growth and urban sprawl, communities previously serviced by a rural brigade may now require the support of an interface, or i-zone brigade. Conditions in such areas are complex, requiring fire fighters from urban and auxiliary services or volunteer rural brigades to work closely together.

A high level of cohesiveness between permanent urban and volunteer rural entities is developing, with a view to increasing the overall effectiveness of dealing with significant wildfire events threatening high density areas and to ensure that RFBs are supported in the services that they provide.

These factors, particularly during protracted bushfires in the summer months, increase the demands made on RFBs and present a challenge to the community and all levels of government in managing demand.

Strategies adopted by the State to manage the demands made on RFBs include risk profiling, forward planning, equipment monitoring, hazard reduction, and ensuring that QFRS resources are available to rural areas during protracted bushfire events.

In addition, measures taken to support volunteers include a learning and development framework which provides easy access and flexible learning options to volunteers, and an increased number of trainers in the regional areas.

To demonstrate the value that is placed on rural volunteers and to pay tribute to the high standard of work performance and conduct of volunteers, a number of awards, certificates and honours are granted each year. 500 awards were made in 2009. Categories include years of service, bravery and acknowledgement of service.

RFBs are largely responsible for their own financial management, internal management, fund raising and community involvement. Funds predominately sourced from local governments, fundraising and donations are held and managed by individual brigades.

RFBs are supported by the local governments and the State Government who provide funding, resourcing and equipment.

Local governments may provide funding from the raising of a rural fire levy or from a proportion of general rates, and may also provide support through the provision of fuel or use of Council infrastructure. Rural Fire Levies collected by local government are currently estimated to provide $5 million annually to volunteer RFBs.

State Government provides funding to Rural Operations from specific QFRS output revenue funding and a proportion of the fire levy raised in urban areas. The 2009/2010 State funding allocation for Rural Operations is $29.6 million. This represents an increase of 66 per cent, from $17.8 million in 2004-2005.
In addition, since 1998 the State has contributed significantly through election commitment funding aimed at resourcing, equipping, training and supporting volunteer fire fighters.

Through State funding, Rural Operations provides equipment, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and communication infrastructure, and funding towards fire trucks and brigade stations.

In excess of $1 million has been spent each financial year since 2003 on PPE and the total number of rural vehicles has increased from 876 in 2003 to 947 in 2010.

A 2006 Enhancement Package for the rural fire service saw funding provided for the largest increase in staff numbers since its inception in 1948, with 23 new full-time positions introduced and additional training provided to volunteers. There is currently a total of 22 Brigade Training and Support Officers proving rural training to volunteers.

The increase in core and election commitment funding in 2009-2010 will enable the provision of 34 new or replacement fire appliances, additional PPE and greater capacity for on-line training.

While RFBs seek to maintain responsibility for their own affairs, Rural Operations works closely with brigades to ensure that risk, operational needs, equipment and appliances are accounted for so that appropriate forward planning can take place. Effective forward planning greatly assists in ensuring that RFBs are prepared for fire seasons.

In addition Rural Operations offers support to RFBs to ensure that RFB monies are spent in an appropriate and accountable manner. RFBs are provided with a Rural Fire Brigade Manual which contains guidelines on financial and audit requirements.

Beyond the financial support provided by local and State Government, RFBs raise funds to cover their operating expenses and non-state funded capital expenditure. To achieve this RFBs may seek funding from local fundraising drives, grants from charity organisations and sponsorships from industry.

The role of Fire Warden is also largely carried out by volunteers. There are currently some 2418 fire wardens in Queensland operating in 227 Chief Fire Warden Districts.

Fire Wardens are generally responsible for managing the use of fire in rural areas, including fire risk reduction, through the issuing of 'Permits to Light Fire' and a prohibition on lighting fires during extreme conditions. Fire Wardens teach members of their communities how to responsibly prepare their properties against the threat of bushfires.

The greatest constraint for rural volunteers is time; time to participate in fire hazard reduction, community education and fighting the fires themselves. For
volunteer fire fighters, time spent providing volunteer services means time spent away from family and from making a living.

- The tireless efforts that rural fire fighters make in preparation for and prevention of bushfires and their participation in fire fighting activities when bushfires occur is greatly valued by their communities.
1. Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

**Context - Queensland’s fire risk profile**

As the second largest state in Australia, Queensland’s geography is challenging in terms of fire mitigation and response. It extends over 1,730,000 square kilometres and includes an arid interior and lush coast regions. The variation in climate is considerable, ranging from low rainfall and hot summers in the inland west, a monsoon season in the north, warm temperate conditions along the coastal strip and low minimum temperatures that can be experienced inland about the southern ranges during winter.

Queensland’s fire season normally commences in late winter in the Gulf and Cape York Peninsula and progresses south into central inland and coastal areas to the south east border during spring. The fire season continues through the summer in southern and far south-western Queensland.

The fire season timeframes and risk can vary significantly from year to year depending on fuel loads caused by previous heavy rainfall, long term climate and short term weather conditions (such as the Pacific sea surface temperatures and the Southern Oscillation Index) in each area.

Fire risk can be reduced by mitigation programs that have been undertaken prior to the fire season and the availability of fire fighting resources in an area.

While Queensland, on average, has hundreds of bushfires of various sizes per year, only some are of such a severity to cause damage to property or loss of life, such as is more often faced in the southern States and in southern Western Australia.

The summers in most Queensland regions are typically wet, unlike the southern states which have hot dry summers where increasing temperatures contribute to dangerous fire conditions. Consequently, the devastation experienced in the Victorian bushfires of 2009 and the Canberra bushfires of 2003 has not been experienced in Queensland.

In order to mitigate its bushfire risk and ensure seasonal preparedness, Queensland has in place a cooperative approach to fire management in partnership with all sections of the community, which includes a range of best practice strategies at both the community and State levels which are detailed in this report.

The functions of Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) are fire prevention activities (including hazard reduction and burn offs), community education and training, and fire fighting. RFBs are the lynchpin in protecting rural communities from the devastation of bushfires in Queensland.
**Origins of Rural Fire Brigades**

Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) in Queensland have a long and proud history of volunteers coming together to form groups at the local level to protect their families, their neighbours and their communities from the impact of bushfires.

The founding principle of rural brigades is voluntary commitment to self-help and mutual assistance, and Queensland brigades have continued over the years with the dedication of generations of volunteers.

The history of RFBs in Queensland can be traced back to 1948 when the government of the day reformed the Rural Fires Board, abandoned since 1929 as a result of the Great Depression. The Glasshouse Mountains Rural Fire Brigade was officially registered as the first Queensland rural fire brigade on 13 June 1949. The Rural Fire Service (RFS) (the collective of the Rural Fire Brigades) in Queensland was originally established as community-based organisations, and strong community involvement has been a feature of RFBs for the past 60 plus years.

The firefighting fraternity of Queensland has grown from strength to strength since the first fire brigade was formed and today Queensland continues to rely heavily on volunteer firefighters. The volunteers who make up Queensland’s RFBs perform a vital role in supporting Queensland communities in active fire fighting and fire prevention.

The State Government, recognising the origins and the philosophy upon which RFBs are based, has continued to treat brigades as community-based organisations and strives to ensure that the relationship each has with the community is maintained.

**The Current Rural Fire Management Structure**

The current Rural Fire Service has some 1500 rural fire brigades with approximately 34,000 volunteers covering non-urban areas over approximately 93% of the state. The management of fire in rural areas is a responsibility shared between local communities, local governments and State Government.

**Collaborative Partnerships**

To promote an effective rural fire management structure for Queenslanders, stakeholders work in partnership with one another to support the invaluable work that members of RFBs undertake.

A particular focus of this collaborative approach is maintaining the partnerships that RFBs have with their communities, with their local governments and with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS). This collaborative approach also relies on partnerships between RFBs in different communities, partnerships between local governments and State Government entities, and, finally, between State government departments.
The Role of the local community

RFBs in Queensland stem from a need identified by their respective communities to protect them against the risks of bushfire impacting on them. This embeds RFBs within the community and engenders strong bonds between the community and its RFBs. RFBs are, in essence, ‘mates helping mates’ and ‘neighbours helping neighbours’, and this is especially evident in the Primary Producer Category of RFBs (the largest single category, with the bulk of RFS volunteers). Many rural communities are strong fundraisers for their local RFBs. Without the strong community linkage it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the brigades to be sustained.

The Role of RFBs

RFBs are not State entities, they are groups of people who donate their time and energy to serve and protect their neighbours and people within their own communities from the risk of bushfire.

The volunteers who make up Queensland’s RFBs perform a vital role in active fire fighting and fire prevention.

RFBs perform these activities within their own boundary areas and will often assist neighbouring brigade areas in times of need. In addition RFBs will participate in joint fire management exercises with State agencies.

The Role of Local Governments

Local governments actively support their RFBs by providing financial support, equipment and resourcing and ‘in kind’ support such as fuel and vehicle servicing.

Some local governments raise and collect a rural fire levy (RFL) across the properties serviced by the brigade, based upon the projected budget required by the brigade for the forthcoming financial year. The funds are provided directly from councils to RFBs. Other local governments may direct a proportion of general rate collection to the RFBs within their Council boundaries.

More information on the funding provided by local governments is contained in Chapter 2 of this submission.

The Role of State Government

The State Government recognises the strong community commitment that is at the heart of RFBs.

In addition to providing a fire management framework, the State Government supports RFBs through the provision of base funding from the Consolidated Revenue and election commitment funding which is administered by QFRS. QFRS utilises these funds in addition to funds diverted from the Urban Fire Levy (UFL) to staff Rural Operations and RFS support activities such as training and mapping, and the provision of equipment and appliances.
The State, through both QFRS and the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) provides State coordination of fire fighting capacity, risk management, mitigation and fire fighting expertise for property holders and also on State owned and controlled land. The State is often assisted in these activities by volunteers from local RFBs and by Fire Wardens (who are predominantly volunteers).

**The Role of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service**

The QFRS is the State Government entity which is the primary provider of fire and rescue services throughout Queensland. QFRS provides funding to its rural fire branch, Rural Operations, through allocation of base funding, from Consolidated Revenue and a proportion of funds raised by the UFL. QFRS also provides an operational, financial and governance structure for Rural Operations.

**The Role of Rural Operations**

The Rural Operations branch of QFRS coordinates and supports the Rural Fire Service, while actively promoting the culture of rural volunteering.

Through Rural Operations, the RFS and its volunteers are supported through a range of mechanisms such as: financial support through the subsidised equipment and appliance system, managing land leases, providing personal protective clothing, communication equipment, training and related material and on the ground support both from an operational and administrative perspective.

The management framework provided by Rural Operations promotes the use of fire as an integrated part of rural land management and rural production systems. It also provides for the use of hazard reduction tools, such as back burning, in order to minimise the negative impacts of fire on rural communities.

As part of preparation for fire seasons, Rural Operations works with and supports the respective RFBs in preparing their local bushfire plans. Pre-season workshops and training exercises are conducted on an annual basis in each region, in accordance with bushfire plans, to foster the flow of communication and information between RFBs and Rural Operations. This also provides both urban and rural crews an opportunity to practice a coordinated response.

Rural Operations also works with RFBs to ensure that volunteer numbers are maintained, that the demand for their services is managed effectively, and that adequate support is provided to volunteers to enable them in turn to provide their vital service to their communities.

**Legislative authority for fire management and RFBs**

The provision for RFBs to operate within the framework of QFRS was passed into law in 1990. Under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 (FRSA), which governs all fire service delivery activities of QFRS, any group of persons may apply to the Commissioner of QFRS for registration as a rural fire brigade. RFBs are constituted under a set of provisions in Part 7, Division 3 of the FRSA.
In relation to rural landscape fire management, the FRSA provides for two fundamental legislative objectives: to control the lighting of fires and to enable fire fighting forces to deal with fire.

The FRSA enables the Commissioner to designate the area for which the RFB is responsible and the circumstances in which the RFB is in charge of fire fighting and fire prevention.

The FRSA enables the Commissioner of QFRS to take prompt action to reduce fire risk such as the construction of firebreaks and other vegetation management such as systematic, controlled burning. The FRSA also empowers the Commissioner to require a person to suspend operations or actions which present a fire risk.

**RFB Characteristics**

Of the 34 000 RFS volunteers approximately 9,478 of these hold firefighter status, and another 2,000 hold trainee firefighter status. The remaining number provide valuable support to their respective RFBs in the areas of training, fire prevention, and operational support or in management roles such as brigade chairperson, secretary, treasurer and the like.

The number of rural volunteers who hold firefighter status has increased significantly in recent years due to a focus on training by Rural Operations. For example, in June 2008 there were around 6,500 fully qualified volunteer fire fighters and that number has risen today to around 9,478. This increased level of training and knowledge greatly benefits the brigades during fire events.

Rural communities rely heavily on their volunteer fire fighters, who are often fighting the fires that endanger their own lives and those of their families and which threaten their own property.

RFBs are made up of a diverse group of landholders and volunteers who come from all walks of life, including farmers, store owners, trades people, doctors, lawyers, teachers and local and state government employees.

There are a number of characteristics that form the basis of RFBs and they include:

- Strong local loyalties amongst rural communities
- A high degree of self-sufficiency and independence
- A wide range of occupational and educational backgrounds from which valuable resources can be drawn for local knowledge and skill
- The willingness of brigade members to sacrifice work and family time to respond to emergencies and participate in prevention activities and training

The character and method of operation of brigades varies considerably across the State to reflect risk.\(^1\) In sparsely populated rural areas, a brigade may simply consist of a group of property owners joining together for their mutual protection against fire, using resources available on their properties. Closer to urban areas which are more

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\(^1\) For a map showing the location and type of rural fire brigades in Queensland refer Attachment Two.
densely populated, brigades are generally characterised by a more formalised operational and administrative structure, and may operate from a centralised fire station with specialised appliances and equipment. More detail on the various types of brigades is provided in the Categories and locations of RFBs section and a map showing the location and type of RFBs is at Attachment Two.

The structure of RFBs

The Brigade Constitution is outlined in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual and RFBs are encouraged to adopt the constitution to assist them to regulate the proceedings of their brigade and provide for their internal governance.

Under the constitution, RFBs elect a First Officer and a Second Officer. An RFB may also elect an additional 6 officers - Third to Eighth Officers. The decision to elect positions in addition to the First and Second Officer is optional and will often depend on the number of members in the brigade or the decision of members to have a structured hierarchy of command. An RFB may create any other office-bearer positions the membership considers necessary and these may include a Secretary, Treasurer or Chairperson.

An RFB may make rules for the purpose of regulating its proceedings and the conduct of its operations including the acquisition, vesting and disposal of its property and funds and those rules must be approved by the Commissioner.

Command and Control (Fighting rural fires)

The structure of fire services in Queensland means that both the QFRS and the Rural Fire Service operate under the one legislative base and one structure headed up by the Commissioner. The Commissioner (QFRS) has command and control responsibility of the urban and rural arms of the organisation. In contrast, other jurisdictions have two separate organisations that provide these firefighting services. For example, in NSW there currently exists the NSW Fire Brigade which provides the urban service and the NSWRFS which provides the wildfire firefighting response. Each of these organisations operate under their own Commissioner and legislative base.

The Queensland model ensures that both urban and rural officers abide by the same Operations Doctrine, Code of Conduct and legislation. This benefits RFBs and the State (and thereby the community) by providing a consistent and united approach to fire fighting activities and enables all of the resources of QFRS to be utilised by Rural Operations in major bushfire events. It also reduces the likelihood of confusion arising in communication and jurisdictional boundaries between various organisations and ensures greater safety for fire fighters, both volunteers and permanent staff.

In practice, this means that during an emergency response incident the first arriving officer assumes the role of the Incident Controller (IC) and announces it via the communications network. Depending on the severity of the fire the role of IC may be transferred to another more senior or experienced officer, given the level of skills and training required.
The IC is responsible to assign specific functional roles within the QFRS Incident Management Team (IMT) and therefore the IMT is managed by the IC.

The chain of command is delegated within a structured hierarchy set out in the QFRS Operations Doctrine “Hierarchy of Command and Control”. The deployment of staff and resources is coordinated via the IMT. The inclusion of local representation, including members of RFBs, on the IMT is encouraged to ensure that local knowledge is available to fight the fires. The QFRS management of the IMT ensures that regional, State and interstate resources can be applied where needed. If the fire activity is escalated beyond the capacity of the local brigades, incident management support may be provided through the QFRS State Operations Co-ordination Centre (SOCC).

Queensland does not typically experience long and widespread fire events requiring a campaign-like response, however, in a major fire event all of the QFRS resources, such as urban fire fighters, aerial support and interstate assistance, may be utilised through the SOCC for a response to major bushfires (see Chapter 4 for details of how the utilisation of QFRS resources manifests and reduces the demands on RFBs).

**Categories and locations of RFBs**

Rural Operations has recognised that as a result of the local community profile, fire risk, population growth, climate change, geographical differences across the state and community expectations, RFBs cannot operate under a 'one type fits all' model.

Therefore it has categorised RFBs to take into account the fire risk profile of the area, the varying landscapes and local environment in which the RFBs operate and the disparate functions which may be required to operate within the local context.

The character and method of operation of each category or type of brigade may vary considerably. In rural areas a brigade may consist of a group of farmers joining together for mutual protection against fire, using resources available on their properties. Closer to urbanised areas, brigades are typically characterised by a more formalised operational and administrative structure and operate from a centralised fire station with specialised appliances and equipment.

The category model assists Rural Operations to streamline the allocation of resources and equipment and in forward planning exercises.

The category model is periodically reviewed to ensure that it adequately reflects the local environment, taking into account issues such as the significant population growth.

Under the category framework there are five brigade types:

- **I-Zone Brigade** – A high-density rural residential brigade, usually with a well-developed commercial centre. The brigade may contain significant areas of bushland but the predominant risk is to life, property and infrastructure.
Activities of the brigade are principally within the operational policy and procedures of the QFRS;

- **Primary Producer Brigade** – This brigade consists of owner/occupiers engaged in primary production who share a responsibility for the management of fire using property based equipment. The brigade operates with limited contact with or support from the QFRS;

- **Rural Brigade** - The brigade area is predominantly rural producing land with possibly some low-density rural residential development. The risk is mainly from bush and grass fires, with a high level of utilisation of property-based equipment for fire management. The brigade area contains little or no government infrastructure and the community centre, if it exists within the brigade area, has less than ten buildings;

- **Village Brigade** - The brigade area has a community centre with more than ten buildings and other government infrastructure (e.g. school, council depots, recycling centres, etc). These brigades are often located in remote areas with little or no assistance available from other rural fire, urban or auxiliary brigades; and

- **Specific Service Delivery Brigade** - A brigade that operates with a service delivery model specific to individual community or service requirements. Examples of this type of brigade includes combined auxiliary/rural brigades, mining brigades, island and resort brigades and compressed air breathing apparatus equipped brigades. (Where a brigade is founded to protect a commercial entity and its land and staff, such as a mining brigade, funding for that brigade is provided by the commercial entity).

Table 1 below shows the number of each different type of RFBs and Table 2. shows the number of volunteers which are operating within each brigade type.

**Table 1. Type and Number of Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Fire Brigade Type</th>
<th>Number of Brigades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i-Zone</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Producer</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Service Delivery</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Number of volunteers by brigade type**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Izone</td>
<td>5934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Producer</td>
<td>9925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>4877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>33883</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each type of RFB requires a different resourcing level based on the level of activity and risk.
Primary Producer Brigades

The greatest number of RFBs are those categorised as Primary Producer Brigades (PPB), as illustrated in Attachment Two. Although all brigade types reflect the principles of mutual obligation and community service, PPBs are the traditional reflection of the RFB concept of community members coming together to help their neighbours and protect their land from fire.

The PPB classification and service delivery model is based around an 'arms length' relationship with Rural Operations, in keeping with the infrequent and episodic nature of its activities and recognising the practices and skills gathered over generations of volunteers. The key benefits of the PPB concept include:

- Operations localised and property based
- Training requirements reduced

To assist PPB to maintain the arms length relationship and reduce the administrative burden for those volunteers, Rural Operations provides:

- Increased Rural Operations Area Office administrative support
- A tailored system to manage workplace health and safety issues
- Continued equipment and liability support

Rural Fire Brigade Groups

In some areas of the State, individual RFBs are structured into Rural Fire Brigade Groups (RFBG). An RFBG is usually formed when warranted by the level of brigade activity and where desired by the brigades operating within that area. The formation and membership of an RFBG is not legislated or compulsory, and is determined by RFBs. There are currently 35 RFBGs in Queensland, the purpose of which is to coordinate the activities of various brigades operating in a single local government area.

The key contribution of RFBGs is to reduce the administrative burden on individual brigades and provide coordination of training delivery and educational updates. For example, the RFBG may provide community education by delivering the QFRS Bushfire Prepared Communities program to the local community. Administrative support reduces the burden of paperwork. RFBGs may prepare plans for those brigades in receipt of a Rural Fire Levy (each brigade in receipt of an RFL is requested to submit a three year Management Plan, a twelve month Operational Plan and associated budget in line with the local government’s budgeting cycle).

RFBGs also serve as a conduit between member brigades, local councils and Rural Operations at the regional level. For example, the RFBG may act as a point of distribution for RFLs from Councils, although the local Council will prescribe the method of distribution and an RFBG may not retain any funds belonging to member brigades.
Similar to other community based committees, RFBGs appoint office bearers in the form of a Group Officer, a Deputy Group Officer, a Training Officer and an Administrative Officer. Neither the RFBG nor its office bearers form a chain of command with member brigades, and office bearers are not supervisors of RFBs.

The RFBG may become operational through the Incident Management System at Level 2 and Level 3 incidents when the RFBG may be called upon to establish and maintain fixed Incident Management Centres (as directed by Rural Operations) to coordinate the RFBs working alongside urban operations.

**A Flexible Approach**

Queensland communities have traditionally required a flexible approach to RFBs. RFBs are encouraged to be largely responsible for the day to day running of brigade business, while the State government provides a framework within which to operate. Rural Operations works with brigades and local governments to promote the preservation of the local culture and flavour of each brigade.

Maintaining this flexible approach is aided by the ability of the State to support RFBs during fire events with all of the resources that QFRS has at its disposal, should the scale of the event warrant it.

One example of the flexibility available for communities to best manage their volunteer resources and their ability to respond to emergencies is through the Emergency Services Unit (ESU) model of service delivery. The ESU model is intended to help a community use available, and often scarce, resources to provide for effective and efficient volunteer functions. It does this by enabling one set of volunteers to integrate the volunteer functions of fire fighting, fire prevention, State Emergency Service (SES) and Community First Responders (for the Queensland Ambulance Service) in one unit.

Where ESUs exist, the local governments have provided administrative assistance as it has been identified that administrative tasks are most often the weakness of volunteer groups. There are currently four ESUs located in Talwood, St Pauls, Rolleston and Tambo which rely on strong local community backing and local government support. Other regional councils have expressed interest in the ESU model and DCS plans to introduce more of these groups, with the assistance of local governments.

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2 From an initial response of local resources, fire incidents are given a scale of operation, from Level 1 through to Level 3. Escalation may be the result of intensifying complexity or conditions, increased application of resources, a predicted protracted incident - or a combination of all factors. As an incident intensifies and more sectors (geographical or functional) are required, the ability to appropriately manage the incident from a Level One Incident Control point may not be possible. QFRS Operations doctrine sets out the triggers and transition arrangements for an incident to escalate from Level 1 to Level 2 and then on to Level 3. Escalation of the level requires a corresponding scaling up of the Incident Management System.
**Interstate Comparisons**

There are apparent differences between the way rural fire services are managed in Queensland compared with other States. Comparisons at State and operational level along the eastern seaboard are problematic because fire risk profiles, funding approaches, service delivery approaches and organisational structures vary significantly.

Historically, Australia's most intense and deadly bushfires have occurred predominantly in the south and south east of the country. Such events include the 1939 'Black Friday' bushfires that raged across eastern Australia, deadly fires in New South Wales in the 1951-52 and 1957-58 summer seasons, in 1994, in 2001-02 and in 2002-03. In South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria, deadly fire events include the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 and the Black Saturday fires of 2009.

Queensland's model is different to that in Victoria and New South Wales due to factors such as the evolution and historical context of RFBs and the funding sources at both the local and State levels, as well as the State's fire risk profile. These factors have all played a part in creating the Rural Fire Service model that is in existence in Queensland today.

In Queensland, Rural Operations forms part of QFRS and manages the framework for the state's rural brigades to oversee support for rural and semi-rural communities. Funding for Rural Operations is drawn from state government funding, primarily through the Urban Fire Levy. Local councils may collect a rural service levy on behalf of RFBs within their jurisdiction or provide some funding support by an allocation from general rate revenues. Outside of this, RFBs which do not receive funding from local levies may access grants from a variety of organisations and community groups, and actively participate in fundraising.

In Victoria the Country Fire Authority (CFA) is not a Rural Fire Service, as it provides urban and rural services to the whole state, with the exception of inner-metropolitan Melbourne. Of the approximately 59,000 CFA volunteers, 9,000 are situated in urban areas. The largest CFA urban brigade is in Dandenong and has some 25 volunteers. The main source of income, comprising over 75 per cent of total revenue, is contributions from insurance companies. Part of the premiums collected by insurance companies when insuring property against fire is provided to the fire services, prescribed by legislation.

The New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) is a co-coordinating, funding and training body only for the State's volunteer fire fighters, with RFBs attached to local governments and not to the State. The NSWRFS is responsible for fire fighting and prevention over 95 per cent of the State, while the New South Wales Fire Brigade manages fire emergencies in the State's major cities and towns. The NSWRFS has a membership of approximately 70,000 volunteer fire fighters and 752 full time equivalent staff. In 2008-2009 the NSWRFS received $267,689.00 in funding, of which the State Government's contribution was $54,118,000. Rural fire districts are based upon local government boundaries and may contain several volunteer brigades. Statutory contributions to the NSWRFS includes funds from insurance companies,
funds from local governments and funds from the Natural Disaster Welfare Relief, as well as income from State Government appropriation. In turn, the NSWRFS makes grants to local governments to assist with brigade funding.

A summary of the funding, staffing levels and responsibility for rural fire services in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Australian Capital Territory and Queensland is at Attachment One.

2. Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

Sources of funding available to RFBs

Beyond the financial support provided by local and State entities (detailed further in this chapter), RFBs must raise funds to cover their operating expenses and non-state funded capital expenditure. The level of funding that is sought and achieved by each RFB is discretionary and varies across communities and across brigades.

Operating expenses incurred by RFBs include power, telecommunications, equipment, appliance and station maintenance, and additional materials and equipment not provided by the State or local government.

Sources of funds available to RFBs for operating expenses and capital expenditure include:

- the RFL collected by some local governments
- contributions from general rates made by some local governments
- in-kind contributions, such as vehicle servicing and fuels provided by local governments
- donations from the community, commercial or government organisations, sometimes received in lieu of payment for the delivery of services by RFBs
- funds raised from a wide range of community fund raising activities
- donations from the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) for the purchase of equipment such as appliances, slip on units and computers
- cash grants from Rural Operations to contribute towards construction or refurbishment of brigade stations to a maximum of $10,000
- Gambling Community Benefit Fund (GCBF) grants for the purchase of equipment and appliances
- Jupiters Community Benefit Fund grants for the construction of brigade stations
- funds received from commercial sponsorships

An RFB has no legal right to demand a fee for service, including conducting a hazard reduction burn. However it is reasonable for a brigade to suggest that landholders make a donation in return for services provided (other than a fire suppression operation). For example, brigades may negotiate a fee for services provided to government agencies.
Local government funding

The *Local Government Act 1993* (LGA) enables, but does not compel, local governments to raise a levy for their local RFBs. Those local governments who do raise an RFL usually pay funds directly to RFBs.

The amount of the RFL levied against rate payers is determined at the local level, in consultation with ratepayers and RFBs, with guidance and advice on funding being provided by QFRS when requested.

Local governments are not required to provide information to the State Government on whether or not they collect an RFL or how much that is. Therefore, there is no central register of the level of funding provided to RFBs through the raising of an RFL.

Some local governments provide funding support to RFBs by an allocation from general rate revenues. Other local governments may provide in-kind support such as servicing of vehicles, utilisation of council infrastructure or use of land free of charge.

Attachment Four shows the funding that is collected from local governments and provided to their RFBs, either through raising an RFL, assigning a proportion of general rates, or providing in-kind support, for the financial year 2008/09. This information was gathered during a telephone survey conducted by Rural Operations in February 2010.

Approximately $5.15 million is raised from RFLs, and a further $195,000 is raised through a proportion of general rates by local governments and provided to local RFBs.

Some RFBs negotiate the funding level with local governments and base the requested level of funding on a projection of the following years needs and expenditure. If requested, Rural Operations will work with RFBs and local governments to establish the level of funding required.

State government funding

The Queensland Government works in partnership with local governments to support their volunteer fire fighters.

The funding for Rural Operations is sourced from specific QFRS Output revenue funding and QFRS urban-services derived revenues. The 2009/2010 allocation for Rural Operations is a record $29.6 million. ³

Rural Operations provides cash grants of up to $10,000 to RFBs to contribute towards the construction or refurbishment of brigade stations, should the brigade have a station. Rural Operations also supplies equipment and vehicles at a subsidised rate with the brigade providing a percentage of the overall cost and QFRS funding the remaining cost.

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³ A significant amount of the budget has been allocated to rural firefighting appliances, trailers and slip on units. It is anticipated that 34 new or replacement vehicles will be purchased for brigades in 2009-2010.
In addition, Rural Operations provides operational equipment to volunteers and RFBs, including radio communication equipment; firefighting equipment (hoses, drip torches, rake hoes and beaters, at subsidised rates); and essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as helmets, overalls, goggles, gloves and boots.

Firefighting support is provided via air operations, Geographic Information Systems and mapping resources.

RFB office bearers (secretaries and treasurers) are supported in appropriate management of brigade resources through the provision of manuals and operating guidelines, including financial management support.

Volunteers are supported through the provision of Workplace Health and Safety resources and support, training tools and support to deliver training, including flexible learning options (such as e-learning), and the provision of Community Education resources. The Volunteer Portal provides direct online access to relevant information and communication resources.

The graph below shows the changing profile of Rural Operations funding between 1997-1998 and the current financial year. The largest single source of funding for Rural Operations has come from the urban services revenue collected by QFRS.4

Note. The funding levels shown in the graph do not include local government grants or levies.

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4 About 68 percent of QFRS funding is provided by urban fire levies, collected on behalf of the State government through Local Government rates.
Election Commitment funding

The Queensland State Government provides election commitment funding for rural fire services. Detail of relevant election commitment funding since 1998 is as follows:

2009: Support Our Heroes

$7.34 million to be invested over four years for the Rural Fire Service (RFS), as part of the Support Our Heroes election commitment package of $12.98 million (2009-10 to 2012-13) to support existing volunteers, attract new volunteers and prepare communities for natural disasters. Funding for this initiative is from the Climate Change Fund.

The focus of funding includes:

- additional equipment and resources for the RFS to provide for 14 new heavy fire appliances
- increased volunteerism through guaranteed leave for active volunteer service for public servant volunteers at natural disasters
- further training for volunteers to support communities in the event of a fire or natural disaster
- new or replacement rural appliances
- the provision of fire reflective curtains in rural vehicles and the replacement of petrol driven pumps with diesel driven pumps across most of the rural fleet

An outcome of this funding package was that in the 2009-2010 financial year $4.5 million was allocated for the construction of rural fire fighting appliances and fire fighting trailers. This is anticipated to provide 34 new or replacement appliances. This includes the first six of 14 specialised appliances that have a minimum 3,000 litre water carrying capacity and are fitted with essential communications and fire fighting equipment.

2009: Community Educators

Under the Bushfire Community Training Package, a $4.6 million (over five years) budget funded by the State Government, a number of temporary full-time staff positions have been created which will support the development of a Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) network.

2006: Safeguarding Cyclone Communities

Funding provided to the RFS, as part of the $52 million Safeguarding Cyclone Communities election commitment package (2006-07 to 2010-11), to further boost the capacity of the volunteer emergency service workforce to prepare and respond to emergencies and disasters. The funding focuses on training, equipment and strengthening existing radio communications infrastructure to improve preparedness and response capability, including:

- $2.149 million for the Volunteer Information Management System (VIMS)\(^5\)
  (including the Operational Management System for the Rural Fire Service)

\(^5\) Now $183,000 annual recurrent funding
$3.1 million over five years for Rural Fire Casual Trainers
$3.9 million over five years for on-line training materials
$2.54 million for Rural Fire Protective clothing
$2.70 million for Communications Equipment

Investing in the future of Bundaberg and the Surrounding Region

The Investing in the future of Bundaberg and the Surrounding Region 2006 election commitment provided an upgrade to the Miriam Vale Fire Station, which included co-location with the QFRS urban station.

2004: Building a Safer Queensland: Supporting Emergency Services Volunteers

The 2004 Building a Safer Queensland election commitment provided $2 million for enhanced training for RFS volunteers.

2001: The Beattie Plan for the Tablelands

The Beattie Plan for the Tablelands 2001 election commitment provided two light attack rural fire appliances for the Walsh River and Wondecla Rural Fire Brigades.

1998: Focus on Frontline Services

RFS funding was increased by $1 million to consolidate the RFS Budget and provide for:
- The upgrade of Rural Fire Brigade equipment; and
- enhanced training systems.

Enhancement Package

In 2006, an Enhancement Package for Rural Operations was implemented. This package saw the largest increase in staff numbers since the Rural Fire Service was established in 1948, with 23 new full-time equivalent positions introduced.

Specific outcomes of the package included:
- additional Rural Operations staff to provide support to RFBs
- additional training provided to volunteers
- increased community capacity, resilience and ownership of mitigation and response
- a more coordinated delivery of operations in rural environments
- a defined regional operational reporting structure at large scale bushfire incidents
- a more regionalised focus for planning associated with bushfire management and volunteer support

6 Now $700,000 annual recurrent funding
7 Now $850,000 annual recurrent funding
8 Now $560,000 annual recurrent funding
9 Now $300,000 annual recurrent funding
The result has been more Rural Operations staff in regions with a greater operational capacity and a clearer alignment with QFRS urban. This has enabled a combined and coordinated response to major bushfire events.

**Sponsorships**

Volunteering also attracts sponsorship support from private industry. For example, a partnership has been established between QFRS and Reliance Petroleum. In 2008, Reliance Petroleum sponsored the purchase of 20 slip-on units (a vital piece of fire fighting equipment in rural areas) to a total value of $100,000.¹⁰

In 2009, Reliance Petroleum made a further commitment to provide an additional 20 slip-on units (again to a total value of $100,000).

Additionally, a partnership has recently been established between QFRS and Energex for 2010, whereby Energex has sponsored equipment for emergency services volunteers to the value of $75,000. Equipment from this sponsorship will include items such as portable dams and defibrillators. Applications for this equipment can be made by brigades from March 2010.

**Operating Budgets for RFBs**

Operating budgets for RFBs vary widely due to the range and types currently operating in the State.¹¹ However, a typical, well-equipped Village or i-Zone brigade will require an operating budget of $20,000 – $120,000 annually. PPBs may operate for as little as a few hundred dollars annually. The operating costs of all RFB types might double or triple in an extreme bushfire season, such as that experienced in 2009.

In some areas, such as the Bundaberg-Burnett region, an integrated service delivery model is utilised where services are expanded to encompass areas serviced jointly by urban and rural brigades. In these areas the practice is for the local governments not to levy an RFL for brigades, but for direct funding support to be provided to volunteer RFBs from QFRS.

The levels of community based fundraising by RFBs varies widely; some raise no additional funding and rely solely on the RFL funds while others may fundraise to a large extent, in addition to the funds received through the RFL.

This variance in individual brigade’s approach to raising funds is usually dependent on the level of fire activity in the area and is reflected in the varying levels of equipment, vehicle and station maintenance undertaken and recruitment, training and preparedness achieved.

¹⁰ Slip on units were provided to brigades at Upper Pilton, Toowoomba; Durong, Maryborough; Barratts Lagoon, Alice Palmer and Mitchell Palmer, Cairns; Toobanna, Townsville; Cannonna, Rockhampton; Hurdle Gully, Bundaberg; Edie, Emerald; Nottingham, Charters Towers; Munburra, Mackay; and Tingarra, Miles/Roma.

¹¹ The variance in operating budgets of RFBs can be determined by a range of issues, such as the type and membership of the RFB, the level of interest, enthusiasm and time able to be given by members to community fundraising events, the amount of funds raised, the perceived risk of bushfires and how affluent a community is.
**RFB stations**

There are approximately 458 brigade station structures (as at 27 January 2010) allocated to RFBs across the State. The State currently makes a maximum grant of up to $10,000 towards the cost of constructing, extending or upgrading RFB stations (sheds) with the RFB typically making up the remainder. Construction costs for a typical station from which a Village or i-Zone RFB will operate are in the order of $120,000 to $150,000. The balance of the cost is borne by the RFB from the RFL, local fund raising, GCBF grants and other sources.

In March 2007, Noel Arnold and Associates were commissioned by Rural Operations to conduct a review and an audit of workplace health and safety (WHS) in RFB facilities. The review made 47 recommendations under 5 key issues relating to WHS systems, training, workers compensation, reporting by volunteers regarding WHS issues and WHS associated with high risk activities. The remedial action identified established a benchmark for continuous improvement of WHS for volunteers. Rural Operations and RFBS are working together to address all the recommendations, including the development of asbestos management plans in rural brigade stations, where required, and systems for the testing and maintenance of essential safety equipment (such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits).

**Equipment**

Equipment, training, insurance, property lease fees (in some cases), support and coordination are provided to RFBs by Rural Operations.

Significant assistance is provided by the State (through QFRS) to upgrade the general levels of RFB vehicles and equipment, establish minimum operational and training standards for RFBs and expand the scope of training of volunteer fire fighters.

The safety of volunteers is of paramount importance. As part of a risk management approach, improvements have been achieved by upgrading the general levels of RFB appliances, vehicles and equipment.

RFBs make a 20 per cent contribution towards the total cost of rural appliances in RFBs and up to 50 per cent contribution towards the cost of other operational equipment.

Rural Operations provides personal protective clothing and radio equipment at no cost to the brigades.

The most common rural appliances are single or crew cab medium sized appliances with four wheel drive capability. In total, the rural fleet consists of 943 appliances. This is comprised of:

- 34 heavy appliances with a capacity of 2000 to 5000 litres water storage
- 586 medium appliances with a capacity of 1000 to 2000 litres
- 323 light appliances with a capacity of 600 litres

Table 3 below shows the number of appliances currently provided to brigades, indicated in local government areas.
### Table 3. Number of Appliances by Brigade Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Trailers</th>
<th>Slip-On Units</th>
<th>Light Appliances</th>
<th>Medium Appliances</th>
<th>Heavy Appliances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcaldine</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bundaberg</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caboolture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cairns Peninsula</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caloundra</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charters Towers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Cloncurry</td>
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<td>Emerald</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Mackay</td>
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<td>169</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Maryborough</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockhampton</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toowoomba</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townsville</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>461</strong></td>
<td><strong>2361</strong></td>
<td><strong>308</strong></td>
<td><strong>582</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In excess of $1 million has been spent each financial year since 2003 on providing volunteers with Personal Protective Equipment (such as fire fighting boots, respirators and heat-resistant helmets), at no cost to the volunteers.

Rural Operations also provides radio equipment free of charge to all RFBs. The State maintains the portable radios and other communication-related infrastructure at no cost to the RFBs. Total expenditure in the 2008/09 financial year for communication equipment provided to RFBs was $790,317 (Operating Expenditure - $571,192 plus Capital - $219,125).

In total the QFRS provides 2361 slip-on units and 461 trailers which are located with rural volunteers around the state.

All equipment provided to RFBs by the State or which is ‘subsidised’ by the State remains the property of the State. Supply of equipment is managed and administered by the QFRS Logistics Services in Brisbane to ensure an equitable distribution.
Table 4 below shows the number of appliances assigned to each brigade type.

Table 4. Appliances by brigade type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brigade Type</th>
<th>Appliance - Heavy</th>
<th>Appliance - Light</th>
<th>Appliance - Medium</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Izone</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Producer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>279</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Fire Brigade Group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slip on units are provided to RFBs for location on members’ properties. A slip on unit is a skid mounted fire fighting unit that slips easily onto the tray of a utility or truck with its own holding capacity of up to 540 litres of water or foam for fire suppression. From Table 5 below it can be seen that the Primary Producer Brigade types have the largest number of slip on units.

Table 5. Number of slip-on units by brigade type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brigade Type</th>
<th>Number of Slip-On Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Izone</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Producer</td>
<td>1391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Fire Brigade Group</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>2361</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brigades are required to have annual safety inspections of appliances conducted by qualified technicians and a copy of the resulting safety certificate provided to the nearest Area office of Rural Operations for monitoring and record keeping purposes.

In 2003 there were 147 rural appliances over 20 years of age. Since then, the Government has funded a program which has succeeded in reducing the proportion of older rural appliances in the RFB fleet and today only 10 appliances remain over 20 years old. In the same period an additional 574 rural appliances, 120 RFB fire fighting trailers and some 1,400 RFB slip-on units have been provided. With respect to replacement of appliances, while it is usual for them to be retired at 20 years, many are replaced well before this time depending on the usage rate or the ability to transfer them to other brigades.

As part of election commitment funding a program has begun to progressively retrofit rural appliances with fire reflective curtains over the next four years. Implementation of the program is planned over four stages with Stage 1 to occur between January and June 2010. Stage 1 will see fire curtains installed in appliances less than 3 years old, with subsequent stages to occur over 3 years. Implementation of the entire program will be complete by June 2013. These curtains will protect brigade members should they be trapped in their vehicles during a fire.

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12 An appliance is usually a single or crew cab four wheel drive truck or utility with water or foam storage capacity for fire suppression.
In addition, petrol driven pumps fixed to existing appliances are being replaced with diesel driven pumps, and 14 specialised appliances with a minimum 3000 litre water carrying capacity are to be progressively purchased over the same period.

3. What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

What is an i-Zone Area

Volunteer RFBs typically operate outside of urban fire brigade areas. However, due to population growth and urban sprawl, communities previously serviced by a rural brigade may now require the support of an interface, or i-Zone brigade.

'i-Zone' is the term used to describe the 'Interface Zone'; a mix of undeveloped (and therefore vegetated) land and the spread of human habitation. i-Zones are situated where residential areas are encroaching into adjacent bushland areas, due to the increase in the number of high-density rural residential properties and the addition of well-developed commercial centres in some.

Conditions in such areas are complex, requiring fire fighters from urban and auxiliary services or volunteer rural brigades to work closely together.

Managing Risks in the i-Zone

Measures taken by the State Government to manage fire risk in i-Zone areas include the identification and mapping of all i-Zone areas in Queensland, local area plans for response, and the recruitment of ten i-Zone training officers to specialise in training volunteers and working with communities situated in i-Zone areas.

Additionally, topographical atlases, mapping resources, electronic and forms-based incident management systems (based on the nationally accepted Australian Inter-agency Incident Management System (AIIMS)) have been developed specifically for response in i-Zone areas. Training in the AIIMS system is provided to Rural Volunteer First and Second Officers.

Major exercises are undertaken at least annually to practice incident management and bushfire response in i-Zone areas so that the relationship between RFBs and QFRS Incident Management Teams is well understood.

In addition, QFRS utilises both VHF and UHF radios. The network of standalone VHF repeaters allows for a command channel that does not interfere with the normal Firecom radio channels. The VHF network is effective in bushfire situations, whereas the UHF network is effective around buildings.

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13 Auxiliary fire fighters are paid, part time fire fighters.
A key benefit of having two distinct networks is that the UHF radios allow QFRS to communicate with PPBs which use their own private vehicles and only have CB radios.

**A combined and co-ordinated approach**

QFRS understands the importance of a combined and coordinated response to emergency incidents. It recognises the effect that urban encroachment has on RFBs and has taken a number of specific steps to respond to, manage and suppress major natural disasters (including bushfires) in i-Zone areas.

QFRS consistently strives for a high level of cohesiveness between permanent urban and volunteer rural entities, with a view to increasing the overall effectiveness of dealing with significant wildfire events threatening high density areas, and to ensure that RFBs are supported in the services that they provide.

In areas outside the Brisbane region, between 7 and 23 per cent of all incidents attended by urban crews are outside designated urban districts.

Because of the increased population density, and therefore a greater potential for loss of life, some i-Zone areas require stations to be staffed by auxiliaries as well as volunteer members of the local RFB. Examples of these combined service delivery stations are at Jimboomba, Elliott Heads and Agnes Waters.

For example, at Elliott Heads in the Bundaberg-Burnett region, an integrated service delivery model has been necessary where services have expanded to encompass areas serviced jointly by urban and rural brigades. With urban development patterns, the existing rural services could no longer effectively service their communities and so a mixed model of service delivery was developed to address the needs of the area.

Where this occurs, RFBs may remain in situ and provide fire fighting capacity in the bush areas, while urban crews provide fire fighting capacity for structural fires. Both rural and urban crews will work collaboratively when the need arises.

Similar mixed service delivery demands associated with population growth are arising in the western corridor-Toowoomba region, in the Gold and Sunshine Coast hinterlands and other coastal fringe developing areas, and forward planning is in place to address the emerging needs.

In these areas, the practice is for the State to raise an urban fire levy for the township areas and for the local governments to provide direct funding support to volunteer RFBs.

Some i-Zone areas serviced by RFBs are 'backed up' by permanent urban station resources. The Samford area is an example of an i-Zone where the RFB is fully supported by two 24 hour, 7 day, permanently staffed urban stations at Eatons Hill and Arana Hills.
4. How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

The State Government recognises that there is an increasing demand for RFB services associated with a number of factors.

The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) reports that climate change and drought are expected to have an extensive impact on the emergency response sector, especially as these factors lead to changes in the frequency and duration of bushfires and impact on water availability for fire fighting. This is borne out by the increasing number of incidents outside urban boundaries in recent years that have required a more frequent response by some brigades.

Population growth in Queensland and the resultant urban sprawl has meant that additional training in the containment of structural fires is required by some rural brigade members and has highlighted the need for the future construction of combined urban-rural stations where previously there has been only a rural station. This also means that some brigades have a changing risk profile.

This increased demand comes in the face of a general decline in the number of hours given by volunteers due to competing business and family obligations. Volunteers cite concerns about the possible negative impacts of climate change on the frequency and severity of large fires which would inevitably require greater demands on their time.

All of these factors have a large impact, particularly during protracted bushfires in the summer months, increasing the demands made on RFBs and presenting a challenge to the community and all levels of government to manage the demand.

Strategies adopted by the State to manage the demands made on RFBs include:

- Risk profiling of brigades categories in light of emerging issues such as local landscape, infrastructure, community profile, population growth and volunteer numbers
- Data collection on RFB activities such as resourcing levels (information on funding levels achieved by RFBs is encouraged but not systematically achieved)
- Forward planning processes to address the risk profiles and promote adequate resourcing and equipment provided to brigades
- Equipment monitoring (asset maintenance and management)
- A Volunteer Management Strategy
- A Volunteer Learning and Development Framework to ensure accessible and contemporary training for volunteers
- Strategies for retention of volunteers
- State-wide coordination of fire management through the work of the Queensland Interdepartmental Committee on Bushfires
- Support to Fire Management Groups established at the local level
- Aerial support for fire spotting and rapid response
- National partnership agreements for aerial resource sharing
- Interstate agreements for the deployment of fire fighting resources
- Hazard reduction and burn off to reduce the risk of fire
- Community Education

**Risk profiles of RFBs**

Rural Operations has profiled and consequently created a new set of RFB categories that identifies the risks faced across each type of brigade to assist with managing the demands placed on them. A Rural Operations Risk Register has been developed, along with a Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business plans which include strategies that identify and address key risk areas.

Quarterly Performance Reviews and Area/Regional Reporting processes are key regional area priorities that have been implemented to ensure information about risk, level of activity and brigade numbers inform effective decision making. Brigades are requested to provide these reports to their Area Offices to assist with risk identification and forward planning (although RFBs are strongly encouraged to provide these reports, participation in these reporting processes cannot be forced upon RFBs).

**Data collection on RFB activities**

The Quarterly Performance Reports and Area/Regional Reporting processes are aimed at capturing a range of data in relation to the level of activity of RFBs, including:
- the brigades in receipt of an RFL
- the number of members and brigade membership type
- member training qualifications
- allocation of protective clothing
- the number and type of incidents attended by brigades
- appliances and other equipment allocation
- whether or not the RFB has a twelve month operational plan details
- three year Activity plan details

Rural Operations are actively working with RFBs to encourage participation in this reporting process. The information captured determines the number of State funded vehicles and other equipment required and indicates the required allocation of resources based on the level of risk and need. The level of RFB activity revealed by this data dictates the level of training required and so training targets can be set and monitored for each RFB.

In addition, ongoing and regular consultation occurs between the RFBAQ, RFBs and Rural Operations by way of correspondence, consultative forums and regular meetings at regional levels to ensure that risks and issues are identified and communicated effectively, and that forward planning exercises reflect current information.

RFBs are requested to submit an incident report after attendance at an incident so that information can be collected about the causes, performance and activity that took place. The information from these reports is used to draw a picture of how a brigade is performing and highlight any gaps in service delivery, for example caused by a shortage of available members to respond or a malfunction in equipment. This fosters
a continuous improvement approach. A review has been conducted of the Brigade Incident Reporting System, taking into account feedback received from brigade members regarding the nature of the system, the form itself and the lodgement process. The review indicated that a more user friendly form and an option to lodge the form on-line would reduce bureaucracy and the administrative burden on brigades. Therefore, an amended form and an on-line process for lodgement are shortly to be implemented.

All of the information collected assists in forward planning for the State's response to rural fire. Additionally, the collection of the data enables systematic communication between brigades and Rural Operations.

**Forward planning processes for the management of rural fires**

Forward planning processes encompass hazard reduction and resource identification for fire management predominantly at the local level, with oversight from regional and State levels.

In preparation for forthcoming bushfire seasons, and to ensure that demands on RFBs are able to be measured, the State conducts a range of exercises at the regional level to test systems, processes and planning in order to ensure operational readiness. The focus of the 2009 exercises was to ensure that appropriate and adequate incident information was provided to communities during operations and incidents.

To enable forward planning and address demand management issues, the State established the Wildfire Mitigation Initiative in 2008. The initiative aims for a unified approach to wildfire risk mitigation and planning. The key drivers are to prepare communities, reduce the risk and impact of wildfires, and inform fire fighting operations.

The key deliverables of the Wildfire Mitigation Initiative encompass the activities of all community members in rural areas and include:

- Community participation in Bushfire Prepared Communities programs
- Identification and education about landowners' and occupiers' (both public and private) fire management responsibilities
- Community's preparedness for wildfire
- Strategic fuel management (hazard reduction and burn off)
- Education about activation levels for Wildfire Alert, including the verification of availability of RFB crews and the cessation of permits

The outcome of this initiative is minimisation of risk of fire to the public and fire fighters by reducing the potential impact of wildfires, and to provide for effective community and inter-agency cooperation and coordination of wildfire mitigation management.

Implementation of the Wildfire Mitigation initiative is incorporated into the Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business plans to enable appropriate risk management and forward planning by the State.
**Equipment (asset maintenance and management)**

RFBs monitor the condition and safety of their buildings and equipment and report this information through the planning framework provided for by Rural Operations.

Additionally, RFBs are required to ensure annual safety inspections for appliances are conducted by qualified technicians, and provide a copy of the resulting safety certificate to the nearest Area Office of Rural Operations.

**A Volunteer Management Strategy**

To assist with management of its emergency services volunteers, and meet the demands placed on them, DCS developed a Volunteer Management Strategy which consists of 53 initiatives to assist with recruitment, support, training, management, retention and resourcing.

Key initiatives within the Volunteer Management Strategy for volunteer fire fighters include:

- development of new membership roles for the RFS
- enhanced leadership for volunteers
- e-Learning initiatives to promote flexible learning options
- review and implementation of exit interviews for volunteers
- whole-of-Department volunteer survey including RFS volunteers
- review of grants and subsidy programs for volunteers
- investigating the feasibility of a volunteer passport that will allow qualifications and skills to be recognised throughout Australia

**The Volunteer Learning and Development Framework**

Rural Operations provides a Volunteer Learning and Development Framework (VLDF) to assist RFBs to align the roles of members with the programs available under the VLDF. Suggested training targets are set against the resources assigned to each brigade. The level of training indicated within the framework correlates with the number of members in the brigade and the inherent risk levels in the local area.

The availability of volunteers to engage in training events is dependent on the time that volunteers have available. This contributes to limitations in closing the training gap. Therefore, flexible learning methodologies have been introduced to assist the volunteers.

Additionally, a range of different media are available for training delivery, including face to face training, workbooks, podcasts, access to Volunteer Conference presentations via DVD, and First Officer training via a Management Program and online courses. The flexible approach to the provision of training programs aims to encourage and support self-directed learning and reduce the demand on volunteer time.
Training provided to volunteers

Fire is a powerful and unpredictable force so it is essential that volunteer fire fighters maintain a high level of preparedness in order to ensure safe, effective and efficient work practices and suppression methods to fight fires.

To facilitate this, additional Brigade Training and Support Officers have been engaged, bringing the total number across the State to 22, and volunteer training targets have been established. Brigade First Officers are also provided with management training. Additionally, a system to capture the level of training being delivered has been implemented, allowing Rural Operations to program training where it is needed.

Rural Operations recognises that training rural volunteers is one of the most significant issues facing the organisation, relating directly to the effective management of demands on RFBs.

The safety of volunteers is of the utmost importance and seen as a joint responsibility between Rural Operations and the volunteer. Rural Operations ensures that each volunteer receives relevant and ongoing training and the volunteer ensures that the training that is offered is undertaken on a regular basis.

Higher turn-over rates and shorter periods of participation of rural fire fighters are currently being experienced. Contributing factors include work and family needs, moving away from the area, dissatisfaction with the role of volunteer, age and health. As a result, basic training is provided to a larger group of people, and ongoing refresher training is required for volunteers who may move in and out of active volunteer service over a number of years.

In some areas, brigade members may assist in activities other than fire fighting and prevention, such as Road Crash Rescue and swift water rescue. Additional training for these activities is provided. Further, training in workplace health and safety is provided on an ongoing basis.

Significant progress has been made in recent years to increase the number of trained rural volunteer fire fighters and support the maintenance of their skills and competency levels. Improvements include:

- upgraded volunteer training programs
- on-line training materials
- enhanced Volunteer Portal to provide greater accessibility.

In particular, a focus on training over the past two years has seen the number of rural volunteers who hold firefighter status increase from 6,500 in June 2008 to 9,478 in February 2010, an increase of around 2900 in less than 2 years.

The Volunteer Portal provides volunteers with information on training, operational doctrine, equipment information and upcoming event details. It is also a resource that volunteers can use to network with each other.
Also available on the Volunteer Portal is the ‘Map Shop’. Through the Map Shop, volunteers can access administrative and operational maps to support planning and response. These maps provide cadastral information for issuing permits to light fire as well as topographic information and aerial imagery.

In addition, Rural Operations has set training targets. This is reported on by regions/areas through the Quarterly Performance Report. This allows Rural Operations to identify any training gaps and focus training on the area of greatest risk/need.

**Community Educators**

In addition to base funding and election commitment funding, a Bushfire Community Training Package (the Package) has recently been funded by State Government to create a number of temporary full-time staff positions within Rural Operations to support the development of a network of Volunteer Community Education Officers (VCEs).

The budget allocation for the Package is $4.6 million over five years. The outcome sought is better prepared communities in light of the expected increase in bushfires as a result of higher temperatures and drier conditions associated with climate change. The Package is a practical way to improve community awareness of bushfire risk and thereby will assist communities to adapt to climate variability due to climate change.

The role of VCEs is to increase bushfire preparedness and awareness within communities of the changing nature of bushfire risk in Queensland.

As part of the Package, Mitigation Education Officers (MEO) will be engaged in 2010 to support and develop the network of VCEs and provide bushfire education to Queensland communities.

The function of VCEs and MEOs is coordinated by Rural Operations. MEOs will be based around the State with one position in each of the areas of Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Maryborough, Toowoomba and Beenleigh.

**Community Education**

The *Bushfire Prepared Communities* education program is delivered by Rural Operations staff and volunteers at community forums and by the distribution of brochures. The program raises awareness within the community about how to keep properties safe from fire and how to reduce the risk of fire.
Geographic Information System (GIS) and Mapping:

The Total Operational Mapping (TOM) system has been developed by the GIS Unit, within QFRS, to deliver a wide range of information including near live incidents, boundaries, roads, i-Zone and bushfire risk. Whole of Government imagery, property boundaries, vegetation, traffic cameras and other information are also displayed in the system, and are combined with Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) radar, cyclone tracks, river gauges and other general weather information. Some local government data is available as well. The system also allows for mapping from Aircraft to provide near live situational awareness and intelligence for planning and operation purposes during incidents.

Rural Operations are currently scoping the potential for the information from TOM to be accessible through the Volunteer Portal.

The GIS Unit also provides a repository for brigades to send locally collected information such as fire breaks, water points and access tracks to be added to customised mapping products for brigades and fire wardens. The process for delivering and updating information collected by brigades is constantly being improved.

Advice and training products on how to use GIS devices and other mapping products such as 'Ozi-Explorer', commonly used by rural fire brigades, is provided and RFB access to information meets data licensing requirements.

The Queensland Interdepartmental Committee on Bushfires

As a result of recommendations from a bushfire audit in 1994\(^{14}\), the Queensland Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) on Bushfires was established. The Assistant Commissioner of Rural Operations is the Chair of the IDC and membership includes DERM (including Queensland Parks and Wildlife and Forestry Plantations Queensland); the Department of Transport and Main Roads; Queensland Police Service (QPS); QR Limited; the Local Government Association of Queensland; Brisbane City Council and the Bureau of Meteorology.

The key purpose of the IDC is to provide a forum for the coordination of government policy and procedures relating to rural fire management in order to achieve a consistent and comprehensive approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities.

A specific outcome of the work of the IDC is the numerous training exercises that occur each year. For example, a joint Australasian Inter-service Incident Management Training occurs with stakeholders to ensure that State agencies can work effectively together, drawing upon the resources of each, during a major incident. In addition, the IDC has instigated interagency training exercises incorporating real-life hazard reduction activities.

The IDC is supported by several IDC sub-committees that address the specific issues of training, communications, environmental issues and operations.

\(^{14}\) A Bushfire Audit, examined Queensland’s preparedness for major bushfires that occurred in Queensland and New South Wales in 1994.
The IDC is also supported by Regional IDCs that carry out practical implementation of the IDC initiatives at the regional level. The Regional IDCs also act as a conduit for information transfer between the State IDC and Fire Management Groups established at the local level.

**Fire Management Groups**

Historically, a number of groups at the local level in various areas of Queensland have come together to consider, identify and address local fire management issues. To incorporate these groups into the IDC framework and provide for a systematic flow of information, these groups have collectively been named Fire Management Groups (FMG). The FMGs ensure a cooperative approach between the community, RFBs, local governments and the State, so that bushfire management is coordinated at the local level.

An FMG may undertake activities such as joint fire management planning, prescribed burning and hazard reduction, community education and risk mitigation.

FMGs are traditionally chaired either by a local landowner or RFB volunteer, Rural Operations Officer or a representative of government agencies. FMGs work closely with the Regional IDCs to ensure that local fire management is consistent with regional priorities.

The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the State IDC, the Regional IDCs, IDC sub groups and the FMGs.

![Diagram](image)

Legend: FNR (Far North Region); NR (Northern Region); CR (Central Region); NCR (North Coast Region), SWR (South West Region); SE (South East Region) and BR (Brisbane Region).

**The Black Saturday Bushfires - Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Inquiry: Queensland Interdepartmental Committee**

In addition to the Queensland Bushfires IDC, a further IDC has been set up in relation to the findings of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The role of this IDC is to guide and oversee the development and implementation of Queensland’s response to recommendations arising from the Commission.
Membership includes the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Treasury, the Department of Communities, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, DERM, QPS and Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

The IDC will assess the applicability of the Commission’s recommendations to Queensland, particularly with respect to warnings, information, relocation, the stay or go policy, risk and refuge, emergency calls and the Commonwealth response to major emergencies, and provide advice in the development of Whole of Government policy to address implications for Queensland.

Aerial Operations

Queensland does not typically experience long and widespread fire events requiring a campaign-like response, however, in a major fire event all of the QFRS resources may be utilised for a response to bushfires.

QFRS engages aerial resources to support ground crews by detecting the nature and extent of bushfires earlier, allowing a quicker response to fires and earlier containment of fires. The flow-on effect of this is less environmental damage, reduced risk to neighbouring areas and reduced drain on full time and volunteer resources.

The QFRS procures the services of three water bombing Helitack helicopters for each bushfire season. These aircraft are based at Archerfield airport during the fire season and are available to assist and support ground crews for the rapid response to wildfire within Queensland. The Helitack helicopters are fitted with external 900 litre tanks for water bombing but are also capable of carrying out surveillance and reconnaissance flights to support ground operations.

Throughout Queensland, there is a system of “call when needed” contracted aircraft of various types for air observation or water bombing. This provides a state-wide register enabling air operations capability and the timely deployment of aerial resources to incidents through aerial surveillance, reconnaissance and water bombing capability. This register operates for the duration of the fire season and currently includes 26 commercial operators (17 rotary winged and 9 fixed winged contractors) with 45 rotary aircraft and 25 fixed winged aircraft.

Aerial support was provided during bushfire activity in September and October 2009 which saw fires burning across 17 regional council boundaries from Barcaldine in the West, Townsville in the North and the Gold Coast in the South.

Without that aerial support land and property losses would have been much higher. For example, it is estimated that aerial response saved between 30 and 50 homes in the Mt Archer fires that threatened eastern Rockhampton in September 2009.

The QFRS has 64 staff (32 urban and 32 rural) trained in aerial operations across the State who undertake pre-season exercises in each region.
State Partnership agreements for aerial support

Queensland is a member of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), which is responsible for the national coordination of resources and sharing of aerial firefighting equipment between Australian states and territories. Should an agency require additional air support, there is provision for the movement of these resources interstate as required.

**Interstate agreements for fire fighters**

An interstate cooperative arrangement exists between fire services in Australia to deploy additional fire fighting resources when called upon. For example, over 100 New South Wales fire personnel were deployed to assist in response and investigation during the Mt Archer fires.

Measures such as aerial response and the interstate agreements with other fire services are further examples of the collaborative approach that the State government takes to fighting fires and sharing resources to better manage the drain on funding sources. This in turn reduces the impact and duration on volunteer resources and enables volunteers to get back to their day to day lives more rapidly.

**Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre**

The Queensland Government, through QFRS, has been an active partner of the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) since its inception in 2003.

The Bushfire CRC was established by fire and land management agencies and research partners in Australia and New Zealand. Its objective is a better understanding of the social, economic and environmental aspects of bushfires. This coordinated, multi-disciplinary research program has delivered practical benefits to the fire and land management industry and the wider economy and society.

Key research programs that the Bushfire CRC has embarked on relate to: ‘Safe Prevention, Preparation and Suppression’; ‘Fire in the Landscape’; ‘Community Self-Sufficiency for Fire Safety’; ‘Protection of People and Property’. In addition, the Bushfire CRC has also undertaken research into the issues of smoke management, fire fighter health, safety and fitness and education and training.

The outcome of the research is increased knowledge for Queensland’s Rural Fire Service as well as the Queensland community. To this end, the QFRS has been an active partner of the Bushfire CRC over the last seven years and provides funding and in-kind support.

The Bushfire CRC is currently conducting research into matters arising as a result of Victoria’s devastating bushfires and the subsequent Royal Commission Inquiry.
Hazard reduction and burn off

The approach to fire hazard reduction is a collaborative one for the community and local and state governments. The Permit to Burn system is authorised under the FRSA and has been established to aid landholders, communities and industry to use fire as a land management tool.

Burn off at the local level

Individual landholders are responsible for fire hazard reduction on their own properties. To prevent and limit the onset of wildfires, QFRS maintains control over the lighting of fires. A well established pre-fire regime is a cost effective and efficient method of fire control and suppression.

Landowners wanting to conduct hazard reduction by way of burning an area greater than two square metres must obtain a Permit to Light Fire from their local Fire Warden (More information on Fire Wardens and their role is contained in Chapter 6 of this submission).

Permits to Light Fires

The authority for a Permit to Light Fire is provided for under section 65 of the FRSA. A Permit determines the conditions under which a fire can be lit. Fire Wardens and Chief Fire Wardens have the authority under the FRSA to impose additional restrictions or cancel permits to ensure the safe use of fire in Queensland.

Local Government’s role

Most rural or regional shire councils have a counter-disaster role to play, including a limited fire management responsibility. These councils rely primarily on their RFBs for wildfire suppression.

Several larger metropolitan councils (such as Brisbane City Council which is responsible for 22,000 hectares of urban bushland) are the owners or trustees of urban bushland) and have a significant fire management responsibility.

Urban bushland frequently has high levels of recreational and unauthorised use and presents an extreme urban interface risk, and so those relevant councils have developed a limited fire management capacity of their own to carry out prescribed burning and assist in wildfire response. Partnership arrangements exist with QFRS for assistance in this regard.

Most local governments in Queensland have by-laws in relation to individuals reducing hazards on their own land. Local laws may regulate fires that are consistent with the provisions of the FRSA pursuant to section 31 of the LGA\textsuperscript{15}. Councils may regulate the banning or lighting of fires on land under their control (eg roads, parks etc).

A local law may not regulate fires authorised under a permit or notice issued by the Commissioner, fire officer or fire warden.

\textsuperscript{15} Edition 4 of the \textit{Local Law Digest}
Management of Fire Hazards on State Government Land

The State Government, through the land management of DERM, is responsible for fire management of approximately 1.3 million hectares of land across Queensland. The operational delivery of fire management within these lands is shared between:

- The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) – 10.25 million hectares of parks and forests
- Forest Plantations Queensland (FPQ) – 2.25 million hectares of forest available for commercial timber harvesting
- State Land Asset Management Business Unit – 1 million hectares of Unallocated State land (USL)

Holders of certain categories of lease or permit over parcels of land within the above holdings also have fire management responsibilities and the State works with these entities in that regard.

The State works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the fire management of many areas of State controlled land. The State also works with landholders and local communities on adjoining lands. These working partnerships with various sectors of the community aids in developing and maintaining cooperative arrangements with stakeholders, and assists in resolving issues associated with hazard reduction, fire lines and wildfire suppression.

An interagency protocol exists between QFRS and DERM to clarify and guide cooperative fire management arrangements between the State agencies and ensure a consistent approach to the business needs of State and community expectations about fire risk management.

DERM has a comprehensive Fire Management System which guides its fire program and provides processes and standards to assist planning and operational delivery.

The planned use of fire is one of the major management tools used by the State to protect life and property in national parks, conservation parks, resource reserves and forest reserves and USL.

To provide a response capability to wildfires and carry out its planned burn off programs the DERM has approximately 700 fire-trained staff and about 165 light attack and 30 medium attack fire appliances. Major investment has also been made by DERM into improving its VHF radio network which is its primary means of emergency communication during fire operations.

A review of the DERM fire training program for staff was conducted in April 2009 and a comprehensive schedule of basic, advanced and specialist fire crew, fire leader, fire planning and incident management training has been put in place. All staff are required to be fully trained and meet a range of minimum requirements before they can attend a fire.
Partnership between RFBs and the State

RFBs assist State government entities (when called upon) to conduct small or large scale hazard reduction within the brigade boundaries.

Examples of hazard reduction burns that RFBs and QFRS conducted together in 2009 include the following:

- Beerburrum - State Plantation Forest land
- Bushland Beach - Unallocated State Land
- Gumlow - Unallocated State Land
- Rollingstone - National Parks land
- Cape Upstart - Unallocated State Land
- Townsville Town Cannon - local government and National Parks land
- Mona Mona - National Parks land
- Roadsides between Kuranda and Mareeba - Department of Transport and Main Roads land
- Gordonvale - land owned by the State Government, local government, and private landholders
- Cape York Aerial Programme

This kind of collaborative activity provides an opportunity to practice communication exercises on the fire ground. Services provided in this way may attract a donation or fee for service, negotiated by the RFB.

5. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

The Government is committed to its rural fire volunteers, recognises the importance of volunteers within the wider community, and values the time and energy that volunteers donate to serving their communities.

Local Government Funds

RFL monies are collected from property owners in some local government areas to support the activities of rural fire brigades based on brigade risk and need. Funds, (other than RFL, cash and in-kind contributions by local governments) which are raised or donated by local communities, do not 'belong' to the State and therefore are not consolidated within the department's financial statements. RFLs made to RFBs by local governments are donated under the LGA and therefore accountability rests with the local government from which these contributions are made.

State Government Funds

Under the FRSA the QFRS Commissioner has limited control over the affairs of RFBs and this control is exercised primarily for operational management and the rules under which RFBs operate. Under the same legislation, the Chief Executive of DCS is responsible for the efficiency of RFBs and may provide training and other assistance
to them. Beyond that obligation the Government does not have any rights or control over the financial resources of brigades obtained through locally raised levies or donations. However, Rural Operations requests certain information to be provided so that effective planning, resourcing, training and risk management can be undertaken in preparation for each fire season.

There are no provisions in the Financial Accountability Act 2009 or any regulations that make RFBs accountable to State government for the use of the revenues which are raised by them or by their local governments. Neither are RFBs subject to requirements under the Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982.

Since there is no legislative basis to force brigades to account for the grants or funding support they receive, Government does not enforce accountability. However, the State acknowledges that brigades have a duty of care to members and the management of brigade revenues, as part of their responsibility to the community that they serve.

**Responsibility for RFB affairs**

RFBs are largely responsible for their own affairs in terms of financial management, internal management, fund raising and community involvement. Funds that are predominately sourced from fundraising and donations are held and managed by individual brigades.

There are no provisions in the Financial Accountability Act 2009 or any regulations that make RFBs accountable to State government for the use of the revenues which are raised by them or by their local governments, nor are RFBs subject to requirements under the Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982.

Since there is no legislative basis to compel brigades to account for the grants or funding support they receive, Government does not enforce accountability. However, brigades have a duty of care in relation to the management of brigade revenues, as part of their responsibility to the community that they serve.

*Report to Parliament No. 3 for 2008, Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland, Auditor-General of Queensland*

An Auditor-General's report (the Report) on rural fire management, tabled in Parliament on 15 May 2008, considered whether suitable systems were operating to ensure the efficient and effective management of rural fires, including whether RFBs were adequately resourced.

The Report raised concerns about the status of RFBs and their relationship with QFRS, stating that RFBs appear to be managed as separate entities with their own financial accounts operating independently of QFRS whereas the legislation provides for RFBS to be part of the QFRS structure, with QFRS responsible for the liabilities of those brigades.
Rural Operations established a Steering Committee to review all of the recommendations contained in the Report and has implemented a number of improvements, including some of the systems and processes outlined in this submission.

With respect to Recommendations 7, 8 and 9, DCS advised the Queensland Audit Office (QAO) in April 2009 that while the department acknowledges that it plays a governance role for RFBs with respect to matters such as training, equipment, policies and procedures, there is no legislative head of power or obligation that requires an RFB to be accountable to the department for its individual financial affairs.

While the Chief Executive of DCS is responsible for the efficiency of RFBs (Section 85 of the FRSA), beyond this obligation neither the department nor QFRS appears to have any rights or control over the financial resources of RFBs.

Funds, other than rural fire levies and cash or in-kind contributions by location governments which are predominantly obtained via local fundraising activities and donations, are not considered material and therefore are not consolidated with the department's financial statements. The QFRS does provide support and guidance to RFBs on appropriate management of those funds in order to ensure that sound governance principles are adhered to.

With respect to rural fire levies and cash or in-kind contributions made by local governments to RFBs, it is considered by the department that accountability for these contributions, which are raised by the local government under the Local Government Act 1993, rests entirely with the local government that raises the rates or levies from which these contributions are made. There is case law that supports the proposition that this money is subject to a statutory trust for the purpose that it was collected and the 'trustee' of this trust is the Council (Bathurst City Council v PWC Properties (1998) 195 CLR566).

The QFRS has introduced Local Area Finance Committees (LAFCs) to complement Council's role by providing a framework for the administration of the levies collected, however, by law this cannot remove the accountability for the levy raised as this stays with the council. (see page 44 for more about LAFCs)

The QFRS acknowledges that it plays a support role in providing information and working with local governments to ensure that RFB monies are spent in an appropriate and accountable manner in the provision of fire services to the local community.

Accordingly, the support provided to brigades to manage their funding, including reporting and accounting processes has been enhanced through the Rural Fire Brigade Manual and through the administrative support provided by LAFCs.

The Rural Fire Brigade Manual is a support tool that contains guidelines on financial and audit requirements and templates for operational and management plans. These guidelines are provided to assist RFBs in their financial management and provide a framework for maintenance, reporting and planning. For example, guidelines are provided for brigades that receive an RFL to prepare a copy of their three year management and one year operational plans.
Rural Operations assists each RFB to prepare an annual budget. This helps brigades to know what funds are needed to meet not only operational requirements, but also capital requirements.

Brigades are requested to submit reports of incidents attended and injuries sustained by members (through the Brigade Incident Reporting System), and obtain annual safety certificates for appliances. The focus of the reporting process is on operational and incident management so that RFBs are aware of the risks in their local area and can plan accordingly.

Minimum training requirements are set for brigade members. Additionally role descriptors are currently being developed by Rural Operations for the use of chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers which outline the duties and responsibilities of each role and also specify highly desirable requirements of candidates. Consultation on the role descriptors is expected to be conducted with the RFBAQ prior to release.

DCS is of the view that the measures taken to support RFBs, as outlined above, address recommendations 7, 8 and 9 in the Report and has requested that the QAO reconsider its position and provide advice accordingly. To date no advice has been received.

A summary of the recommendations contained in the Report, and the corresponding actions undertaken by QFRS is at Attachment Three.

**Local Area Finance Committees**

LAFCs have been established at the local level in some communities to assist RFBs to enhance their accountability measures and governance. They are also aimed at assisting local councils, who may have as many as 60 RFBs within their boundaries, to effectively administer separate levy rates for each RFB. While LAFCs are a complement to the role of council’s, by law they do not remove the accountability for the levy raised from the council.

LAFCs are comprised of representatives of RFBs, local councils and QFRS. The objective of an LAFC is to reduce the administrative burden on volunteers, so that they can concentrate on bushfire-related activities. For example, LAFCs may assist RFBs to prepare an annual budget with the aim of ensuring a guaranteed level of funding for brigades to meet not only operational requirements but capital requirements.

LAFCs may also submit a proposal on behalf of the RFB to the local council for a rural fire levy to be charged to rateable properties for that year. Once the levy has been applied and collected by Councils, the levy funds will be distributed by the LAFCs to the brigades in line with their budget.

By examining operational and financial issues facing a group of brigades in a particular local government area, LAFCs can facilitate the collection and distribution of the levies based on the actual operational and financial needs of the brigades.
Some RFBs have expressed concern about establishing an LAFC. Those RFBs who have raised concerns have cited the potential for an increased administrative workload, onerous reporting requirements and the potential for funding provided by local governments to be reduced.

However, the establishment of LAFCs by RFBs in local government areas is voluntary and where LAFCs currently exist there has been a reduction in the administrative workload for brigades. This is because LAFCs undertake negotiations and discussions with local governments on behalf of member RFBs, negating the need for individual RFBs to singularly approach local governments. The assistance that is provided by LAFCs to their member RFBs in budgeting and planning has resulted in a more appropriate and equitable distribution of funding (primarily determined by the annual budgets submitted by individual brigades).

Consultation is being conducted by QFRS with brigades who do not have LAFCs and may wish to establish such committees in their local areas.

6. **What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?**

Section 75 of the FRSA empowers the Commissioner to appoint such number of Chief Fire Wardens and Fire Wardens as the Commissioner thinks necessary or expedient for the purposes of the FRSA.

There are currently 2418 Fire Wardens in Queensland operating in 227 Chief Fire Warden Districts. Although public service officers, fire officers and police officers may undertake the role, Chief Fire Wardens and Fire Wardens are predominantly volunteers.
The Role of Fire Wardens

Fire Wardens have a pivotal role in addressing changing community attitudes to the use of fire, particularly in higher density population areas. The future impacts of climate change, population growth and changing societal values regarding smoke and environmental burning will mean that the skills of Fire Wardens will remain vital.

Fire Wardens are generally responsible for managing the use of fire in rural areas for a range of management outcomes, including hazard and fire risk reduction, through the issuing of ‘Permits to Light Fire’ and a prohibition on lighting fires during extreme conditions.

Landowners wanting to conduct hazard reduction by way of burning an area greater than two square metres must obtain a Permit to Light Fire from their local Fire Warden. All ‘Permits to Light Fire’ determine the conditions under which a fire can be lit. Approximately 15,000 Permits to Light Fire are issued by Fire Wardens to Queensland landholders each year.

Fire Wardens teach members of their communities how to responsibly prepare their properties against the threat of bushfires. In addition they engage with communities to ensure that property owners participate in responsible burning to reduce the threat of fire in their local areas.

Powers of a Fire Warden

Under Section 76 of the FRSA, the powers of a Chief Fire Warden or Fire Warden are the same as those of an authorised fire officer subject to any limitation imposed by the Commissioner, and the Commissioner may also direct a chief fire warden or a fire warden to discharge functions in addition to those imposed by the FRSA.

Fire Wardens must comply with certain codes of practice and directions by the Commissioner.

Fire Wardens and Chief Fire Wardens have the authority to impose additional fire restrictions on the local community or cancel permits, to ensure the safe use of fire.

2006 Review of the Fire Warden’s Role

A review of the Fire Warden role and the Permit to Light Fire system was undertaken in 2006 by Rural Operations, which included a survey conducted by the Volunteerism Project Team of the Bushfire CRC.

The objective of the review was to ensure that Rural Operations has the capacity to lead best practice in the proactive use of fire and to assess whether the role of Fire Wardens remained contemporary.

The survey results indicated that Fire Wardens tend to be long serving (54% more than 10 years) and revealed that a future challenge for Rural Operations is to ensure that teaching and transfer of knowledge occurs between older or retiring fire wardens.
to new recruits. Fire Wardens reported participation in an average of some 13 hours per month on their volunteer duties, primarily in prevention activities.

**Recommendations from the Review**

The review highlighted a number of areas for improvement to strengthen the Fire Warden role including:

- Appointment of Rural Operations Area Directors as Chief Fire Wardens to ensure consistent availability and expertise
- The creation of a Permit to Light Fire zoning system to effectively manage the State’s diverse geographic spread and variations in the need to use fire as a hazard reduction
- Declared fire season zones to allow for improved management of both Permits to Light Fire and the incidence of unauthorised fire
- Change to Commissioner’s notifications in order to remove certain exemptions to Permit to Light fires (for example, the burning of a beast and the burning of sawmill waste), to control the lighting of fire during the declared fire season, and provide a coordinated restriction on the issue of Permits thereby reducing the need to implement a fire ban during the declared fire season
- Ensure that legislative change required as a result of implementation is effected

An implementation plan, adopting all of the recommendations, is currently being scoped and staged implementation of improvements will begin in 2010.

In addition, feasibility studies are being conducted for the creation of a centralised system for issue of permits. The aim of a centralised system would be to enable more effective management in the areas of reporting, data collection and auditing of issued permits. A centralised system will also facilitate dissemination of fire ban information and enhanced capacity to restrict permits during fire bans.

7. **Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?**

While there have been many innovations and changes to the operation of rural fire services in the past 150 years, the willingness of Queenslanders to help each other through tough times, even if it means putting their own lives on the line, remains unchanged. This section outlines some further key work being done to ensure the rural fire service in Queensland continues to thrive to protect rural communities from the threat of bushfire, and some of the challenges involved in doing so.

**Rural and Remote Communities**

Rural and remote communities typically have a low population dispersed over broader land areas compared to the higher population densities of cities and urban towns. The greatest challenge to emergency services delivery by volunteers in rural and remote communities is building capacity for required functions with fewer volunteers within small communities.
The dwindling populations of some rural and remote communities in Queensland have resulted in some communities finding it difficult to source enough members to operate multiple volunteer emergency services (such as SES, Rural Fire Service and Community First Responders for ambulance services), thereby exposing the risk of collapse of one or more of the local groups. The ESU model has proved particularly beneficial in remote communities.

All of these factors have a large impact, particularly during protracted bushfires in the summer months, and present a challenge to QFRS in addressing the increasing demands on the State's fire services.

Significant activity has been undertaken by various organisations in Australia, including DCS, in recent years to strengthen the capacity of the volunteer pool and to raise awareness of the value that the community places in their volunteers.

**Constraints on volunteers' time**

The greatest constraint for rural volunteers is time; time to participate in fire hazard reduction, community education and fighting the fires themselves. In PPBs in particular, time provided in volunteer services means time away from family, making a living and tending properties.

Additionally, the amount of time given by volunteers is declining and volunteers are not always available for extended periods of time. For example, employees may be released by their companies to attend fire fighting volunteer duties for a day or two, but are expected to return to work thereafter. Similarly, self-employed people may not have the capacity to be away from their business to provide volunteer assistance for an extended period of time.

Volunteers themselves cite concerns about the possible negative impacts of climate change on the frequency and severity of large fires which would inevitably require greater demands on volunteers' time amid the current economic uncertainty. An additional and repeated issue raised by volunteers is the increasing hours required to be spent on paper work and processes.

**Measures to retain volunteers**

A number of measures have been taken by the State to support and retain volunteers.

The recruitment and retention of volunteers is an ongoing challenge. In addition to constraints of time, volunteers cite financial imposts and out-of-pocket expenses as an ongoing concern. Volunteers also cite concerns about the administrative and reporting obligations increasingly applied to volunteers. Members who provide voluntary services to their local communities often do not have the time, capacity or

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inclination to observe the increasing number of performance and accountability measures.

Enhancements have been made to the Rural Fire Service, particularly over the last 5 years, to assist RFBs with planning for budget allocations, appliances, communications, equipment, geographic information systems, training, reporting and staff support.

In particular, a focus on training over the past two years has seen the number of rural volunteers who hold firefighter status increase from 6,500 in June 2008 to 9,478 in February 2010. The heightened level of training and expertise within brigades greatly assists RFBs during incidents.

The Payroll Tax Act 1971 was amended, from 1 July 2008, so that tax exemptions apply to volunteer fire fighters, as well as other emergency services volunteers. The exemptions apply to wages paid or payable to an employee in relation to any period during which the employee is taking part in bushfire fighting activities as a volunteer in the Rural Fire Brigade, or engaging in emergency activities as a volunteer.

The exemptions also include a range of associated activities including training in bushfire and emergency procedures and prevention activities such as hazard reduction burning. (Exemptions do not apply to paid sick leave, annual leave, long service leave or similar leave taken while the employee is absent due to these volunteer activities).

In addition, under Directive 18/09 pursuant to the Public Service Act 2008, a public service employee who is also an emergency service volunteer, such as a fire brigade member or an auxiliary fire fighter, will be granted special leave when called out for emergencies or to fight fires.

The Government has an insurance agreement in place with WorkCover Queensland covering a number of volunteer groups, including RFB members. The department pays a capped premium to Workcover for compensation claims associated with volunteer duties.

The Rural Operations Volunteer Conference

In 2008, the inaugural Rural Operations Volunteer Conference was held. The purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity for volunteers to participate in learning and networking with other volunteers from around the State. A key message of the conference was that Rural Operations places great faith in its volunteers and values the services that they provide. Presentations from key speakers included the latest developments in fire management and the outcomes of research and projects.

170 volunteers from around the State attended the two day conference and provided feedback through a survey conducted by Rural Operations. The volunteers rated the conference as "excellent" and "extremely useful" to understanding their role in the context of a State wide approach to rural fire management. A CD of the presentations was given to attendees for volunteers to share with their RFB colleagues.
Due to the success of the conference it will become a biennial event, with the next conference being held in 2010. The focus of the 2010 conference will be on community education and the role of the Volunteer Community Educator.

**Honours, awards and medals**

To demonstrate the value that is placed on rural volunteers and to pay tribute to the high standard of work performance and conduct of volunteers, a number of awards, certificates and honours are granted each year. In 2009, 500 awards were made. Categories include years of service, bravery and acknowledgement of service to community.

Awards and certificates currently available to Rural Fire Service Volunteers include:

**Australian Honours:**
- Bravery Awards
- Order of Australia
- Australian Fire Service Medal, National Medal

**Achievement Awards:**
- Australia Day Achievement Awards
- Minister’s Awards of Excellence

**QFRS Honours:**
- Diligent and Ethical Service Medal

**Certificates:**
- Minister’s Certificate of Commendation
- Commissioner’s Certificate of Commendation
- Assistant Commissioner’s Certificate of Commendation
- Certificate of Appreciate for Years of Service
- Regional Rural Fire Service Volunteer of the Year Awards
### Rural Fire Services in Australia – Interstate Comparison

#### Summary Table of Operational Funding, Staffing and Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>South Australia Country Fire Services</th>
<th>Victoria Country Fire Authority</th>
<th>New South Wales Rural Fire Services</th>
<th>ACT Rural Fire Service</th>
<th>Qld QFRS Rural Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Revenue ($'000) 2008-2009</strong></td>
<td>67,838&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>451,715</td>
<td>267,689</td>
<td>Not provided in Annual Report</td>
<td>29,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CFS provides support (operational, equipment, funding) to the volunteer brigades in regional and semi-metropolitan areas. Chain of command indicates that salaried staff are only at senior level - firefighters are all volunteer.</td>
<td>In addition to &quot;fires in the country area&quot;, the CFA is responsible for provision of fire and rescue services to more than 50% of metropolitan Melbourne and every provincial city, town and village in Victoria. All urban brigades have both paid and volunteer staff. Brigades in rural areas may consist of volunteers only.</td>
<td>NSWFRS is a funding, coordinating and training body for the State's volunteer brigades, who are attached to local governments. Rural fire districts are based upon local government boundaries, and may contain several volunteer brigades.</td>
<td>RFS provides direction, support, funding and equipment to the ACT's rural fire brigades. Rural brigades have responsibility for areas outside of &quot;built up&quot; areas.</td>
<td>Rural Operations forms part of QFRS, and is responsible for a management framework for the State's rural brigades. Rural Operations is responsible for rural and semi-rural communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Insurance or Property Levy Funding ($'000)</strong></td>
<td>33,673&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>239,231</td>
<td>169,030</td>
<td>13,358&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Government Funding ($'000)</strong></td>
<td>27,842</td>
<td>171,034&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>54,118&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9,250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Other Income ($'000)**  
(fees, interest etc) | 6,323                                 | 41,450                          | 44,541                             | 6,469<sup>7</sup>       |
| **Number of Volunteers** | 15,400                                | 58,943<sup>3</sup>              | 70,701                             | ~400                   |
| **Number of Full-Time Equivalent Staff**  
(salaried) | 108                                   | 1,481                           | 752                                | 11                     |

**Notes:**
1. The South Australian Emergency Services Levy applies to all fixed and some mobile property. The SA Government also contributes to the dedicated Emergency Services Fund to compensate it for concessions to pensioners, payment of liability on its own property and remissions to a variety of property owners.
2. Includes $112.1 million in 2008-09 due to the 2009 bushfires in Victoria.
3. Of these volunteers, more than 9,000 are urban brigade volunteers. Every CFA Urban Brigade is partly staffed by volunteers.
4. Includes $13.3 million in 2008-09 due to the 2009 bushfires in NSW.
5. Funding and staffing information provided for QFRS Rural Operations only. Information of local government funding to RFBs is in Table 5.
7. Includes other QFRS Urban Services-sourced revenues, $5.1 million and contributions from rural fire brigades, $1.4 million (for equipment and vehicles).

A Summary of Progress Achieved by Rural Operations (as at February 2010), Queensland Fire and Rescue Service on QAO Recommendations:

### QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – FORWARD PLANNING

1. QFRS implements a forward planning process specific to rural fire management as part of the QFRS strategic planning process, which involves regional and area offices and incorporates:
   - a process for identifying risks and opportunities;
   - the development of strategies to address the risks and opportunities; and
   - a system to monitor and report on the implementation of strategies.
2. QFRS provides guidance and support to rural fire brigades in the development of their one year operational plan and three year management plan.
3. QFRS implement a process to review brigade plans and incorporate specific issues identified into forward planning at the area and regional levels.

**Progress Achieved**

- As at August 2009, 65% of Future Directions Report Recommendations have been 'Completed', 30% of Future Directions Report Recommendations are 'Work in Progress' (and 5% are either 'On Hold' or are 'Not Being Progressed').
- Rural Operations Risk Register has been developed.
- Development of 2009-2010 Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business Plans with strategies that address the key risks.
- New Quarterly Performance Review and Area/Regional Reporting Process Implemented.
- Commenced monitoring the development of brigade plans through Area Quarterly Performance Process.
- A brochure has been developed to promote the benefits of the Local Area Finance Committee concept.

### QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – RISK MANAGEMENT

4. QFRS establishes a structured risk management process for rural fire management, which involves regional and area offices, to enhance decision making processes and ensure opportunities are maximised and losses are minimised. This process should be linked to forward planning and incorporate existing processes such as:
   - brigade hazard identification and reduction plans (brigade fire management plans);
   - brigade one year operational and three year management plans; and
   - local action plans for iZone brigades (high risk areas).
5. QFRS implement a brigade issues management process to capture, manage and report specific brigade issues.
Progress Achieved

✓ Ensure the ongoing viability of both the State and Regional Bushfire Interdepartmental Committees through ensuring regular meetings are programmed and the key issues as outlined in the Committee's Terms of Reference are being addressed.

✓ Included the trial implementation of the Wildfire Mitigation concept in the 2008-2009 Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business Plans.

✓ A strategy to ensure that brigades in receipt of a levy submit plans to Area Office annually has been included in the Rural Operations Business Plan.

✓ Commenced monitoring the development of brigade plans through the Area Quarterly Performance process.

✓ Area Offices report on the current level of reporting by brigades in receipt of a levy, including the auditing of books and how many have a 12 Month Operational Plan and a 3 year Activity Plan in place.

✓ Ensure ongoing consultation with the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland Inc (RFBAQ) through both correspondence and the continuation of the consultative forums as well as regular meetings at regional levels.

✓ Other mechanisms already in place include: Rural Operations Area staff attend brigade meetings; feedback mechanisms in place through the Volunteer Portal, Bulletin magazine, website and Rural Fire Brigade Manual.

✓ Anti-Discrimination awareness strategies implemented: a supply of brochures and DVDs provided to Regional Managers for distribution to Area Offices/brigades; informative article included in the Rural Fires Bulletin magazine; and information included in new members Welcome Packs.

QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – BRIGADE FUNDING AND RESOURCING

6. QFRS ensure compliance with the brigade accountability requirements for funding received by rural fire brigades as specified in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual.

7. QFRS review the financial accountability and audit requirements of the rural fire brigades to reflect their status as part of QFRS.

8. QFRS implements a system to collate and analyse brigade funding information.

9. QFRS provides assistance to brigades in determining and budgeting for their resource needs.

10. QFRS utilises performance information on brigade activity as a factor in determining brigade resource and funding needs.

11. QFRS implements a system to monitor the condition and safety of brigade buildings and equipment.

Progress Achieved

✓ One of the initiatives currently being implemented is the concept of the Local Area Finance Committee, which is intended to be established in each Local Government Area, responsible for administrating all aspects of the collection, distribution and accountability requirements of the rural fire levy, so as to satisfy local government's accountability requirements in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 (NB: On hold pending further consultation in the Rockhampton area).

✓ A strategy to ensure that brigades in receipt of a levy submit a 12 Month Operational Plan and a three year Activity Plan to Area Offices annually has been included in the Rural Operations Business Plan.

✓ Rural Operations has commenced monitoring the development of brigade plans through the Area Quarterly Performance Process. Area Offices report on the current level of reporting by brigades in receipt of a levy, including the auditing of books and how many have a 12 Month Operational Plan and a three year Activity Plan in place.

✓ Audit of all rural fire brigade stations finalised in June 2008.

✓ Implemented a strategy to ensure that all appliances are issued with an annual safety certificate.

NB-Director-General sent a letter to Auditor-General dated 22 April 2009, advising that the department is
of the view that Recommendations 7, 8 and 9 have already been addressed – no reply received to date.

**QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

12. QFRS determines the performance information needed to support effective decision making.

13. QFRS establishes a suitable process to reliably capture that information.

14. QFRS introduces a system to collate and analyse performance information for use in management reporting and to support effective decision making processes.

**Progress Achieved**

- ✔ Scoping document developed for a project team to review the current brigade incident reporting system.
- ✔ Implemented new Quarterly Performance review and Area/Regional level reporting process.
- ✔ Further development of Rural Operations Quarterly Performance Review with improved measures around the key risks and strategies.
- ✔ Developed 2009-2010 Personal Performance Plans for Rural Operations staff.
- ✔ Implementation of the new brigade classification system to assist with ensuring that available resources and support are appropriately allocated.

**QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – TRAINING**

15. QFRS continues to support area training staff in the development and implementation of brigade training programs and calendars.

16. QFRS improves the capacity to address the brigade training gap by continuing to encourage and facilitate the accreditation of volunteer trainers within brigades where appropriate.

**Progress Achieved**

- ✔ Introduced new Brigade Training and Support Officer positions, bringing the total across the State to 22.
- ✔ Released and promoted the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework to all volunteers.
- ✔ Established volunteer training targets.
- ✔ Provided volunteers with access to 2008 Volunteer Conference presentation DVDs.
- ✔ Commenced monitoring progress towards achieving training targets through the Area Quarterly Performance process.
- ✔ Developed the Rural Fire Service Awareness training package.
- ✔ Commenced development of the Brigade Management Program – First Officer training.
- ✔ Included in the 2008-2009 Business Plan, the strategy for minimum level training being delivered by Volunteer Trainers in brigades
- ✔ Policy and Supporting Business Rule developed to ensure the utilisation of Casual Trainers is undertaken within a corporate governance framework and they are utilised to deliver the greatest outcomes for the cost.
## QUEENSLAND LOCAL COUNCILS

### FUNDS RAISED FOR RURAL FIRE BRIGADES 2008-2009 FINANCIAL YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL COUNCIL NAME</th>
<th>TOTAL FUNDS RAISED THROUGH A RURAL FIRE LEVY</th>
<th>TOTAL RURAL FIRE FUNDS RAISED AS A PROPORTION OF GENERAL RATES</th>
<th>IN-KIND SUPPORT PROVIDED TO LOCAL RURAL FIRE BRIGADES</th>
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<td>Barcaldine Regional Council</td>
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<td>$0 No $0 $0</td>
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Source: Data collected by telephone survey conducted with each regional council in February 2010

Note: Indigenous Councils were not contacted as they do not collect a Rural Fire Levy.
Dear Sir,

Please find attached the submission from the

Julatten Rural Fire Brigade
Mt Kooyong Road
Julatten Qld 4874

Postal address
C/- G. Crees
Secretary JRFB
PO Box 56
Mt Molloy Q 4871

Daytime contact number – Wally Gray ph (07) 4094 1248

Your faithfully,

Grace Crees
Secretary JRFB
Accountability: while we have no doubt that most brigades have adequate financial management, we can see that visibility for the funding party is important. Given this is local government through the levy the accountability should be to local government through quarter accounts. It is important to get balance of reporting and increasing workload to both treasurers and councils right.

Strategic planning: most brigades do not have the resources, knowledge or capability to plan strategically. Teaching strategic planning to 1 or 2 people in each brigade would be an extremely lengthy and expensive process, but divisions should have proper business and strategic planning in place with input from the brigades. Given the sheer number of brigades any input will be limited but as financial accountability is raised and information gathered it will become clearer where funding and management gaps are.

Thought should be given to the appointment of divisional business managers, either employment or as consultants to help in the planning and implementation of these strategies as well as some basic commercial skills to brigade treasurers and first officers.

Urban Encroachment
Urban encroachment has the impact of making us more likely to be called out to road accidents or structural fires, while to some extent this is a training issue, this also has the effect of increasing the time and resources given by volunteers. Volunteers need to be encouraged not only to train for but also to turn out to incidents this is a “whats in it for me” scenario and consideration should be given to some kind of reward for training at least. Response times for professional services can vary – in our area. There is no urban fire brigade, no SES, No ambulance. Our brigades commitment to the local community. We believe that we should attend these incidents because of our local knowledge of the community and access to certain areas.

With the above increasing demands we believe that at least the more qualified and senior members of the brigades should have some reward? Ultimately the brigade will still need to be based on volunteers as its hard to see any other way of financing. We must however encourage new members to join and to train for the future.

Current modem
It is difficult to see how any other modem could give the coverage currently given. The cost of sent professional fire fighter would be astronomical as pointed out in the report. We do believe however that there should be more recognition of the time and resources that volunteers give. QFRS needs to realize that not only brigades but all volunteer organization struggle to get interested people, and the harder you make membership and the more you expect of them the fewer people will get involved in the brigades.

One suggestion could be a tax credit to active officers of the brigade (those who have undergone crew leader training and above) this could be nominal.
(perhaps $100 off a car rego) and would not only have the effort of a reward but would hopefully make it likely that brigade members would volunteer for positions.

Fundings
The current funding model seems rather haphazard. Our brigade receives funding from local government levy, but we know of others that do not. We recommend to standardize the funding from local government, but the most important thing is that there must be local ownership of the funds. Centralizing collection and apportion to Brisbane would increase bureaucracy and cost, at the same time losing accountability and visibility for local councils. The levy should be kept in the brigade area that it is collected in and not pooled that brigades have to then compete against each other for funding. If you do this you discourage brigades that are prepared and willing to do extra in fund raising to go the extra miles.

As for grants and other special funding opportunities we think the fire services should make brigades aware of opportunities as they become available and also what finance is available when brigades have projects to pay for.

PPE must remain free of charge to volunteers of that are to be encouraged to wear it.

The removal of certain subsidized fire fighting equipment from the list has caused problem in rural areas. The ordering system should be changed to allow the district office to store certain items allowing brigades access to these items with less work on the secretary and treasurer.

Fire warden review
We believe that most wardens are happy with being in charge of the way fire is managed in their area and that the work load and cost incurred is minimal compared with the alternative.

As far as we are aware, fire wardens are an intrinsic part of the brigade working together with the brigade to manage the risks involved with grass fires and care of the environment.

The permit to light fire system administrated by a localized fire warden net work is by far the proven best method of fire control in QLD. The appointment of a local is paramount as this person will have local knowledge of industry requirements and intimate local knowledge of community issues plus the added local knowledge of weather dynamics and its impact on the local area. There are roles and responsibilities of land holders and they are managed by the volunteer fire warden system through a permit to light a fire.
To the Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee: -

"Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland"

The submission has been put forward from the above-mention association with the hope that this committee will look at and discuss the issues raised by the association and hopefully act on the same.

**Background:** On the 1st July 1990 the Qld Fire Brigades Act and the Qld Rural Fires Act were repealed, they were then replaced with the Qld Fire service act 1990. The major political parties at that time- the Labor, Liberal & National parties all agree with that course of action.

This effectively meant approximately 80 Urban and 1 Rural Fire Boards were disbanded and replaced with a Fire Officer administrator with a Fire Commissioner (Mr Wally Belcher) as the Officer in Charge for all Queensland’s fire services.

The Rural Fire section of the overall new service was allowed to carry on as per normal operations with an assistant commissioner responsible for daily administration and an Advisory Rural Fires council was created to assist government with Rural Fire matters.

While this action was carried out in “good faith” it actually increased the “them and us” mentality that existed before the Boards were disbanded.

**Current position:** in the almost 20 years since its inception the current fire model has seen many changes with the introduction of the “statutory fire levy” for some rural areas, first refurbished but now new fire appliances for rural fire brigades and an ever increasing growth of the rural residential development. This has created an administration called the “Izone” with urban and rural fire components trying to work in closer harmony. However once again, all this action taken in “good faith” has done is to continue and actually increase the “them and us” mentality.

The Rural Fires Advisory Council was a “Toothless Tiger” and recently was dissolved and the new Emergency Services Advisory Council was formed which is also another “Toothless Tiger”. Running alongside this action the Rural Fire Brigades Association has developed into a large administrative body which represents volunteers. It has become an embarrassment spending much of its time making phone calls to places like Brisbane residents asking for donations and trying to sell raffle tickets. This association is funded by the Queensland government with large salaries paid to senior administrators; this action is a complete contrast to the word “Volunteer”.

The Queensland Fire & Rescue Service is administered by a Commissioner, 7 Assistant Commissioners who collectively cover the state, but are only responsible for Urban fires, plus 1 Assistant Commissioner for Rural Fires who has a state wide responsibility, this model is well out dated.
Recommendations & Issues:

1. The Queensland Government provide stronger legislation that deals with illegally lit fires and fire hazards. No issues.

2. The Queensland Fire & Rescue Service disbands the Rural Fire component and places it under the 7 (so called) Urban Asst Commissioners. No issues.

3. The Commissioner and 7 asst Commissioners must have practical experience in ALL facets of fire fighting from Urban High Rise to Grass fires.
   - This issue will have an enormous effect on the troops both urban and rural “one boss no division”


5. All Queenslanders pay a Fire Levy which must be on a sliding scale. IE: the greater the risk the higher the levy. It must also be flexible to cater of “Change” such as higher, lower or no levy for specific persons / properties. The levy is to be collected by councils.
   - In an urban area the levy is collected by the council and given to the state government for distribution.
   - In adjacent rural areas and in the same council area the levy is given to the Rural Fire Brigades or their respective Group. Sometimes these monies are misused – excessive purchasing of non required equipment, monies horded and not given to those brigades that need it, or some brigades in the southern areas of the state having huge masses of money in the bank in excess of $70,000.

6. Part of the levy must be paid to “Fire Wardens” who control Fire Ignition and Fire Hazards.
   - The local Fire Warden is the most important person in the Qld Fire and rescue service for rural areas. He/she is the pre fire expert and this is where the service must direct 80% of its attention NOT fire suppression (it’s too late after the fire starts). The Fire Warden must be paid an annual amount each year in return for this remuneration the Fire Warden would report monthly to the relevant Asst Commissioner. The duties and reports should cover Permits issued, Permits refused, Action taken to abate fire hazards (both private and crown land), reporting of fuel loads and potential fire hazards.

7. Every council must employ at least one (1) Emergency Services Officer whose responsibilities include Urban & Rural Fire incidents and enquiries, SES, Flood, Animal Disease and Bush Fire Planning.
   - Once again this would be a huge benefit to not only the councils themselves but the Department of Community Safety as well.

8. All QFRS trucks are to be one colour.

9. Coordination of all Rural Fire Planning and Fire Hazards is the responsibility of the relevant Assistant Commissioner for any region and his or her delegated authority.
Conclusion

The Rural Fires Association Queensland Inc (RFAQ), was Founded in 1982 to act as an advisory body to the then Rural Fires Advisory Council, the Queensland Fire Service and State and Local Governments on matters pertaining to Rural Fires in Queensland. Its membership consists of serving Urban and Rural Fire Officers, past Senior members of the Rural Fires Service, Bush Fire mitigation planning officers and other interested members of the public.

Our association is at the forefront of Rural Fires issues in Queensland and keeps abreast of matter of a similar type across Australia.

We hope that this submission is read in full and that all matters raised in this document are brought before and acted on in parliament.

Regards

B S Beasley

Bruce S Beasley
Secretary
Rural Fires Association Qld Inc.
The RFAQ was founded in 1982 following a course at the Forestry training Centre in Gympie at which all Field Officers (Inspectors) of the then Rural Fires Board attended. The aim of the course was to establish a standard for Rural Fire Officers, and the formation of the Association was a natural progression from the aim.

The formation of the Association was sponsored by the Rural Fires Board and the Minister at the time, Mr Bill Hewitt MLA, who was interested enough to attend part of the course and to present certificates to those undertaking it.

In 1985 the Association was registered in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Act, which was then administered by the Justice Department, and the objectives as set out in the registered set of rules were:

"To provide an interested body for the study of the roles and functions of rural fire services in Queensland and the promotion and advancement of professional standards in this and associated services".

The Constitution was amended in 2003 to reflect changes in the role of the Association. New objectives are:

- "To promote and advance and monitor the professional standards, roles and functions of rural fire services in Queensland;
- To provide advice, input, solicit and lobby state and local government and industry on rural fire risk management including preparedness, prevention and response strategies at micro and macro levels;
- To monitor and liaise with rural fire research organisations both nationally and internationally and to promote research findings into active and proactive rural fire management strategies as best practice.

The term "rural fire" shall include any bush, grass or vegetation fire incident in the state of Queensland and any structural, vehicle, gas, hazardous chemical and bulk fuel storage fire incident in rural Queensland."
The Association has the capacity to act as an advisory body and to address any other activity within its charter. Membership is maintained by the private subscription of members, i.e. a joining fee and variable annual subscription according to membership level.

The Association has, at Government request, made submissions in the case of the Revision of Fire Services in 1989 and the Public Sector Management Commission Review of the Bureau of Emergency Services in 1993. With some financial help from the Queensland Tertiary Education Foundation and the official support and approval of the Queensland Fire Service, the Association supported the development of a formal course in Rural Fire Management by the University of Southern Queensland. Several members of the Association contributed written material for inclusion in the course.

The Association is also officially recognised by, and has made contribution on bushfire matters to, the Forestry and Forest Products Division of CSIRO. It is also recognised and supported by the Director General, Department of Emergency Services and the Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Originally comprised of career officers of the Rural Fires Board in 1982, the Association has now expanded with an imposing list of members with rural fire management expertise. These include present and past officers of the Rural Fire Service including former Chief Executive Officers and Commissioners, former Board members, Senior and Regional Inspectors, District Inspectors, District Training Officers, Fire Protection Officers of the Department of Primary Industries (Forestry), Urban Fire Service staff, prominent members of many volunteer Rural Fire Brigades, Fire Wardens, professionals in private fire management consultancy and representatives of Local Government and Queensland Rail.

As is evident from this membership profile there is an enormous depth of talent and pool of knowledge and experience in Rural Fire Management waiting to be tapped – A Sleeping Giant.

The Management Committee is continuously working on a series of Position Papers utilising some of that knowledge and experience. Documented items concurrently include:

- Continued use of fire for land management and fire hazard reduction strategies
- Greater emphasis on aerial suppression strategies using local, national and international technology with a policy for cost sharing by all stakeholders
- Renewed emphasis on the use of aerial ignition as a strategic hazard reduction tool for broad scale burning over vast land tracts and identified environmentally sensitive ecosystem protection
- Smoke pollution and nuisance policies and strategies associated with the use of fire as a land management tool, with particular emphasis on hazard reduction and abatement practices, and the consequential benefits in reducing pollutant concentrations from extensive and/or intensive wildfires
- Legislation to support the use of fire for land management purposes such as woody weed control, ecosystem/habitat modification, crop pre- and post-harvesting, pasture rejuvenation and fire hazard abatement
- Training of staff and fire fighters at all levels in all facets of fire application, fire science, fire suppression strategies and incident management, and maintaining skill competency
- Use of satellite based Global Positioning Systems, interfaced with Local Government and/or Natural Resource land tenure databases, to assist in identifying fire hazardous tenures requiring issue of hazard abatement notices.
Other issues, and indeed initiatives, are on the Management Committee’s agenda for future development.

The Association invites current and past personnel of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and other interested persons who are not already members to consider making application for membership. QFRS personnel include volunteers, auxiliaries and career officers. Applications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr Bruce Beasley, 39 Farrell Drive, Walloon Q 4306.

Accredited members are entitled to use the acronym MRF AQ after their name.

With the existing membership and an influx of new members, the Association is poised to play a significant role in the advancement of Rural Fire Management in Queensland. You are invited to be part of that exciting future.
From: Paul Tiffany & Lyn Newman [kalbar2@bigpond.com]
Sent: Monday, 19 April 2010 8:52 AM
To: Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Subject: Submission to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Attachments: Submission to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee.pdf

Please find attached the submission on Rural Fire Management from the Aratula RFB.

Paul Tiffany,
First Officer - Aratula Rural Fire Brigade.
07 5463 9897 (H) - 07 5463 1609 (W) - 04 1771 7483 (M)

Those who say it cannot be done shouldn't interrupt the people doing it.

2 Valley View Dr
Kalbar 4309.
Submission to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee.

Discussion on the management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

Introduction:
The Aratula Rural Fire Brigade (ARFB) welcomes the opportunity to enter into the discussion on the management and provision of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

Aratula provides fire suppression for wild fire in the area bounded, roughly, by Lake Moogerah and Mt French (western sides), Kalbar, Silverdale, Tarome and Cunningham's Gap. We also provide assistance to the urban fire brigades (QFRS) of Boonah, Kalbar and Harrisville in any situation we are called upon. This includes road rescue, relay of water, provision of manpower etc. We also assist the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) with manpower and assistance when required. The ARFB attends around 25 to 30 ‘activities’ a year and this includes emergency calls and controlled and pre-organised activities such as hazard reduction.

Paul Tiffany, first officer and chairman of the Aratula Rural Fire Brigade, who would like to acknowledge the assistance and input from the following, has prepared this submission to the Committee:

- Mr Kevin Lotz, ESM - immediate past first officer and chairman,
- Mrs Fay Lotz - immediate past secretary,
- Mrs June Wallace - current secretary,
- Mrs Jan Pfeffer - current treasurer,
- Mr Brian Johnson - current second officer ARFB, and
- Mr Trevor Pfeffer - fire fighter ARFB.

The current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitability:
The current structure of the rural fire service is structurally sound, but needs to be viewed in two separate parts - operations and management on a ‘business’ level. Like any organisation the RFS needs to be flexible to growth and development of the state.

The operational side, the immediate dealing with and control of fire and emergent situations, is sound. Having said this there is some serious concern about the removal of local people and officers from command and control in larger incidents and having the command taken by RFS office based staff with little or no local knowledge.

The RFS needs to remain an essential stand-alone organization and review its interaction with volunteer staff to improve outcomes.

The business side, which includes financial management, we see that there is need for improvement. There is no consistency or uniformity on across the state for the collection of the fire levy for the local RFS brigades and this leads to the inequities between brigades that exist now.

Currently the police service is funded from the collective revenues of the state; the ambulance service has a standardized levy across the state and the urban fire brigades are funded by a standardised schedule of levies with the amount-collected set to the type of property.

The local rural fire brigades are funded at differing levels and in varying ways across the state and because of this there is no equity in the funding of brigades but the required services are often expected to be the same. Some brigades are highly funded, some are self-funded with a huge
volunteer effort and some are poorly funded. It must also be noted that some brigades are poorly managed on a local level.

It is due to these inequities that some brigades are over equipped and some are operating with minimal tools and often using what personally owned equipment is available at the time.

The ARFB is in the belief that the formulation of a schedule which allows for equitable levies to be charged state wide with the RFS managing / over viewing of locally submitted and operated budgets is one valid option for the RFS. Submitted budgets that are generated on local risks and potentials are needed. The operation of the local services that the rural fire brigades provide can only be done with local level budgeting.

This operation would be formed and run along the lines existing government policy, accountability and procedure as what is found in the QAS and QFRS now without local government control, save for collection of levy monies.

**Appropriateness of the existing funding:**

Existing funding and its appropriateness is something that does need to be viewed on a local and individual basis. Currently the ARFB has a levy of $7.50 per rates notice, which is a total of $15 per property / notice per year. This amount was set in approximately 2000 by the Boonah Group and has not been lifted in 10 years. The Boonah Group has a contingency fund for extreme conditions holds a portion of this money with no real equity as to its disbursement.

The ARFB is in an extremely healthy financial situation due to the efforts of the immediate past first officer and chairman and the immediate past secretary as well as the efforts of the members of the brigade as well as brigade culture of economic efficiency and views to the future of the brigade. We have the luxury to be ‘comfortable’ financially and are well aware that there are less financially secure brigades in operation.

On local levels any increase in levies are seen as politically distasteful. At a recent local forum of Boonah Group brigades they were advised to use the same amounts on a 3-year budget, totally ignoring the fact that prices go up. With localised management along this line local brigades are not advancing forward and are going backwards in real terms.

The existing structure of incoming funding is accounted for on a minimal level. The disbursement of this funding and it ultimate expense has no real form of accountability. This disbursement is done at the brigade wants and needs with little or no auditing of where this funding actually went, especially if payments are made for items sourced from outside of the RFS. There is no active or random auditing seen on a brigade level. There is a perception of the management of the RFS that they keep the brigades at ‘arms length’ away when it comes to a financial level.

With the introduction of a state-wide standardized property contribution along with a fixed and audited budgetary process will lead to appropriate funding for the provision of the services needed across the state.

**Urban encroachment and effects on Rural Fire Brigades:**

The last 10 years (and in the foreseeable immediate future) show that there is a large change in the layout of the traditional rural areas, particularly those within a few hours travel of the coastline.

There are indeed areas of the state in which there is a high level of stability, no large or expansive development. In the ARFB area we are seeing an increase of development with more residential acreage blocks and standard residential town blocks now being built and habited. Once what was

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1 Collective representative body of all rural fire brigades in the old Boonah Shire area.
fertile and productive farming land is now changing into lifestyle blocks and areas that were once areas of scrub now have residential houses and outbuildings within them.

In areas where fire control was easy and straightforward is now complex and requiring more assets and manpower to control.

The expansion of urban areas and the increase of residential acreage is going to require the formulation of potential demand profiles for services that may be required, such as what types of fires may eventuate. The management of emergency service provision in the state need to be continually evaluating the need for new urban stations.

The immediate issues that this development generates for the Aratula RFB is a greater ‘izone’ area with the integration of residential habitat with the landscape which brings with it a higher probability of increased calls in the traditional fire seasons.

Effective management of increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades:

Often, and it is seen in many government departments, the increase in demands and services results in increases on individuals, both personal and departmental. As the changes in demographic and to the landscape in areas of the state the RFS will have to increase administrative staff. This has to be done by providing much more accurate and clear guidelines to brigades as to who does what. All to often there is poor communication purely caused by not being able to access the correct person.

Operationally the RFS needs to integrate closer with local operational staff. With the changes to some areas the years of previous experience of older members, first officers and fire wardens is invaluable and fire behaviour in some instances cannot be learnt from a book.

The greatest difficulty we see the RFS encountering is a change in contributions to the service along with the introduction of appropriate accountability and financial control measures.

Appropriateness of existing accountability mechanisms:

As previously discussed we are of the belief that there is minimal if any real accountability for the funding and finances of the rural fire brigades.

The issue is that the levies raised our area is collected by council, then it is passed on to the local Boonah Group and then onto local brigades. Our enquiries into exactly how many rateable properties we have in our area are always stonewalled. We cannot find out how much in the way of levy total is collected in our area and how much is actually we are actually receiving.

By the introduction of a proper established and structured levy system, which is actively audited and managed effectively, there will always be inequities.

The role of fire wardens within the Rural Fire Service:

The role of fire wardens within the community, and the state as a whole, is vitally important. Having said that, it is viewed that there is little to no real interest in the fire wardens by the RFS. This is demonstrated in the lack of efficient communication with the local wardens, particularly during high fire danger times. This was demonstrated during the last fire season where the Aratula first officer took numerous calls from the area office about the current status of his area. Whilst there was a good and competent overview the fire warden, whose position includes this was never called. It is the fire warden who has the legislated responsibility for fire use in the area.

In the past the RFS would have staff actively touring areas and visiting fire wardens and contact was kept. It was these visits in which information was passed and feedback given, often freely. The ‘feel’ of the real world was valid and used then, not so much now.
The fire wardens of the state must be kept and must be supported.

Other matters:

Volunteers:

There is a major shift in the culture of volunteering in the state. This can be looked at on both a cultural and managerial level.

Today’s person is leisure rich. There is so much for them to do leaving very little ‘disposable time’ in which to give to the community. Add to this the essence of volunteering, no pay. The demands on a normal person for normal financial survival are high.

People will often turnover for jobs when the need is real but it is increasingly difficult to have people give away a whole weekend, or even weekday nights, to attend training. Compound this with existing members with often many years and thousands of hours experience being told that they ‘know nothing really and have to Attend training’ to stay a competent member.

The increase in the administration and the huge expectations and requirements of people just to be a volunteer makes the actual offering of oneself to a position less and less appealing as it becomes a business, a job and not something that is done for the benefit of the community. The earlier proposed introduction of financial requisites should not be seen as additional ‘paper work’, the level of financial management should be there already. The establishment of a position within RFS regions of a financial assistance officer whose task is purely to assist local brigades with financial documentation and procedure should be done.

There is a loss of ‘ownership’ in the brigades due to this business like approach. There is huge pride and satisfaction in the work performed and the hard work that has gone into the raising of money for assets of brigades. All ultimately for the well being of the community.

Add to all of this, the major reduction of the youth who are volunteering. Leisure time, changes of social culture and migration away from rural areas for many reasons, including employment and studies, all mix to an end result of having less and less 16 to 30 year old volunteers. The Aratula RFB average age is around 50, this is not uncommon.

Strategies and policy needs to be reviewed to attract younger members to the RFS and to adequately embrace the changes in the everyday culture to ensure the ongoing viability of the RFS purely on a membership level.

Summary:

- The RFS needs to remain an essential stand-alone organization and review its interaction with volunteer staff to improve outcomes.
- The current appropriateness of funding of rural brigades is essentially poor and is inequitable. This is viewed with the poor accountability measures for funding received now.
- That local brigades formulate and operate under locally prepared budgets with the assistance of the RFS through the implementation of a financial assistance officer's position.
- There are changes happening to the rural - urban interface. Ongoing management and monitoring of demand profiles needs to be maintained to ensure adequate services are available.
- Fire wardens are an invaluable resource within the state, they must be supported more.
- Volunteers are the heart of the RFS. More contact by RFS management and greater listening and acceptance of views and individual ownership will strengthen the organization.
From: Sarah Standen [Sarah.Standen@canegrowers.com.au]
Sent: Friday, 16 April 2010 4:03 PM
To: Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Subject: Submission from CANEGROWERS Babinda

Deborah Jeffrey

CANEGROWERS Babinda consider that the current model of Rural Fire Brigades works well across the district and therefore should be maintained in its present form. Local District Brigades have loyal support from not only landholders but local residents willing to help in an emergency.

When Country Cabinet met in the North last month, eleven volunteers from the Babinda Area alone, were awarded long service medals ranging from 25 to 30 years service. This bares testament to the success of the present system.

Is the existing model, including resource allocation appropriate?

The list of subsidized equipment made available to volunteer brigades has been reduced dramatically over the past few years, despite regular requests from branches to reinstate some items. It may be necessary to maintain different subsidised equipment for different areas across the state. Equipment appropriate to fire fighting in a particular area, needs to be made available and subsidised accordingly.

Trash and cane fires require a very fast response and for this reason galvanised water tankers [trailers] need to be housed in several locations within each brigade area.

Rural Brigade volunteers (the men at the fire front) should have a voice on any budget or funding committee.

What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Limited urban encroachment is being experienced in the area.

How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Although only limited urban encroachment has been experienced, it would be helpful to local brigades if a standard information pack was mailed to all new landholders by Local Government making the landholder aware of the existence of the brigades. In busy times fire wardens are not always aware of land sales.

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

Accountability should not be a problem if the documented procedures are followed. A strengthening of the link between the individual rural brigades and the Area Director could prove beneficial.

What should be the role of the Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The role should remain as is. These wardens are local landholders who in most instances have farmed the areas for decades. They know the local terrain, understand the local weather conditions and are respected and experienced members of the local brigade and have no hesitation in saying no when conditions dictate. Most have been in the role for many years with no major rotation of wardens being experienced.

It is essential that the decentralised system of fire wardens along with the present permit system be
Other relevant matters:

The requirements for Rural Fire Services in the Wet Tropics would vary greatly from the needs of other brigades across the state. For this reason, it is disappointing that the committee set up to consider submissions, review and evaluate the management of Rural Fire Services does not have balanced representation drawn from across the State.

Regards
Sarah Standen
Manager
CANEGROWERS Babinda
I wish to raise issues in relation to the Fire & Rescue Act 1990. The Act is open to interpretation and mis-interpretation.

In particular section 81 of the Act

81 Officers of rural fire brigade
(1) A rural fire brigade must elect a first officer to be in charge of the brigade.
(2) A rural fire brigade may also elect such other officers as it considers necessary.
(3) Any election must be conducted in accordance with the commissioner’s directions and has no effect unless approved by the commissioner.
(4) A person holds office for the period specified by the commissioner.
(5) The commissioner may dismiss a person from any office held with a rural fire brigade or may disqualify a person from holding any office.

Does (3) mean the commissioner must approve the election process or mean approve the persons elected???

The commissioner has chosen in the past not to approve democratically elected officers not for reasons they weren’t qualified but because they were not liked by QFRS staff. I do not believe the Act was written to give the commissioner the power not to accept democratically elected officers.

Paragraph (1) states a brigade must elect a 1st officer. Paragraph (4) states the election must be approved by the commissioner.

QFRS staff also use paragraph 19 to allow people other than the commissioner to make the decision of approval of the election process.

19C Delegation
(1) The chief executive may delegate the chief executive’s powers under this Act to the commissioner or an appropriately qualified fire service officer.
(2) A delegation of a power by the chief executive to the commissioner may permit the subdelegation of the power by the commissioner, under section 19, to an appropriately qualified fire service officer.

Questions raised from this
Is the approval of a rural fire officer a “power” of the commissioner or a “function” if it is a function he cannot delegate this responsibility.

Under current practices after an election, the minutes of the meeting and a form listing the office bearers is sent into the Area office. If you hear nothing back it is assumed the election is approved. This is not an acceptable process.

The Act does provide powers to Rural brigades such as entering properties without approval to fight a fire. If a 1st officer elected is not approved, the brigade is not covered under the Act.
Under an election process all positions must be declared vacant. People are then nominated for the positions and elections held.

This election under the Act has no effect until approved by the commissioner. Therefore the brigade would not have an elected 1st officer until the commissioner has signed off. And a brigade is non-operational without a 1st officer. So every brigade is the State between the time of their election and (not) hearing the election is approved is non operational (not protected by the Act).

QFRS refer to another section of the Act paragraph 83.

83 Powers of first officer
(1) Where, pursuant to notification given under section 82(2), a rural fire brigade is in charge of operations for controlling and extinguishing a fire, the first officer of the brigade has, for that purpose—
   (a) the powers of an authorised fire officer, subject to any limitation imposed by the commissioner; and
   (b) the control and direction of any person (including any fire officer) whose services are available at the fire.
(2) Any power exercisable by the first officer of a rural fire brigade may be exercised by any person acting at the direction of the first officer.
(3) Any person exercising a power or discharging a function under this section must comply with any code of practice and with any direction of the commissioner.
(4) In this section—
   first officer includes, where the first officer of a rural fire brigade is unavailable to act, the next senior officer of the brigade who is available.
(5) Where a rural fire brigade is assisting in operations for controlling or extinguishing a fire, the person who pursuant to this Act or any direction given by the commissioner is in charge of those operations has the control and direction of the members of the rural fire brigade.

Claiming if the brigade does not have a elected 1st officer the next most senior officer can act as 1st officer.

The Act clearly states a Rural Brigade MUST have a 1st officer. Sect 83 (4) where the first officer is unavailable then the next senior officer acts on his behalf. It does not state if you don't have a 1st officer then the next most senior officer can act as 1st officer.

I do not believe the Act was not written to give the Commissioner or his delegates the authority to chose the people they want in brigade positions. Brigade officer bearer positions are to be democratically elected from their brigade the fact the Act states the commissioner is to endorse these elections is only to give the brigades protection under the Act.

QFRS has chosen to use their interpretation to control the election process of the rural fire service.

Regards

Graham McNicol
Dear Sirs,

We provide the following for your consideration:

The Eudlo Rural Fire Brigade is located in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland and was formed in 1952. The Brigade had a total of 56 members consisting of 19 active members, 5 reserve members, 17 recruits and 15 support members. In 2009 the Brigade attended a total of 44 incidents and participated in numerous Strike Teams. The Maroochy South Group Officer and Group Administration Officer are also members of the Brigade.

1) The way Rural Fire brigades do business seems to be constantly changing to meet changes in the local community as well as technical changes in the way in which fire is controlled. We feel that the current model does allow a degree of flexibility across the state. Our requirements are very different from those operating in a pure rural environment so it would be impossible to make a one size fits all system. Flexibility in structure is the reason why the model works.

2) Within the Caloundra Area on the Sunshine Coast we have developed a funding model that is simple and meets the needs of the local brigades. Recent changes have ensured a more equitable distribution of levies. It is essential that individual Brigade funding is not consolidated into QFRS revenue. Brigades are fiercely protective of their funds and as a result generally tend to use the funds in an efficient manner. Consideration should be given to QFRS supplying vehicles at no expense to the Brigades and that Brigade income is adjusted accordingly.

A uniform method of funding needs to be applied across the State. It is absurd that local governments effectively control funding and yet there is an expectation from the community that a Rural or Urban unit will respond to an incident. We are aware of Brigades out west who really struggle to fund their operations. Members give up enough of their time as it is without having to raise funds to supply a community service when there are more effective methods of funding.

On the coastal fringe the density of properties is sufficient to apply a small levy – out west it may be necessary for some assistance in funding from QFRS. Our point is that we are considered to be part of QFRS. We feel that the Director General is expressing
an out of date view when he says that brigades are expected to fund their own operations.

There can be a danger that brigades may accumulate funds unnecessarily. Our experience on the Sunshine Coast is that when the account balances are studied it will be found that in most instances Brigades are under-funding their vehicle replacement program and what at first glance seems to be an excessive surplus is in fact a shortfall. Many Brigades are still trying to build sheds or extend buildings to meet requirements.

3) Urban expansion is a fact of life in south east Queensland. Funding is usually the first item to be affected by the changes in Urban QFRS boundaries although there are examples of successfully merging urban and rural funding in an area to ensure the continued operation of the local rural brigade. This is important where the expansion of the Urban service footprint includes a considerable number of Rural properties. Incident management can be an issue and this is discussed later.

4) There needs to be a standard accounting methodology that is used across the entire Rural Operations network. We have difficulty in our brigade to compare accounts when we have changed auditors since they each have their own interpretation of cost centers etc. We know that this is an issue across all Brigades in our area. QFRS should develop a standard accounting package for all Rural Brigades. This system needs to be simple – often the Brigade Treasurer has limited financial experience. In the Caloundra Area the agreement with the Sunshine Coast regional Council is that each Brigade will submit a set of audited accounts together with a three year budget before 31st March each year. Funds will be withheld until such time as this requirement is met. These accounts are sent to Caloundra Area office so we would presume that at this point QFRS has the opportunity for oversight of each brigade’s financial status. Once again we fail to see how our funding can be influenced by the local council as we believe this is a matter for QFRS alone.

5) We are fortunate that in the Eudlo area we have one Fire Warden and he is a member of the Brigade. We are aware that changes are taking place with how Fire Wardens operate. They have a vital role to play. Some thought needs to be given to consolidating the number of wardens and aligning their areas to match those of each Brigade where possible. We have an excellent relationship with our Fire Warden. This is really important during times of high fire danger as we can control the issuing of permits without having to resort to waiting for fire bans to be placed. It is helpful if the Fire Warden doesn’t also hold the position of First Officer in the Brigade as this adds a level of “challenge” in the decision making process.

6) Incident management – The last fire season was one of the worst in Queensland’s history. There was a severe fire season in 2004 – the Kilcoy fire was at that time the longest running fire that Rural Operations had dealt with. One of the points to come out from that year was fatigue management. This matter has still not been dealt with and was a factor again last year. Part of the problem is the use of senior permanent Urban staff that lack understanding in the way Rurals operate.

We have a very strong view that QFRS needs to review its operational doctrine with regard to who actually controls major incidents. Clearly there are more Urban permanent officers than Rural Operations staff so the work load will require Urban staff...
to help manage rural incidents. It is not a matter of whether a Rural or Urban officer is in charge but more a case of that person having suitable operational experience. The current approach seems to be a focus on rank rather than experience. This is much like the Army having a major in the Catering Corps being in charge of a gun battle against insurgents. There are also many senior Rural volunteer officers that are competent to assist in the management of large incidents and greater use should be made of their experience. It has been our experience that incidents that seem to have an Urban focus in the management of a rural incident have been poorly managed. That was the case in 2004, 2008 and again in 2009.

Senior QFRS personnel seem to be comfortable with the level of pre season training but we challenge that. It is all very well to run a table top exercise but there is nothing to beat a practical exercise using a live hazard reduction burn. The benefits of this would be two fold. In the first instance it would allow Urban personnel to see first hand how a real incident unfolds and secondly they would see that Rural volunteers act in a professional way. There is still an element of “us and them” at times between the two services. The more the Urban’s and Rurals work together the less this becomes an issue. That is certainly our experience in our local area.

We look forward to the outcomes from the Committee.

Yours faithfully

Hamish Murdoch
First Officer

Alan Hammond
Secretary
April 15th, 2010
The Research Director,
Public Accounts & Public works Committee,
Parliament House,
George Street,
Brisbane, Q. 4000

Re: Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Ms Jeffrey,

H&DPA inc on behalf of the community of Habana, via Mackay 4740, welcomes your report that certain areas of Rural Fire Services can be improved.

There are 2 parts to our submission to your report:

#1: We stress that for the report to be accurate it is obliged to include a brief of Queensland’s rural fire history including its system of Fire warden Permit to Light Fire of which we include reference to our specific location

#2: We note that according to your findings the threat to the current system’s effectiveness lies mainly in administrative deficiency.

#1 Queensland’s Unique Fire Circumstance/History
It is a fact that vast areas of Queensland’s rural community utilise over a century’s experience of ‘putting in safe, precise ‘burns’ (fires)’ via the Cane Farming Industry. Indeed, Queensland’s good track record with bush fire is in great part due to this wealth of inherent practical knowledge of local terrain with its relationship to fire, & application thereof. Queensland is historically, nationally well known for its regular back burn / burn off methods, which correlate with ancient indigenous practices of the controlled burning of the land in order to preserve & regenerate flora and fauna.

Our committee emphatically concurs with the Director-General, Department of Emergency Services’ acknowledgement within your report, of “the role of the ‘Permit to Light Fire System & 2650 volunteer Fire Wardens in mitigating the impacts of bushfire . . .’[pg3]. H&DPA inc categorically maintains that local fire wardens are equipped to make the call as
to whom warrants a permit as a result of their completing fire safety training to attain the position, participating in regular training sessions with rural brigades comprising their own & at times other district brigades, & their residence in & association with the community. In our experience fire wardens responsibly exercise their duty to issue fire permits with accuracy. Our community is adamant that fire wardens have proven through a successful track record that they should continue to do so at their discretion. Our view is that, notwithstanding the current system's flaws, it is of paramount significance that your report gives due credence to Queensland's unique good record of fire safety which was won through implementing this system. It is a record that in any court would be testimony to its success.

#2. Compliance/Administrative Obligations

We thank you for revealing the need for better reporting and communication between Rural Fire Brigades & QFRS Rural Division. As they are volunteers, Habana Rural Fire Brigade's members have limited time, which dictates that they must prioritise practical training, the maintenance of equipment, fundraising, all while assisting landowners to protect their property through controlled 'burns'. We suggest that the future reporting/compliance mechanism must be a streamlined system accompanied by a workable solution perhaps with your recommendation for paid help with same. To advise a heavier workload without accompanying help to complete the extra tasks would be counterproductive to our Rural Fire Brigade's successful operations. It could have the potential to compromise the function of the Rural Fire Services through decreased membership. Indeed we have received feedback to this nature, from within the brigade's ranks. If membership diminishes, the ensuing centralisation of our district's fire brigades could only bring greater exposure to fire threat. We hold that an imperfect reporting system of fire mitigation is preferable any day to a perfect report of a fire tragedy!

In closing:

H&DPAInc has earnestly deliberated your discussion paper, gleaned response from our community & the result is that we implore the Auditor-General to thoroughly consider that because Queensland is a large state of > 1.8 million km² of diverse environments populated unevenly with people & activity, vegetation & fauna, it is critical that generalisations are avoided in order that Rural Fire operations are facilitated, not thwarted, bureaucratically. Further-your submission to parliament must be vigilant so as recommend change for better compliance & communication without jeopardising the influence of local knowledge of the area. This local insight is indispensable to the continued effectiveness & future enhancement of Queensland's sound fire safety strategy.

Yours faithfully,

Lesley Vardanega
Secretary
April 15th, 2010
The Research Director,
Public Accounts & Public works Committee,
Parliament House,
George Street,
Brisbane, Q. 4000

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Yours faithfully,

Lesley Vardanega
Secretary
From: Mike Flanigan [MFlanigan@chrc.qld.gov.au]
Sent: Monday, 19 April 2010 11:39 AM
To: Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Subject: Management of Rural Fire Services in QLD.

The Chair,

The following points are my own private views and are not those of Council.
I am a former Senior Officer with the QFRS holding both Urban and Rural positions of Area Director and District Inspector.

1. Unify the QFRS into ONE service and dispense with the two existing models...Urban/Rural.
2. Dispense with the position of Assistant Commissioner - Rural Operations - and allow the Regional Commissioners to administer ALL fire services within their area of responsibility.
3. Introduce an equitable funding system, where ALL property owners may contribute a fair and identifiable amount, and distribute the funding according to need.
4. Dispense with individual Brigades holding vast amounts of public (levy) money within their unaccountable accounts...gaining interest!
5. Government funding to the Rural Fire Brigades Association to cease....this is a private business enterprise!
6. A portion of the Rural Levy to be paid to the Fire Wardens who control fire ignition and fire hazards.
7. Encourage Brigades to co locate with SES units, and where capable, WITH URBAN FIRE STATIONS, pool buildings and resources, provide for cross membership to address volunteer numbers, dispense with dual police checks.....SELL ANY SURPLUS BUILDINGS once co location is enacted...Landholder Brigades not affected by this as equipment kept on their properties and should be accountable by an audit trail!
8. Engage with employer groups.
9. Involve Local Government to a greater extent...as with SES units.
10. Dispense with different coloured fire appliances...this promotes the 'them and us' attitude......suggest lime green for ALL QLD fire trucks...Legislate that this colour to be used on fire trucks only !.....SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE provides for this colour providing the best visibility under all lighting/smoke conditions.
11. Provide Auxiliary 'Urban' Brigades with appropriate 4x4 off road capable trucks, as they attend many rural fire incidents in acceptable timeframes....-existing trucks are sealed road surface only.

Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me on my mobile phone.

Regards,
Mike Flanigan
Emergency Management Coordinator

Central Highlands Regional Council
95 Egerton Street
PO Box 21
Emerald QLD 4720

Mobile: 0438 785 980
Phone: 1300 242 683
Fax: (07) 4984 1329
Email: mflanigan@chrc.qld.gov.au
Web: www.centralhighlands.qld.gov.au

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19/04/2010
Submission by Keith Paulsen

to the

Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

inquiry into

Management of Rural Fires in Queensland

April 2010
Details of Rural Fire Service history

I am a member of the Mount Alford Rural Fire Brigade (since 2001) and have held the following positions:-

Active Fire Fighter (current)
Crew Leader (current)
Second Officer (current)
Vice President

I am also involved with the Boonah Rural Fire Brigade Group in the position of:-

Group Administration Officer (current)
Deputy Group Officer

The Mount Alford Rural Fire Brigade is a very active brigade and trains regularly and has been involved in many fires and hazard reduction burns including a large number of fires outside of it’s brigade area. It has a small core of active fire fighters and 72 members.

The Boonah Rural Fire Brigade Group is made up of 13 member brigades from the old Boonah Shire and 4 officers. The Boonah Group’s main tasks are to set the amount of fire levy and to distribute the fire levy and if requested by a brigade, to provide assistance at a fire. The Boonah Group has been involved in a number of fires providing Incident Management. It is involved to a lesser extent in distributing QFRS correspondence and coordinating and preparing brigades on days of high fire danger.
Brief Summary

The Auditor-General's report revealed a large number of severe weaknesses in the QFRS implementation of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) Model which ostensibly should be governed by the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990.

There is no doubt that this report has shaken the QFRS and there has been much activity to overcome some of the identified deficiencies. However QFRS needs to do better and to do more.

QFRS has, or appears to have, an excellent reputation for maintaining, improving and managing their Urban Model. Unfortunately, how or why the RFS Model came to be so badly conceived, fabricated, maintained and managed defies belief.

A full and proper implementation of a “top down” management structure and operation of the Brigades and the Fire Wardens is required. There is far far too much autonomy and authority given to Brigades and Fire Wardens which creates the problems across the whole spectrum of the RFS Model.

A paradigm shift in the culture and thinking of QFRS towards the Rural Fire Division is urgently required. All employees of QFRS, not just the volunteers (unpaid employees) have to embrace this paradigm shift.

Brigades and Fire Wardens should not be stand alone operational entities. The brigades and Fire Wardens need to be managed, developed and coordinated along with the individual employees (full time, part time, casual or volunteer). Job specifications and positions need to be created and filled using the Urban Model.

Manipulation by a few entrenched egocentric individuals has created fiefdoms of many brigades to various degrees.

Many active fire fighters are genuinely altruistic and are wanting to be developed to their full potential to serve. Many of these people are not being given this opportunity within the current development environment of some brigades. QFRS are missing out on an opportunity to recognise and tap into this talent.

The government needs to facilitate change by way of legislation and auditing regimes as required.

A simple answer, with a powerful action, is that QFRS should move the RFS Model to an Urban Model for the whole of Queensland as a matter of urgency.

The tax status and the ability to obtain grant money of brigades should be given to the support/administration side of brigades. The support part of brigades should have no affect on the operational requirements, operational administration and operational management.
Is the current Model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

NO! The investigation and report by the Auditor-General has clearly answered this question.

The EMS Director-General and QFRS would have us believe that it is not their child, that it is only adopted and belongs to the community.

Irrespective, QFRS are now the owners of the problem that has been “60 years” in the making. The legislation is very clear.

Time to throw out the current RFS Model and use the the Urban Model with appropriate modifications. The use of the Urban Model will have the advantage of no change for the QFRS infrastructure as the Urban Model already exists and works well.

QFRS need to seamlessly absorb the the truly active rural fire fighters and brigade assets. The same conditions of recruitment, employment, training, rank and management of brigades, as exist in the Urban Model, should be applied.

The remaining active rural fire fighters can be used as an adjunct, much like used to exist with the war time army reserve.

The reservists should be offered a position within the brigade if there are any unfilled vacancies, provided the individuals meet the minimum requirements and have completed basic training. The reservists should be trained along with the active fire fighters.

The reservists will then become an integral part of QFRS and its fire fighting ability.

The Urban Model will discipline and improve the rural fire fighters to be a fighting force that QFRS will be proud to have as a part of their professional organisation.

It will weed out the chaff that dominates the current brigades. The rural fire fighters will not be wasting time having brigade general meetings, where much time is wasted, trying to convince non fire fighting members of their need for operational funding or any other matter of operational importance e.g. equipment (radios, GPS, wind meters, training resources, office resources, kitchen and food preparation facilities).

Brigades should have no boundaries. They should be directed to attend incidents or tasked by Firecom or by the Area Director (or duty officer) and not allowed to work autonomously. Training and community education are examples of a pre-approved task. Resources should be strategically created, placed and activated using a GIS (geographic information system) model that ensures the fastest response times to an incident.

A lot of what QFRS does and does not do with brigades and members is largely driven by the status afforded by QFRS. The RFS Model, as typified in the RFS Brigade Manual, is tantamount to a self styled QFRS embargo on brigades and its members. An embargo designed to distance themselves from and to keep the rural fire brigades and members out of its professional structure (Urban Model) and to put the onus of compliance, management, funding and auditing onto other bodies and individuals.
Is the current funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

NO! The investigation and report by the Auditor-General has largely answered this question.

The rural fire fighters should be funded and resourced the same as the Urban Model.

A government that provides for the existence of an emergency service by way of legislation should ensure, especially in this day and age, that the emergency service is fully funded and resourced irrespective of its historical roots.

QFRS should ensure that adequate resources (buildings, manpower, appliances, equipment) are properly designed, developed and strategically placed throughout Queensland and ensure that extra human resources can be rapidly mobilised into areas within 1-2 hours.

The Urban Model would ensure a standard for fire station buildings, appliances, training, reporting, management and equipment. Most importantly, it would ensure the appropriate strategic placement of resources. Additionally, the Urban Model has systematic checks, internal audits, better planning and risk management. It is a far more robust model than anything that has been requested of, or applied to the rural brigades and fire fighters.

The rural fire fighters should not be burdened with the onerous task of deciding an appropriate fire levy using the current RFS Model.

The greatest tragedy of the current levy setting system is that ratepayers are not getting value for money and there is no proper (or consistent) auditing and reporting of the entire process, including where the levy money is going within individual brigades.

Why is there such a huge variation in the levy amount per rateable notice being collected by the various councils? This is one question that would be answered using a well devised management strategy and one that needs to be answered. The answer and the data should then be made available for review by all brigades, councils and the Auditor-General.

The one levy system that needs to be avoided at any cost is the one where brigades demand that all the levy money collected within their brigade area goes into the brigade's coffers. This archaic arrangement has no place in the future QFRS. It is another good reason to do away with brigade boundaries.

The legislation to apply a state wide rural fire levy, which QFRS would manage according to the Urban Model, already exits. QFRS would be representing brigades and would only have to advise councils of an amount to be collected, the same as currently exists with the Urban Model.
What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

There has always been an urban rural interface around every village, town or city.

Rural Brigades get displaced where QFRS deem that an Urban fire fighting presence is required and in some recent instances a joint operation has been deployed e.g. Jimboomba and Kalbar.

With an Urban Model in place, these changes would be mostly seamless, with only minimal changes required.

QFRS has become more intense about the urban rural interface after recent fires encroached into high density urban areas such as in Canberra and Victoria.

These interfaces contain areas where agricultural/grazing land has been sold for large acreage subdivision or just sold as large blocks of land to life-stylers and tree-changers. These people unwittingly increase the fuel loading and/or build in heavily timbered areas on ridges and hills which were previously largely inaccessible and considered inappropriate many years ago. Some of these owners actually go out of their way to 'green' their properties and surround structures with this 'green'. Many road verges are unmitigated areas of risk.

These practices create many risks and increase the intensity of fires which impact on the fire fighters who are requested to provide structural protection and/or fire suppression. Some of these properties are not defendable.

Many people will not consider grazing, vegetation removal or hazard reduction burns and much of this land surrounds many urban areas. These people have little or no time for rural fire fighters and don't like being advised on appropriate measures to reduce risks. When the inevitable occurs these properties provide no defence for the urban areas. Some of these landowners are governments.

The Urban fire fighter commands more respect and is regarded as more professional. The rural fire fighters need to 'urbanise' and become more professional with the same training and standards of presentation. The professional approach should increase their ability and chances of achieving change within these and other rural areas.

Additionally, people need to be protected from themselves and if they are living in a fire prone area then the government needs to provide direct legislation that gives the power to detect and enforce compliance with a lot of legislation that already exists. Full time Fire Wardens of the QFRS could be used to provide this service as well as carrying out their normal fire warden duties within defined areas.
Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

No! The investigation and report by the Auditor-General has largely answered this question.

The Urban Model would make many, many, improvements that are long overdue.

QFRS would be responsible for separate internal audits (i.e. independent of a brigade's self audits). Quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) should be an integral part of how QFRS provides its services and maintains those services.

The Auditor-General should audit the individual brigades and charge them accordingly. These brigades are government entities under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 1980 and receive public monies.

The brigades should be subject to standard reporting, financial recording and audit processes equally. These changes would standardise the information that is aggregated by QFRS for whole of division reporting to the minister and importantly, to brigades.

What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services Model?

All Fire Wardens should undertake and pass a standard QFRS training package before being accredited to carry out the duties of a Fire Warden. A standard procedures document should be used by all Fire Warden and be available for download by the general public.

The requirements for a permit need to be improved. At a minimum, a landowner must provide a copy of the fire management plan associated with the intended hazard reduction burn. The fire management plan can be a standard template with provision for a map. Critical information would include information on distribution of fuel types and loading along with detailed information on fire breaks and fire fighting resources. Ideally, the Fire Warden should inspect the property and the equipment to verify the details in the plan before issuing a permit.

Fire Wardens play a critical role in QFRS fire mitigation strategies. These positions need to be integrated into the Urban Model and the incumbent should be a paid employee. The Fire Warden system needs to be an integral part of QFRS.

Permit details should be provided to brigade officers along with a copy of the Fire Management Plan.

A fee should be charged for the issue of a permit.

Brigades could be tasked to undertake a hazard reduction burn on behalf of a landowner for a fee.
Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

The following 4 points are provided as an example only, of how the QFRS status of brigades creates inequality and weakens their own professionalism :-

- When seeking information from QFRS a common answer is that the information is subject to the Privacy Act. This answer is given for information that is not personal and does not identify a person and which would be considered "commercial" information for use within an organisation. Another answer is that the records are not complete.

- Other information such as digital mapping and digital cadastral mapping along with land ownership details is not made available to brigades. There is a need for uniform IT (information technology) provisioning and training.

- QFRS have been degrading standards by circumventing training requirements and performing the most minimal assessments of some individuals over the phone. This activity has been described as RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning). Previously RPL required an individual to undertake some current training and an assessment of equipment usage. In fact the whole training package has been downgraded to allow more individuals to pass so that brigades can remain current. Other examples are 4WD driver and chainsaw operator training to a QFRS standard or an Australian Standard not being provided, however, the equipment is available and used in most brigades by unqualified operators.

- Not training active rural fire fighters using the same professional trainers and in the same training facilities as Urban fire fighters. And not using the same assessment and accreditation level or standard as for Urban fire fighters. And not providing access to common training modules further degrades the professionalism of the rural fire fighter and their value.

The word "community" is a very powerful word and is regularly used and abused to gain advantage. Whenever this word is encountered, it should be replaced by another to test the value of the what is being communicated. For example, a community can range from the whole Australian community to the community of a 2 household village. It also denotes a "togetherness". For example, the community of Mt Alford village is not the Mt Alford Rural Fire Brigade community and the majority of Mt Alford residents are not members (or attend brigade meetings) or have an interest. However, the majority if not all of the community of the village and surrounding areas want emergency services of a high order and are prepared to pay for those services. Significantly, a few brigade members can say they represent the community when in fact they only represent a community of themselves and their own interests.

Only a few pertinent points and suggestions have been included to keep this submission simple, but indicative of a general forward direction for QFRS to take with providing quality rural fire fighting services.

Much more could be said.
19 April 2010

The Research Director
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Ms Deborah Jeffrey

Please find attached the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland Submission into “Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland” – 15 pages.

Also enclosed is a printed copy of the PowerPoint Presentation to the Parliamentary Accounts Committee, consisting of 42 pages.

Regards

Dick Irwin AFSM
Chief Executive Officer
Rural Fire Brigades Association

Enc: PowerPoint Presentation printout, Submission
Ms Deborah Jeffrey,

Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland Submission into:

‘Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland’

Strategic Overview

The Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) is acknowledged by Government, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) as the peak body who represents Volunteer Fire-Fighters, support members and Fire Wardens in Queensland.

As the RFBAQ is the Association that supports the Volunteer, many of the recommendations put forward in this document are current policy of the RFBAQ or have been recommendations put forward to Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Rural Operations over several years. The Association therefore seeks the right to continue to openly display or recommend these changes.

The Rural Fire Service in Queensland comprises of some 1,380 brigades, with over 33,800 Volunteers and 2,600 fire wardens. Covering over 93% of Queensland, the Rural Fire Service is the provider of Volunteer emergency support that is represented in force across the State.

Volunteer Fire Brigades in Queensland range from Primary Producer Brigades, which make up about 45% of the total; even though these are primarily self help brigades where the use of fire is an integral part of their land management practices, they are crucial to the safety of the State due to these practises. Generally little individual funding is available to thesees Brigades.
The operational capacity of the remaining 55% of Brigades, depend on available finances, the communities ability to be able to provide active Volunteers to carry out essential mitigation works and respond to incidents. This variation is significant, ranging from highly active very motivated Brigades that are funded sufficiently for operational costs through the levy system introduced for Rural Fire Brigades in the mid to late 90's; to Brigades whose ability to exist is a constant struggle with a disproportionate and inappropriate time spent on fundraising.

There are a small number (predominately in the South East corner) of highly trained well resourced brigades which carry out aggressive structural fire fighting and road accident rescue within their Brigade areas, their role would also include grass and bushfires.

Brigade Placement

Coastal brigades run from the NSW border north to Cairns and above, these brigades, while still being very active are impacted by Local Government levy collection variances and a difficulty in recruiting and retaining Volunteers.

Far northern brigades are affected by strong seasonal weather patterns and also by the large distances that brigades need to service, with a very small pool of available Volunteers and rateable properties.

Western brigades are comprised predominantly of Primary Producer Brigades interspersed with Rural Fire Brigades that have very small income bases and a diminishing pool of Volunteers.

It must be recognised that brigades cannot be listed simply by service classification, or by geographic location. The economic capacity, the availability of suitable people and social drivers of a community more correctly defines the ability or capacity of a Brigade to meet their own fire needs. This truly underlines the fact that although classification may be advantageous for the Fire Service, it does not necessarily fit with the community’s ability ‘One size does not fit all.’

The RFBAQ recognise the improvement in funding to the Rural Fire Service especially to the area of additional training and support staff, which has improved the amount of available support time needed to meet the changing requirements of Government and the expectations of the community. Significant additional and ongoing funding is still desperately required.

The RFBAQ also welcomes the review, as we believe that it comes at an opportune time for both Queensland and the diverse communities that make up the Volunteer fire brigades.

Rural Fire Brigades across the state respond to rural and urban fires, road accident rescue, flood, cyclone, storm damage, search and rescue, first responders for the Ambulance Service, emergency service units and in any other way in which their communities expect of their Volunteer service. The brigades are able to supply such divergent support due to the nature of the unique resources the RFS has, 4 wheel drive trucks with high clearance, chainsaws,
transfer and high pressure pumps, experienced incident control staff and facilities, established communications networks and a credible presence over the whole of the state.

Couple this with the Volunteers, who in many instances bring a wealth of practical professions and skills, and also important local knowledge to any incident that they are presented with, and you have an agency that can provide a quick and professional response and where necessary on a very large scale.

Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

The RFBAQ believes that on balance if adequately funded which it currently is not, the current model with the addition of a more equitable management and support structure, will ensure both an increase and the retention of current membership and a continuum of new adequately trained Volunteers, necessary to meet the growing fire management needs expected of it. Numbers of available active fire fighters have reduced significantly over the last 8 to 10 years.

Increased funding alone will not achieve this objective, the Rural Fire Service must continue to reflect the needs of the communities, who are the Rural Fire Brigades and from which Volunteers are drawn. It will continue to lose support if the urban model and structure is allowed to continue to overshadow the very differing culture of the Rural Fire Brigade.

The current model in Queensland supports over 1,443 fire brigades who range from Primary Producer Brigades, that are an immediate self help mechanism for land holders to manage fire and fuel on their own properties, through to heavily urbanised brigades who respond to road crash rescue, structural fire, internal search wearing breathing apparatus as well as the traditional bushfire and flood and storm rescue capabilities.

The current Brigade model draws its authority from the Commissioner of QFRS, this authority resides in the 1st Officer of a Brigade, which allows for a Rural Fire Brigade to be internally structured in a way that reflects the needs and abilities of the community and in turn when adequately supported address the fire risk in line with the individual needs of that community.

As previously mentioned there is a necessity for diversity between brigades across the State to truly reflect the needs of the communities they support and in turn are supported by. The current model allows for a great degree of latitude in the service that individual Volunteer brigades supply to their communities. If this was to cease, both the short and long term impacts could be significant.

Impacts upon the current model come from a number of directions, and one of these is internal. The Rural Fire Service initially recommended the Area Offices listed below to service the Volunteer needs in (2002).

1. Cairns Peninsular
2. Innisfail
3. Charters Towers
4. Cloncurry*
The Area Offices listed with a single * have been closed down, and the RFBAQ believe that not only should these offices be reopened and adequately staffed, but that the Ipswich Area Office, which also covers the Gold Coast and southern Brisbane brigades, be split in half due to the number and activity of brigades and the volume of Volunteers in the South East corner of Queensland. This would be in line with the opening of 2 additional Areas of Caloundra and Townsville. Emerald office remains open with Training staff and administrative support available but is managed from Barcaldine Office.

At the time when both areas of Miles and Emerald have and are experiencing significant growth due to mining, and the continued increase of risk associated with the gas and coal industry there has been a significant withdrawal or reduction of Rural Staff to these areas. This is concerning when Regional Councils are barely coping with this rapidly increasing risk and population.

Previously the Rural Fire Service in Queensland was led by a Deputy Commissioner who reported to the Commissioner of Queensland Fire Service (QFS). This position was later mirrored by the Urban arm of the fire service, but was deleted from the Rural Fire Service. Currently the RFS does not have a Deputy Commissioner but instead an Assistant Commissioner. The Urban Service has retained the role of Deputy Commissioner and also has seven (7) Assistant Commissioners.

The RFBAQ again believe that the re-introduction of a Deputy Commissioner for the RFS and the supporting structure would best serve the needs of the Volunteer communities across the State. This would also help redress the imbalance, as currently the RFS has the vast majority of fire-fighters, the majority of stations, the majority of fire engines, the majority of the land area and the majority of the fires; yet RFS has the minimum of representation and institutional support.
The RFBAQ would see that the RFS continue as an arm of QFRS, and does not recommend a model in which the RFS was a standalone model. Neither does the RFBAQ see the RFS being absorbed into a one service philosophy.

The RFBAQ supports the current model of Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland with the amendments as listed above and the understanding that the model be adequately funded.

The imposition of a model not acceptable to Volunteers will result in Volunteers and communities not mitigating local bushfire risk or fighting fire.
Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

The existing funding model for Rural Fire Brigades and for the Rural Fire Service is not sufficient to meet current needs.

**Organisational Funding**

**Funding Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAFFING</th>
<th>RESOURCES (Equipment &amp; Communications)</th>
<th>TRAINING &amp; RESEARCH</th>
<th>BRIGADE OPERATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funded through recurrent funding &amp; initiative funding.</td>
<td>Funded by a mix of recurrent Budget &amp; initiative funding.</td>
<td>Funded by a mix of recurrent budgets and some initiative funding.</td>
<td>Funded by a mix of local government, community fundraising, by Volunteers &amp; Association.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Need initiative funding to become recurrent funding

**Staffing** - Currently, staffing for the RFS is funded through recurrent funding and initiative funding from the Federal Government. Initiative funding can lead to the organisation taking direction from meeting the criteria of available grants and not necessarily the needs of the RFS or Volunteers. Initiative funding is also set to timeframes, and this does not necessarily reflect the best needs of the service. The RFBAQ can only support the RFS on these issues, as the service is attempting to make the best of a situation caused by ongoing funding shortfalls.

As mentioned in "Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?", The RFBAQ believe that re-opening the closed Area Offices and splitting the Ipswich Area would require extra permanent staffing to service the Volunteers adequately, and in addition to this the RFBAQ believe that each Area Office should have an extra FTE (Full Time Equivalent) Administration Officer as well as at least 1 extra Brigade Training and Support Officer (BTSO).

**Resources** – Currently equipment and communications are again funded by both recurrent and initiative funding. As mentioned above, this position leads to the inability to put in place ongoing long term projects such as the veteran vehicle replacement programme, and the full retrofitting of appliances as promised.
Training – Currently training and research are funded by both recurrent and some initiative funding, and while the pure volume of training has increased, it is largely focused on minimum requirements for operating safely on a fire-ground under supervision. The RFBAQ believe it is imperative for recurrent funding to be made available so that higher levels of skilled training also be undertaken, so that there is a leadership pool of Volunteers available to lead and supervise those with minimum skills.

There are over 2,600 Fire Wardens in Queensland, who directly manage the states fuel load risk on a local basis, and these Volunteers currently receive no financial support for the administration expenses incurred for this crucial position. This has been promised now for more than 15 years. Significant increasing is essential to meet the changing environmental necessities and the community.

Brigade Operations – Currently out of the over 1,380 Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland, approximately 400 brigades receive a Council Levy.

(This in itself does not equal adequate funding, as some levy allocations do not meet needs. ‘A’ brigade received approx. $1,200 per annum from council levies and had an average annual overhead of approx. $9,000 to meet operational necessities including appliances.)

Raising levies varies from council to council, whether a levy is raised at all, or as to what the amount should be.

Under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990, there is a stated requirement for Councils to collect levies from properties that fall within the boundaries of the Urban service delivery model. This is not stipulated in the Act for properties that fall within the boundaries of Rural Fire Brigades.

Approximately 1,000 brigades, receive no direct council levy funding at all, although Council amalgamation has improved this number.

This in some areas will force Volunteers to spend their precious donated time in the pursuit of raising money for basic operational needs, such as diesel and tyres for their fire trucks; Instead of devoting their time to improved training, community education, risk mitigation and fire-fighting.

The RFBAQ recommends that a state-wide assessment framework, that is driven by ‘Risk’ and ‘Need’ be implemented, as there is a defined need for a system that reflects “to each according to their need and the ability for that community to support that need”.

A system introduced in 1997/8 following a PAC inquiry, where managed properly was extremely successful and should be revisited as a part of the new state-wide framework.
What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Urban encroachment and the way that it is managed by QFRS is negatively impacting Rural Fire Brigades in a number of ways.

As urban expansion is necessary, undeniable and planned, the negative effect on Rural Fire Brigades is the complete lack of cohesive management between the different arms of the QFRS.

Currently QFRS is attempting to manage the increased service expectations in urbanising areas by transporting a new service level onto a community, and then directing the local Rural Fire Brigade to prove that their Volunteer Community Fire Service still has a reason to exist.

Direct impact to a Rural Fire Brigade will be the:

- Loss of income due to the loss of rateable properties, currently there is no defined mechanism for distribution of rates in a dual service delivery model.

- Loss of identity and of a geographic hub impacts on the ability of a Rural Fire Brigade to attract Volunteers and also to 'rattle the bucket'.

- Loss of a geographic hub negatively impacts upon the Rural Fire Brigades' ability to project an ongoing presence in the urban interface, and this then impacts upon ongoing community support and awareness.

- Lack of public acknowledgment by QFRS of the years of effort and community safety that the local Volunteer Fire Brigade has ensured. This directly impacts retention of experienced existing members and recruitment of new Volunteers.

- Engendering in the public eye that the Urban service delivery model, once offered, is superior to that given by the local Rural Fire Brigade. This impacts on all Rural Fire Brigades and Volunteers, as the inferred perception carries outside of the I-Zone area and into the general community.

- Unwillingness of QFRS to accept that a dual service delivery model can meet the expectations of the community.

- New coastal communities are not exposed to Volunteering, as the majority of new service delivery is from a permanent station. This is leading to a diminishing ability to recruit and also for bush fire awareness in the I-Zone. (Newer planned communities, due to design, have a high susceptibility to bushfire.)
Opportunities that present themselves to Rural Fire Brigades will be:

- The impetus to structure the Rural Fire Brigade to meet the emergent needs of the community looking 15-25 years ahead.

- Consolidating or amalgamating existing brigades to reflect the changed needs of the re-shaped community, this also can be the impetus for a central management committee that can support two or three satellite stations. Giving:
  - increased training and level of training
  - correlation of weight of attack
  - increased devotion of time to core business
  - ability to structure brigade around opportunities (appliances)
  - better negotiating position with Rural Operations
  - ability to fund better facilities
  - higher likelihood of response

(Due to the vast diversity of brigades, communities and geography, brigade consolidation or amalgamation can only be driven from within and not directed from without. In many instances, consolidation or amalgamation would not benefit the community or brigade.)

- Interface Zones having high population densities in close proximity to Rural Fire Brigades, which allows for a positive recruiting environment.

- Building dual service delivery models that can meet the needs of changing communities.

- The ability of brigades who are close to the high risk interface, to be able to support a more diverse community as service provision transfers across zones.

- Creation of more high volume brigades that can support and export strike teams in times of high fire hazard. This was exemplified by the last fire season, where the south east of Queensland provided hundreds of firefighters and appliances in support to other regions and communities.

- Brigades learning to work closely and regularly with Urban, Auxiliary and SES units.
How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Increased demands on Rural Fire Brigades are now undeniable; as CSIRO research shows that the average temperature in Queensland will increase by 2 degrees by 2050, and that while rainfall rates across the State should not drop, evaporation rates will increase, exposing Rural Fire Brigades to more Level 2 and Level 3 Wildfires and also to more frequent and violent monsoonal, flood and cyclone activity.

Increased demand is also driven by development, and even if the current level of fire activity was to not grow, demand will grow due to the increase in the sheer number of properties.

Example: A paddock has 1 fire per year that threatens the 1 house bordering the paddock = 1 property exposed. The same paddock still has 1 fire per year, yet now 50 houses border the paddock = exponential growth in demand.

Add to this the design of some newer communities where heavily urbanised areas abut scrub, forest or National Park, or where eco-communities are built amongst coastal heath-land and wallum and in conjunction with narrow access roads, there is a community that will absorb a large number of appliances in a time of fire emergency.

Effective management of the already increasing workload should be done by:

- Acknowledging RFB’s and what they do, not just bushfire management, but as an agency for emergency management and community support.

- Acknowledging Volunteers abilities in all fields, as Volunteers are able to fulfil almost all of the functions of the communities that they represent.

- Providing increased funding support from QFRS to allow Brigades to build stations and facilities that at least meet minimum current operational needs, or preferably meet future needs.

  Current maximum support from QFRS for the construction of a new station is $10,000. The RFBAQ currently match this Government funding (when applied for) and the RFBAQ has suggested to the RFS that if they increase their station funding the RFBAQ would consider same. The support funding of $10,000 to build a fire station that when finished is classified as a government asset is less than appropriate. This is less than one eighth the cost of erecting the building notwithstanding fit out cost.

- Providing increased retained staff support to Area Offices so that Volunteers can devote donated time to training, community education and mitigation activities instead of performing administrative duties.
• Providing a dedicated rural fire-fighter and leadership development training facility that is accessible to all Volunteers and fire wardens, and to train Volunteers in road crash rescue, respond remote structural, breathing apparatus (where applicable), 1st officer, officer, senior fire-fighter, crew leader and incident management courses. This training facility would need to be in a regional location in that is accessible to Volunteer fire-fighters and fire wardens.

• Actively look to retaining experienced Volunteer fire-fighters, by QFRS supporting and treating members of Rural Fire Brigades as both unpaid professionals and bushfire specialists and dealing with Volunteers and their communities in a consultative and supportive, not in a directive way.

• Actively build community awareness in the need for Volunteer fire-fighters as an ongoing and considered campaign.

• Ensuring that Rural Fire Brigades are represented within QFRS by a Deputy Commissioner.

• Maintaining the responsibilities of Local Government in the identification and enforcement of local government laws relating to the reduction of fire hazards.

• Fully fund fire-fighting and support vehicle repair and annual roadworthy certificates.

• Fully fund tyre replacement on fire-fighting and support vehicles.

• Return to 50% government funding for slip on units, and make provision of slip on units to Primary Producer Brigades a matter of immediate importance.

(Slip on units consist of a water tank, pump, hose reel and foam applicator that are attached to a steel frame. The slip on unit sits on a steel frame (speed loader) and can be 'slipped on' to a primary producer's utility so that they can fight fires in their areas. These units are the backbone of Primary Produce Brigades.

• Markedly increase funding to the RFS, so that Volunteers can spend time away from their families in training, community education or fire-fighting, not rattling a bucket to put fuel in a fire engine.

The RFBAQ are aware of the constraints placed on the government purse by increased funding requests by all organisations; yet prioritising need means that the provision of an emergency service to an organisation that covers over 93% of Queensland will hopefully start to meet the already increased immediate needs of Volunteer fire brigades.
Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

The accountability processes that are currently in place to monitor and track individual brigade financial activities, the RFBAQ believe are adequate. In stating this, the RFBAQ also realise that brigades financially report in varied ways that reflect the time available to Volunteers in the brigades, the financial reporting expertise and the communities that they come from.

Financial reporting, as mentioned in previous sections is a responsibility that has devolved down to brigade level, while the RFS now demands higher levels of consistency and timeliness from brigades, no general pro-forma or support is available to brigades to meet these demands. *The RFBAQ is meeting this need by making available to brigades, at no charge, an easy to use financial transaction tracking system. This initiative is a support model that in no way supersedes systems that brigades may currently have in place.*

Brigades across the state, as mentioned previously are funded, or not, to varying levels by Local Governments and the communities that the brigade is drawn from, or in many Primary Producer Brigades, the community is the 2 or 3 landholders. In the instance where a Volunteer brigade has little or no external funding, it is a severe imposition to demand high levels of reporting of Volunteers that the Government is not supporting.

Accountability for equipment is again a responsibility devolved to brigades due there being a lack of retained RFS staff in Area Offices. An increase in the number of retained RFS staff in Area Offices and the reopening and adequate staffing of closed Area Offices would both lighten the load on Volunteers and allow for a greater ability to track and replace equipment.

The Auditor-General considers that as part of QFRS the brigades revenues, expenditures, assets and liabilities should be accounted for in the financial records of the department. At present, there is no reflection of these financial records other than for appliances and buildings in the accounts of the department.

The RFBAQ reflect the advice of the Director General in his response to the Auditor-General's report, as the RFBAQ see that the auditing of equipment that is not stations and capital equipment such as appliances could lead to Volunteer fire-brigades being unable to purchase and dispose of assets valued at less than $5,000.

Bearing this in mind, the RFBAQ also believe that as the RFS and therefore QFRS currently do reflect stations and appliances as Government assets, then the responsibility for fully funding the provision and maintenance of these assets rests with the Government and not with the Volunteers.
What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

The Auditor-General advised that for the Fire Warden network to play a pivotal role in mitigating the effects of bushfires would require a significant enhancement to the current communication, operational and planning systems within QFRS.

In response the RFBAQ cite the Director-Generals’ response noting the role of the ‘Permit to Light Fire System’ and the 2650 Volunteer Fire Wardens in mitigating the impacts of bushfire. The Director-General noted that Fire Wardens have a pivotal role in addressing changing community attitudes to the use of fire, particularly in higher density population areas. The future impacts on climate change, the continuing migration into Queensland and the changing societal values over smoke and environmental burning are all pressures that are placing greater demands on the skills of Fire Wardens.

The RFBAQ fully endorse these sentiments and add that the pivotal role that Fire Wardens play in mitigating fire and educating landholders can only continue if Fire Wardens are allowed to continue applying their local knowledge to the differing needs of the communities that they represent.

The RFBAQ, as stated earlier believe that Fire Wardens must be valued by the RFS and QFRS, and must be given ongoing training and support so that the decisions that they make on a local level reflect not only local, but also the expectations of the community at large.

The RFBAQ are against any move to centralise Fire Warden activities, and also against the implementation of a “Declared Fire Season” in Queensland or any regional restrictions on fire burning. This system would place in the same position as other southern states with equally catastrophic results.

Other impacts to mitigation activities by Fire Wardens are the varying Local Government laws that in instances restrict or make mitigation impossible. Landholders, with the support of Fire Wardens, must retain the ability to use fire to dispose of vegetative fuels on their properties.

Another recommendation of the RFBAQ is that the declaration of preserved or endangered species must remain the responsibility of the fire permit applicant.

Currently across Queensland, a Chief Fire Warden could be the Clerk of the Court, local Policeman or other Government employee. The RFBAQ believe that this system now needs to be reviewed, and that the RFS Area Director be appointed to the role of Chief Fire Warden. This would encourage a higher level of connect between the RFS and Fire Wardens. In some areas this may not be appropriate in extremely isolated areas, this needs to be addressed with caution and significant requirements.
Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

Continued Rural Fire Service arm within QFRS

The RFBAQ believe that the Rural Fire Service should continue as an arm of service provision within QFRS, and that the Director General undertake to endorse the policy of the current Government in clearly defining the ongoing need for the RFS. The RFBAQ also believe that the provision of a Deputy Commissioner, Rural, would ensure the independence and value placed upon Rural Operations and the Rural Fire Service.

Key Recommendations

- Reinstate all Area Offices. Increase retained staff - particularly support to Area Offices
- Training: Dedicated Rural Fire Fighter / Fire Warden & Leadership Development training facility
- Volunteer Fire Fighters: Focus on retention of experienced as well as acquisition of new
- Leadership: Deputy Commissioner – Rural
- Hazard Reduction: Identification and enforcement of local laws by local government to reduce fire hazards
- Rural Brigades should be able to focus on training and protecting the community (and not fundraising)
- Initiative funding to become recurrent
- State-wide assessment framework for funding (based on risk / need).
- Local government rate collection & disbursement. Voluntary levy system.
- Fund stations/ facilities that meet current needs (OHS) and future needs
- Improve accountability of funding by returning to the process, in the signed agreement
- The responsibility for providing the asset audit should remain with staff, and not be delegated to Volunteers
- Ability to use fire responsibly as a land-management tool
- Recognition of different area types across the state and need for flexibility to issue permits
- Increased support for Fire Wardens, especially on the coastal fringe

- Declarations of endangered species must remain the responsibility of the permit applicant

- Applicants should disclose known endangered species

- Retain the ability for the land holder to use fire to dispose of vegetative fuels on their properties

- Rural Fire Service remains a separate entity within QFRS - continued reporting of Rural Volunteers and staff to Rural Operations Management (not urban)

The RFBAQ is committed to the representation of Volunteer fire-fighters, support members and fire-wardens from across Queensland. In addition to the above submission, I will make the President of the RFBAQ, Max Rogers, myself and my staff available to appear before the committee at a time that suits the committee and look forward to working with you in the support of the Volunteer brigades and their communities.

Regards

Dick Irwin AFSM
Chief Executive Officer
Rural Fire Brigades Association
Queensland Inc.
Presentation to the Parliamentary Accounts Committee

Prepared by: The Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland, Inc.

Date: Feb 20, 2010
Presentation Structure

Introduction

Context
- Importance
- What we do
- History & Insights

Issues/Topics
- 1. Current Model of RB?
- 2. Funding Model
- 3. Urban Encroachment
- 4. Managing Increased Demands
- 5. Accountability Mechanisms
- 6. Fire Warden Role
- 7. Other Relevant Matters

Close
- Key Recommendations
- Next Steps
Introduction

- Importance of current review
- Changes to structure of Rural Fire Service by Director General
- Challenge to those changes
- Review to these changes in 2002 (Foster)
- Progress 5-years
- Opportune time
What We Do

• Respond to community needs
  – Fire (rural & urban)
  – Road accident rescue
  – Flood
  – Cyclone
  – Storm damage
  – Search & rescue
  – Ambulance
  – Etc
What We Do

- **Unique Resources**
  - Heavy trucks
    - High clearance
    - Fighting deck
    - Four wheel
  - Equipment
    - Chain Saws
    - Transfer Pumps
    - High Pressure Pumps
- **People**
  - Drawn from community
  - Multiple professions
  - Local knowledge
- **Quick Response / Large Scale**
Learning from History

- History is important
- It should influence the future
- Not control it
1. The Current Model

Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?
The Current Model

• Is the current model suitable?
• What is the current model?
  – Brigades 1,483
  – 34,000 Volunteers + 2,600 Fire Wardens
  – Bushfire Brigade Types (all are Rural FB)
    • Primary Producer
    • Class 1, 2, 3
    • I-Zone
    • Village
    • Special Service Delivery Brigades (SSDB)
Current Model

QFRS Commissioner

Deputy Commissioner
  Urban Fire Service

Assistant Commissioner (1)

Supports
  1,483 Brigades
  93% land area

34,000 Rural Fire Fighters
2,600 Fire Wardens

Assistant Commissioner (7)

Supports
  239 Stations
    (including auxiliary)

2,271 Urban Fire Fighters
2,061 Auxiliary Fire Fighters
## Comparative Scale of Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fire Fighters</td>
<td>34,000 + Fire Fighters 2,600 Fire Wardens</td>
<td>2,271 Permanent Fire Fighters 2,061 Auxiliary part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Stations</td>
<td>415 Rural Fire Stations 1,483 Rural Brigades</td>
<td>239 Urban / Auxiliary Stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Appliances</td>
<td>942 Rural appliances + slip on units and trailer-able units</td>
<td>492 Urban appliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>$30 m + $ (8%)</td>
<td>$367 m + $ (92%)</td>
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</table>
# Comparative Scale of Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Management Roles</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief Superintendents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspectors</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparative Scale of Operations

Regional Management Roles:
Comparison of Rural & Urban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chief
Superintendents | 0     | 8     |
| Superintendents   | 7     | 20    |
| Inspectors         | 14    | 64    |
Key Insight: Increase in I-Zone results in increased bushfire exposures (resulting in increased need for Rural Fire Brigade equipment, training and support).
Impacts on the Model

Situation
• Growth factors
• Changing demographics (urban to bush)
• Changing weather patterns
• Urban fire service expansion

Consequence
• Increased pressure on:
  – Class 2
  – I-zone Brigades

• Knock-on effect on Primary Producer Brigades

Recommendation
• Rural Fire Brigades needs to have a defined and increased budget
Recommended Model

QFRS Commissioner

Deputy Commissioner
Rural Operations

Assistant Commissioner (1)
Chief Superintendent (2)
Regional Managers (7)
Area Managers (17)

Deputy Commissioner
Urban Operations

Assistant Commissioner (7), etc.
(Continue with existing structure)

Rural Fire Brigades
- Majority of fire fighters
- Majority of stations
- Majority of fire engines
- Majority of the land area
- Majority of the fire
- Minimum of representation/ governance

15
Area Offices (Recommended *)

1. Cairns Peninsular
2. Innisfail
3. Charters Towers/ Cloncurry
4. Townsville
5. Mackay
6. Rockhampton
7. Emerald *
8. Barcaldine
9. Bundaberg
10. Maryborough
11. Miles *
12. Roma
13. Toowoomba
14. Caloundra
15. Caboolture
16. Ipswich (x 2) *
2. Funding Model
Resource Allocation

Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?
Rural Fire Service Funding

- Two-part issue
  1. Staffing & Resource Allocation
  2. Brigade Funding

- Rural Brigades should be able to focus on training and protecting the community (and not fundraising)
Organisational Funding

Funding Model

STAFFING
Funded through recurrent funding & initiative funding.

RESOURCES (Equipment & Communications)
Funded by a mix of recurrent Budget & initiative funding.

TRAINING & RESEARCH
Funded by a mix of recurrent budgets and some initiative funding.

BRIGADE OPERATIONS
Funded by a mix of local government, community fundraising, by Volunteers & Association.

Need initiative funding to become recurrent funding.
Rural Brigade Funding

Situation

- Brigade funding from community fundraising, local funding
- Inadequate funding
- No recurrent govt funding – 1,100 Brigades
- 400 Brigades funded, many under-funded
- Inconsistent council levies
  (There was a sound framework in place, but not well-managed.)

Recommendation

- State-wide assessment framework (risk / need)
- Voluntary levy system
- Local government collection and disbursement (of rural levy)
- Return to approved PAC structure, modified to suit amalgamation
3. Urban Encroachment on Rural

What is the effect of urban encroachment on Rural Fire Brigades?
Urban Expansion

- Necessary, undeniable, planned

- Lack of cohesive management by QFRS

- QFRS response – supplant rural with urban service, based on community size

- Negative impacts to Rural Fire Brigades
  - Rural Brigade ‘evicted’
  - Loss of community, income and identity
  - Brigade contribution not acknowledged by QFRS
  - Perception that Urban service superior to Rural
  - Unwillingness of QFRS to accept dual service delivery model
  - Newer communities not exposed to volunteering
  - Newer communities / higher risk
Urban Expansion - Opportunities

• Impetus for Rural Brigades to re-structure – future proofing

• Some Rural Brigades have chosen to consolidate (to fit re-shaped community and risk)

• i-Zone = positive recruiting environment

• Service delivery model to meet needs of changed community
4. Increasing Demands on Rural

How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?
Managing Increased Demand

Drivers of Demand

• Climate change
• Lack of hazard reduction
• More exposures
• Design of new communities
• Community expectation
Managing Increased Demand: Recommendations

Leadership
• Deputy Commissioner – Rural

Retained Staff
• Increase retained staff (In particular, those to support to Area Offices. This would free up Volunteer time to focus on training and mitigation activities.)

Training
• Dedicated Rural Fire Fighter / Fire Warden & Leadership Development training facility

Volunteer Fire Fighters
• Focus on retention of experienced as well as acquisition of new

Community Education
• Manage community perception
• Acknowledge range of abilities within Rural Brigades

Hazard Reduction
• Identification and enforcement of local laws by local government to reduce fire hazards

Increase Resources
• Funding, retained staff support, training

• Build stations / facilities that: (a) meet current needs (OHS) (b) meet future needs (c) are funded adequately
5. Accountability Mechanisms

Are the accountability mechanisms, currently in place, appropriate?
Accountability Mechanisms: Financial Levies Collected by Brigades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Recommended PAC system in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some implementation difficulties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Return to the process, in the signed agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accountability Mechanisms: Resources (over $500 ???)

Situation

• Resources
  – Processes in place
  – Annual audit by Area Office

• Auditor General report states a lack of financial reporting and accountability of assets within the RFS

Recommendation

• The responsibility for providing the asset audit should remain with staff, and not be delegated to Volunteers

• Audit should include slip-on units, etc.

• Brigades should retain the right to purchase and dispose of necessary administrative support equipment, on an ‘as-needs’ basis
6. Fire Wardens

What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire Service model?
Rural Fire Wardens

**Situation**
- Different areas across the state have different needs
- Fire Wardens currently able to respond to the different needs in different areas
- Current review of Fire Warden role
- Local knowledge essential
- Important to have ability to burn if the conditions permit (and not defined season)

**Recommendation**
- Ability to use fire responsibly as a land-management tool
- Recognition of different area types across the state and need for flexibility to issue permits
- Implement the transition from Area Director to Chief Fire Warden
- Increased support, especially on the coastal fringe
Rural Fire Wardens

Situation

• Fire Wardens not adequately supported

• Some disconnect between Fire Brigades & Fire Wardens

• Local government laws in response to pressures re smoke and air quality

• Impacts likely from environmental concerns

Recommendation

• Increased support and training for Fire Wardens

• Integration of Fire Warden role into Rural Brigade structures

• Reinforce the role of the Fire Warden in training documentation for all Officers and Fire Fighters

• Retain the ability for the land holder to use fire to dispose of vegetative fuels on their properties

• Declarations of endangered species must remain the responsibility of the permit applicant
  
  – Applicants should disclose known endangered species
7. Other Matters

Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?
Other Relevant Matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current advisory body</td>
<td>Rural Fires advisory body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not adequately represent the needs of Queensland communities in matters relating to fire</td>
<td>Ability to provide strong recommendations to the Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Should consist of RFBAQ and land management bodies, for example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Primary Producers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cane Growers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• AgForce</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Other Relevant Matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pressures to eliminate the Rural Fire Service from the existing structure of QFRS</td>
<td>• Rural Fire Service remains a separate entity within QFRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reporting of Regional &amp; Area Offices</td>
<td>• continued reporting of Rural Volunteers and staff to Rural Operations Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Other Relevant Matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership role of Rural Fire Service has been diminished</td>
<td>Re-instatement of the role of ‘Deputy Commissioner – Rural’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(from Deputy Commissioner to Assistant Commissioner)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging the weight of the role</td>
<td>Acknowledging the weight of the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– managing 93% of land area Qld</td>
<td>– more stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– more stations</td>
<td>– more fire fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– more fires</td>
<td>– more fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– more Brigades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Conclusion
Key Recommendations

- Area Offices: Reinstate all Area Offices. Increase retained staff - particularly support to Area Offices
- Training: Dedicated Rural Fire Fighter / Fire Warden & Leadership Development training facility
- Volunteer Fire Fighters: Focus on retention of experienced as well as acquisition of new
- Leadership: Deputy Commissioner – Rural (essential the appointee has a rural operational background)
- Hazard Reduction: Identification and enforcement of local laws by local government to reduce fire hazards
Key Recommendations

• Rural Brigades should be able to focus on training and protecting the community (and not fundraising)

• Initiative funding to become recurrent

• State-wide assessment framework for funding (based on risk / need)

• Council collection & disbursement. Voluntary levy system.

• Fund stations/ facilities that meet current needs (OHS) and future needs

Continued / . . .
Key Recommendations (cont)

• Improve accountability of funding by returning to the process, in the signed agreement

• The responsibility for providing the asset audit should remain with staff, and not be delegated to Volunteers

• Brigades should retain the right to purchase and dispose of necessary administrative support equipment, on an ‘as-needs’ basis

• Ability to use fire responsibly as a land-management tool

• Recognition of different area types across the state and need for flexibility to issue permits

• Increased support for Fire Wardens, especially on the coastal fringe

Continued / . . .
Key Recommendations (cont)

- Declarations of endangered species must remain the responsibility of the permit applicant.

- Applicants should disclose known endangered species.

- Retain the ability for the land holder to use fire to dispose of vegetative fuels on their properties.

- Rural Fires advisory body. Ability to provide strong, credible recommendations to the Minister.

- Rural Fire Service remains a separate entity within QFRS - continued reporting of Rural Volunteers and staff to Rural Operations Management (not urban).

End
End
Mr Tony Marks  
7 Corbett Street  
Samford Village, 4520  

19 April 2010  

Ms Deborah Jeffrey,  

Submission by Tony Marks into:  

‘Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland’  

Background  

I have been a rural fire volunteer for well over 20 years, with experience gained both in the NSW Rural Fire Service and Queensland Rural Fire Service. I have held or hold positions as an Officer in both services and am currently a Deputy group Officer with the Pine Rivers Group. I have also been sent on deployment to NSW and have participated in Strike teams in both States. I am also an Area Representative for the RFBAQ.

I am currently a member of the Samford Rural Fire Brigade, which is a brigade directly impacted by the urbanisation of the fringes of Brisbane, yet is still classified as part of regional Australia. A key feature of our Brigade area — “our patch” — is that it includes large areas of semi-rural residential development, a significant proportion of which relies upon their own stored water supplies as opposed to a reticulated, “town water” supply. In addition, this has led to ever increasing amounts of vegetation cover across the Samford Valley as areas previously farmed are revegetated by both native and non-native species of grasses, weeds, plants and trees. Also, due to the geography/topography of the area, vegetation types vary from remnant rain forest to both dry and wet sclerophyll forests and grasslands. These factors make the area covered by Samford somewhat unique, with many areas of high environmental value being present.
One social aspect that also remains a powerful driver and motivator within the area serviced by the Samford Brigade is a strong sense of community and community spirit. This is an aspect reflected in the continuing use of the name of "Samford Village" to distinguish those who live within the village area and those who choose to live within the wider area of the Samford Valley. I have no doubt that this strong association with community is common in all areas where a rural fire brigade is established.

I am also aware that the management of the Samford Brigade have also lodged a submission with this Committee and can only endorse the comments they make about the importance of serving in a community that strongly identifies and links the members of a Brigade with their voluntary service to their community. This aspect alone will not and can never be replicated in any form of paid occupation or service and endows Brigade members with both a special knowledge of their area of operation and a motivation to ensure risks are adequately managed within their community. In that sense, one matter that I would strongly urge the Committee to adequately consider in its deliberations and in the course of phrasing its recommendations is that this strong sense of identity and connection that brigades have with and within their community be fostered and enhanced. A failure to do so would, I suspect, lead to many rural fire volunteers leaving their brigades and seeking other avenues to serve within their communities.

I have attached to this submission a number of discrete areas for the Committee to consider based upon the areas they have been tasked to investigate. Not all areas subject to review are the subject of this submission.

I look forward to the outcomes from the review by this Committee; outcomes that enhance the capacity of volunteers to serve within their communities rather than increase the level of administration and process they need to follow.

Should you need to contact me, my phone number is 3226 3569 or 0422001814.

Yours faithfully

Tony Marks
Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

Support for RFBAQ submission on the need for stronger recognition in the structure of QFRS

I have had the opportunity to review the submission of the RFBAQ on this topic and can only endorse the need for the Rural Fire Service arm of QFRS to be given greater recognition and importance in both in terms of structural recognition and representation. I do not believe that separation of Rural Operations from QFRS is desirable nor of benefit to volunteers as there will be an ever increasing need for paid, retained and volunteer firefighters to work closely together in a spirit of mutual respect. Having said that, having a separate identity is also important as the motivations and drivers of volunteers are significantly different from those who are employed to undertake their duties.

Adequacy of the service delivery model in rural and regional Queensland

I would also encourage the Committee to consider the question of whether the standards of fire cover provided to rural and regional Queenslanders is adequate? Another way to phrase this question is whether the skills and competencies of rural fire volunteers are being adequately harnessed?

A quick review of how rural fire services are delivered in other States highlights how inadequately this has occurred to date. In making this statement, I do not make any adverse comment on current management within QFRS, as they are trying to ensure fire cover is provided across Queensland based upon a level of funding that is itself inadequate. In particular, should the Committee look at the NSW RFS, the SACFS, the Vic CFA, the operational roles undertaken by volunteers include structural fire fighting (including the use of CABA), road accident and rescue, hazmat...and the list goes on in the roles and capacities volunteer firefighters are able to undertake within their communities. It is also relevant to note this also means those elected to govern in those jurisdictions have decided that this is a good, affordable and efficient way to support rural and regional communities in their jurisdictions. So why should a state boundary, being the Queensland boundary, result in a significant decline in fire services able to be provided by volunteers to their communities in rural and regional Queensland?

Obviously recurrent funding is a critical issue, as reflected in the significantly higher levels of funding provided to rural fire services and brigades in other states as measured on a “per volunteer” basis. Some very simple financial modelling also demonstrates that the number of Rural Operations staff
supporting volunteers is woefully inadequate as well. And these are all aspects within the responsibility of Parliament to adequately fund. Hence, this either means the Queensland Government has not been prepared to provide the necessary funding or that they see the role of rural fire volunteers as simply limited to bushfires. In either case, this is demeaning of the skills that volunteers can bring to their communities and limits their capacity to serve within their communities.

The use of volunteers in an expanded form is also consistent with the use of the phrase “Rural Fire Service”, as is used in Queensland. NSW deliberately moved away from the phrase “Bushfire Service” to “Rural Fire Service” close to two decades ago in recognition of the expanded role volunteers played in providing safety from a range of hazards, of which fire is but one hazard. Volunteers are also able to provide a level of all hazards cover in their communities at a fraction of the cost able to be provided through either a retained or permanent fire service.

Hence, in phrasing their findings and recommendations as relates to this area of review, the Committee needs to make explicit their understanding of the role volunteers do and can play in a contemporary Rural Fire Service. Should their role be limited to simply bushfires, or do they, as other states already recognise, have an all-hazards role. This is a critical matter for the Committee to resolve and an essential strategic foundation for the delivery of fire and mitigations services across rural and regional Queensland, as the implications related to funding, staffing, resourcing and training are significant, although the alternatives are not particularly palatable: who would want to be held responsible for:

- A dwindling volunteer pool, as the opportunities to be trained and become involved in serving their communities became more limited due to a limited service vision and model?
- The outcomes from catastrophic events, as have occurred in southern states, because the service model itself lacked vision and funding and prevented volunteers gaining or utilising their skills in the management of all-hazards events, particularly where other states already facilitate volunteers doing so?

Unfortunately, it is a reality that promulgation of a retained/auxiliary and/or permanent fire service model across a state is too expensive for any state budget (and its residents) to bear, let alone Queensland. This is easily evidenced and supported by what exists in other states. However, an enhanced volunteer model is sustainable, as can be evidenced in other jurisdictions where a “full service”, rural fire service delivery model has been implemented. Further, such a model will recognise the skills of volunteers...
and enable/release them, should they decide to do so, to provide an improved level of fire cover, let alone an all-hazards cover, to their communities.
Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

The existing funding model for Rural Fire Brigades and for the Rural Fire Service in not sufficient to meet current needs and will certainly not be adequate should the Committee determine that Queensland deserves a "Rural Fire Service" as opposed to a bushfire service. Further, by retaining the Qld RFS within QFRS as an operating division, financial and other synergies will be retained and secured to the State, further enhancing the safety and security of its residents.

The following material has been "borrowed" from the submission by the RFBAQ as it succinctly reflects some of my views reflected in this submission, with modifications as may be required to reflect what I believe should be an appropriate level of all-hazards cover, particularly fire cover, for residents in rural and regional Queensland delivered through a Rural Fire Service.

Organisational Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Funding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAFFING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded through recurrent funding &amp; initiative funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESOURCES</strong> (Equipment &amp; Communications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by a mix of recurrent Budget &amp; initiative funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRAINING &amp; RESEARCH</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BRIGADE OPERATIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by a mix of local government, community fundraising, by Volunteers &amp; Association.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Staffing** - Currently, staffing of Rural Operations is funded through recurrent and initiative funding from the State Government. Initiative funding is currently limited by the vision of what volunteers are capable of delivering as a service and does lead to the organisation taking direction from meeting the

Submission by Tony Marks

Page 6 of 11
criteria of available grants and not necessarily the needs of Queenslanders, the RFS or volunteers. This is undesirable as it results in short term initiatives without future certainty in service delivery and limits the on-going opportunity for volunteers to deliver a quality service to their community.

I suggest that the Committee carefully examine the levels of staffing provided through other comparable Rural Fire Services to assess whether the current levels of staffing within Rural Operations are appropriate.

**Resources** – Currently equipment and communications are again funded by both recurrent and initiative funding. As mentioned above, this position leads to the inability to put in place ongoing long term projects such as the veteran vehicle replacement programme, and the full retrofitting of appliances as promised.

**Training** – Currently training and research are funded by both recurrent and some initiative funding, and while the pure volume of training has increased, it is largely focused on minimum requirements for operating safely on a fire-ground under direct supervision. Consistent with the views of the RFBAQ, I believe it is imperative for recurrent funding to be made available so that higher levels of skilled training is also undertaken, so that there is a leadership pool of Volunteers available to lead and supervise the growing numbers those with only minimum skills.

There are over 2,600 Fire Wardens in Queensland, who directly manage the states pre-fire mitigation activities and fuel load risk management plans on a local basis, and these volunteers currently receive no financial support or on-going training. This places them at a significant disadvantage as they struggle to meet the changing social and environmental needs and expectations of their community, and those of QFRS. Ultimately, this can only result in an increasing number of disputes between land owners, Fire Wardens and QFRS, whom the Fire Wardens represent.

**Brigade Operations and funding** – Currently, out of the over 1,400 Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland, the RFBAQ estimates approximately only 400 brigades receive a council collected levy. As a Brigade that has benefited from the collection of such a levy, I can personally attest to the way such a reliable source of funding enhances the operational effectiveness of our service to our community. Hence, instead of having to collect funding through raffles and community fund raising activities, Samford Brigade is able to focus upon undertaking hazard reduction and other pre-fire management activities. This is a significant benefit to our community and means our volunteers are focussed upon their tasks/role as a fire brigade member and not as fund raiser.
I also note that other states have formalised their collection of such levies on a uniform basis, whether that be by way of a Fire Service Levy (on insurances) or another levy on property, such as exists in Western Australia. The critical element is that the levy has to be set at a level that allows for the sustainable, on-going funding of fire or emergency services, is equitable and is not easily able to be avoided by the persons whom the levy is ultimately intended to support.

As noted by the RFBAQ, councils are required to collect a fire levy on rateable properties within urban boundaries under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, although this is not a requirement for properties that fall within the boundaries of Rural Fire Brigades. Consequently, not all Queenslanders are equitably sharing in the cost of providing fire services in their communities. Unfortunately, given the demographic spread of residents within Queensland, should a uniform levy be imposed, this will result in an element of subsidisation by residents in more densely populated regions of residents in more sparsely populated areas. However, such a scenario is no different from the principles underlying the collection of any form of levy or tax.

Critically, the introduction of a standardised form of levy for the funding of fire services across Queensland must be linked directly to the provision of those services. So, if a uniform fire levy is settled and collected, it must go to the provision of those services and not be diverted to other government programmes. This is a strength of the fire levy system used in NSW, although I note that the Property Council of Australia and insurance companies frequently argue its imposition is not equitable as not all residents take out insurances to cover fire events.

**Magnitude of the issue** - To provide some idea of the scale of the funding issue to be considered by the Committee, the NSW RFS indicates in its 2008 Annual Report that:

- it engaged around 710 permanent staff to support a volunteer workforce of some 70,000 volunteers, at a coverage of approximately 99 volunteers to one staff member. To achieve a comparable level of cover, QFRS, Rural Operations would need to engage approximately 340 fulltime staff to provide an equivalent level of support to its 34,000 (odd) volunteers; and
- it had an annual budget of $198m, averaging at funding of $2,829 per volunteer. To achieve a comparable level of funding for Queensland rural fire service volunteers, the Government would need to provide annual funding of $96m per annum, which is some $60m short of current funding levels or an expressed need to increase funding by approximately 266 percent over current funding levels.
Hence, the scale of the funding problem facing the Committee is significant and probably evidences that there is already a diversion of funding from the urban fire service levy that is collected towards rural fire services. Practically, should the Committee believe that rural and regional Queenslanders deserve an appropriate level of service, then the amounts collected to fund those services need to increase by a significant margin. Admittedly, there will be some savings to be gained through the sharing of Head Office resources by Urban, Auxiliary and Rural Operations; however, there is still a significant disparity to the current position.
What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Urban encroachment and the way that it is managed by QFRS is negatively impacting on Rural Fire Brigades in a number of ways. Samford, as brigade that is an iZone brigade is frequently not responded to incidents that are clearly and historically well within the skills and competencies of its members. This is unfortunate and leads to a reduction in morale. Ultimately, where rural fire services cease to be provided within a community, then a significant portion of the pre-fire mitigation activities also cease. These is because such services are not a core or financially supported function of both an Urban or Auxiliary service model and are left with individual landholders to manage on their own as opposed to with the assistance of their local rural fire brigade. This is an important issue for the Committee to understand, particularly as other state and local government agencies reduce their funding and resourcing towards fire mitigation activities.

I note the observations made by the RFBAQ on this important area and endorse their comments. In doing so, I also draw the Committee's attention to the importance of the service delivery model adopted for rural fire services within Queensland. In particular, should the Committee agree that the Rural Fire Service is just that - a full service fire service across rural and regional areas – then the issue of urban encroachment from a volunteer's and community perspective largely disappears. This is because a volunteer fire brigade will be equipped and resourced to provide an equivalent level of service as can be provided through an Urban or Auxiliary Brigade at a fraction of the cost. However, it would seem that the current method of determining service delivery is rather outdated and expensive and ignores the role that volunteers can provide; assuming that a type of "residential" or "structural" fire service can only be delivered through an Urban or Auxiliary model. Clearly the examples evidenced in rural NSW, SA and Victoria attest to this and the capacity of volunteers to fulfil such a role.
How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

I note the submission made by the RFBAQ and, once again endorse their comments and sentiment. However, one aspect that requires closer attention is the role of employers being in a position to release volunteers to undertake their roles. As a volunteer, I have experienced discrimination and had my intentions questioned as to my involvement. This is notwithstanding I have been employed by large employers and they have entrenched volunteer policies.

In terms of how the Committee could assist volunteers in addition to those recommended by the RFBAQ, I suggest the following initiatives:

- A reward and recognition programme be implemented that recognises employers who actively engage volunteers and release them as and when needed in their roles as volunteers;
- Empower the head of the Rural Fire Service or the Minister, as appropriate, to declare the services of volunteers as essential in specified circumstances. In this way, volunteers engaged in those services should be able to have their employment “protected” while engaged in an essential service. Obviously, some checks and balances would be required to ensure this concession is not abused; and
- The Qld Government introduce into their contracting arrangements with suppliers of goods and services terms that favour those organisations that have “volunteer friendly” employment arrangements.
Response to PAC questions – Preamble

My name is Les Bateman, and I am the 3rd Officer of the Samford Rural Fire Brigade, which is located 30 kilometres north west of the Brisbane CBD. This brigade is in a unique position as it still has at its core a lot of undeveloped and potentially life threatening vegetation which is rapidly being swallowed up by development.

This is creating an area known to Fire Services as the Izone, where the urban development encroaches on the rural vegetation. This creates special issues for our brigade in that as a rural brigade we carry SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus), making us capable of defending structures within our area. This is a rarity within the rural service and as you can imagine has caused our brigade to look more globally at our area, in terms of crew make up and response capabilities.

I have been a volunteer for 10 years, and I have been fortunate enough to have undergone a high degree of training and actually fire ground experience, having been involved in large campaign fire at Kilcoy, Stanthorpe and northern NSW. It with this combination of knowledge and fire ground experience that if fell qualified to comment on the proposals that are being put forward for the rural fire service in the future.

Thank you, for this opportunity to express my thoughts on an “occupation” that I hold very close to my heart

Thank you

Les Bateman
3rd Officer
Samford Rural Fire Brigade
19/4/2010
Responses to PAC questions – Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

The current method of the 4 classification system – Primary Producer brigades, Level 1, 2 and 3 (Izone brigades) is acceptable for making a broad generalisation about the capabilities of brigades, but again QFRS need to undertake a skills/equipment audit to determine how much additional value these individual brigades add to their local community. There are 1500 brigades with 34,000 members state wide and each are individual and all different from each other, in their wants and needs, so it is inappropriate to try and use a "one size fits all approach" when dealing with the multitude of unique circumstances found in each brigade/brigade area..

While the task they perform is the same, the circumstances and responses to these fires may vary considerably yet they may only be a few kilometres apart geographically. Just as there is no one panacea for fighting fires, there is no one panacea for governing rural fires brigades/service. Brigades and their members need to be flexible and adaptive in their work approach, so must the management of these resources.

Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation appropriate?

Why should brigades that work hard and are able to manage their funds be penalised by pooling all their cash, only to go cap in hand to a central authority (who is so out of touch of the needs of the brigades) to seek funding for required projects. The priority assigned these projects may/will vary from the fiscal lords and worthwhile and in some cases essential projects will not be given the go ahead, potentially endangering the lives of crews (Zero Harm). If the funding were to be removed from the brigades and handed over to the Area Director or Group to administer and mete on a needs basis there would absolutely no incentive for members to make brigades a going concern. The members of the brigade would see any attempt to pool all brigade funds and place them under the control of the Area Office as a step away from what little autonomy to make reasoned local decision on the needs of the brigade. They would also view this as a means of rewarding under
performing brigades, while penalising the brigades (Samford) who are very proactive and diligent in their decision making processes, while being very aware that they are using community/public monies to achieve its fire fighting capabilities. There is a very real possibility that if the monies were centrally controlled that there would be a difference of opinion between the controlling body and brigades, as to what was considered to essential projects/purchases. The subsequent and ongoing debate could/would potentially place the lives of the members and the community at risk until a resolution could be reached, if at all. The model that is in place at the moment appears to be trying to use a “one size fits all” mentality at present, when in fact there needs to be a more case specific model developed, where individual brigades and circumstances can be reviewed in order to maximise the benefits to not only the brigades but also their surrounding COMMUNITY. Where a brigade has the ability to generate its own working funds both through their own efforts of hazard reduction work and by receiving supplementary income via the levy system, this would appear to be working, however as previously mentioned there are glaring anomalies in this approach, purely dependant on a brigade demographic location. There is no reasonable rationale to penalise a brigade purely due to its ability to generate these funds. A suggestion might be to impose a 10% per annum “local improvement levy” on the larger more successful brigades, with the understanding that they retain the balance of their funds for their own needs, in order to assist the smaller less well off brigades within their own region. So I believe there needs to be a more individual specific funding model developed that takes into consideration the unique circumstances to each brigade, the area it needs to defend, the population density and the community’s ability to contribute to the running of these essential services in their area.

With regard to resource allocation, the QFRS brigade classification and population demographic will determine the level of support and that areas are eligible for, when in truth the needs may outstrip what appears on paper, and again there needs to be an individual model developed in consultation with the major stakeholders – the fire brigade members, who know first hand and best what is required to successfully defend their own patch of territory. Individual brigades will know historically what is required to handle fire suppression in their area and this local knowledge is invaluable when considering the provision of equipment/resources.
Overall there needs to be a reworking of the model used to allocate funds and resources making certain that it takes into consideration the unique and specialised conditions that exist in the rural and regional areas of the state. This model needs to work in a consultative manner with the local brigade members and the local community to ensure that any equipment/resources supplied are fit to meet the community needs.

The parent organisation QFRS need to appreciate the level of skill, dedication and professionalism that is involved in being a rural fire fighter. They need to understand what skills the rural service has to offer in their individual regions, and just what type of resources these brigades hold e.g. BA, RAR etc. the major difference between the urban service and the rural service is that there is little COMMUNITY based thinking in the urban service.

How can the increasing demands on the Rural fire Service be managed effectively?

The parent organisation QFRS need to appreciate the level of skill, dedication and professionalism that is involved in being a rural fire fighter. Remember volunteers DON'T have to be there, they choose to be there. They need to understand what skills the rural service has to offer in their individual regions, and just what type of resources these brigades hold e.g. BA, RAR etc. the major difference between the urban service and the rural service is that there is little COMMUNITY based thinking the urban service.

Volunteers who live, work and invest in their own communities are extremely proud to do so. QFRS need to carry out a skills audit (this should be easy enough with the volume of data in relation to training, equipment etc that brigades are forced to supply to area offices) to see what skill base there is in the community out there. Volunteers not only add value to their community/brigade through the regimented training regimes but they bring a wealth of personal skills, which sadly again is not recognised by QFRS. The rural fire service are busy trying to retain volunteers by offering incentives e.g. crew leader gear bags, greater recognition of skills obtained – crew leaders skills, by issuing yellow helmets and epaulettes to show this qualification, if asked most brigades would prefer the cost of these items be given as cash to the brigade to be used as
seen fit by the members. Brigade members don’t need reminding who is at what level of capability, it is obvious to them. Also as part of the Queensland Government Q2 project a basic tenet of this scheme is the “continuing to grow our volunteer workforce in organisations such as the State Emergency Services and the Rural fire Service”, “Encouraging volunteers from all backgrounds to increase diversity in the volunteer workforce”, promoting the economic, social and environmental benefits of volunteering”, working with the community sector to help supply the volunteers that it relies on”.

In response to the 4 roles that the Queensland government are concentrating on in the Q2 program:

- While there is disharmony in the Fire Service between the Urban Service (in particular the UFU, who see volunteers taking the paid jobs of their colleagues) and the rural service, it will be impossible to grow the service in the constructive way. The Urban service have little idea of what level of equipment, skills, training and dedication that rural brigades possess and which the readily offer at non cost to their COMMUNITY and there appears to little or no will to find this out.

- The volunteers in the Rural Service bring a wealth of knowledge, skill and entrepreneurial talent, purely through their diverse backgrounds and interests, and again these skills are not recognised or encouraged by the people in charge at all levels of the urban service.

- The economic benefits provided to their local COMMUNITIES by the rural service are immense and are ongoing as part of the very tangible commitment to its COMMUNITY. Due to the diligence and application of the members the fire levy is able to be kept at $25 per household, while provide the best in response in a very timely manner. The brigade also carries out community education programs in the COMMUNITY, at schools, local events (Agricultural Shows) and in conjunction with the Moreton Regional council, and through these programs that
there has been a change of thinking within the COMMUNITY that has resulted in a lessening of the potential of fires as well as the provision of a greater awareness of what to in the case of an emergency. The brigade participates in fund raising efforts of the COMMUNITY, thereby putting economical resources back into its local COMMUNITY. The brigades through very astute use of it's funds, not only provides equipment and training for it's crew members but it lessen the impact on the State coffers by being almost totally economically self sufficient where possible, an example of this is the brigade to which I belong, Samford. A cost analysis carried out has indicated to provide an equivalent service with minor station upgrades and using auxiliary crews would cost the government $1.2 million dollars a year, the current service is almost cost neutral, this provides a major cost saving benefit.

➢ Socially – the brigade provides an avenue for members – new and old an opportunity to mix and develop new skills and to expand existing ones. The brigade is very active in the community, by being very actively involved in COMMUNITY based activities such as Anzac Parades, the Local Agricultural Show, RSPCA Million Paws Walk, the presentation of education programs such as Fire Awareness and Bushfire Prepared communities to all the COMMUNITY based organisation in the valley as well the pre schools, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in the region. The brigade is also highly respected and works well with the QPS, SES, Council and QAS within the region.

➢ Environmentally the brigade carries out regular property assessments for land holders in order to best prepare them for the upcoming perils of the fire season. The brigade has a very active program of hazard mitigation which will help negate the potential catastrophe of what happened in the southern states last year. The program combined with the ongoing education campaign will enable the brigade to achieve a balance of hazard reduction along with a good sustainability, by allowing us to identify the potential environmental loses that would have otherwise occurred if
education and preventative work had not been previously carried out.

- Through the activities carried out in the previous categories of Economic, Social and Environmental participation, the brigade has earned the trust, respect and support of the COMMUNITY.

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

Brigades in the state operate under the establishment of a constitution and the associated regulations/rules /legislation contained in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990. As mentioned in the Auditor General’s report, that there was no reporting of revenues, expenditures, and assets and liabilities undertaken by QFRS, only appliances and buildings are recorded. A majority of Level 1, 2 and 3 Brigades would have a very robust organisational structure including the detailed report and recording of all the financial aspects that are currently neglected by the QFRS recording system. The brigade books are audited annually and maintained in accordance with Sections 27, 28, 29 and 30 the Brigade Constitution D7.27 of the Brigade Manual as described on the QFRS web site. Asset checks and inventories are carried out at brigades by local Rural Fire Operations staff members and these records are forwarded on the QFRS headquarters at Kedron.

What effect is urban encroachment within the brigade areas having on rural fire Brigades?

The increased urban presence within Samford Valley has brought the problem of unreal expectations by the new property owners that if there is ever a fire in the valley that there will be a fire engine located at every property, this will not be so, due to the need of the brigade to be in the best and safest position possible to combat the present threat of the fire. Rural Fire Brigade are actively involved in a process of changing that mind set by carrying out series of community education programs, designed to education the community so that it can make calm and reasoned decision in the
time of a bush fire. This community education is carried both in concert with the Councils and QFRS through they're jointly run Bushfire Prepared Communities Program, and independently by brigade by visiting and educating as many pre schools, kindergartens, primary and secondary school children as possible in the area, so that the bushfire safety message are taken home. The brigade also educates local community groups, as well as the general public at shopping centres and local agricultural shows.

With the increased development that has occurred in state, combined with the building of homes in more inaccessible, yet affordable blocks of land, will impact greatly on the rural service, as we possess vehicles that are suitable to attacking fires in these situations. Samford is indeed fortunate to be one of only five rural brigades to possess CABA capabilities. This coupled with the fact that urban appliances are too heavy (16t) and are ill equipped to travel over soft dirt rural roads (2 wheel drive), make the rural presence in the valley a necessity. The brigade has maintained the equipment and the training regime of our CABA qualified fire fighters in line of that of an auxiliary station. We have been called in by urban appliances to provide support to their crews during aggressive structural protection activities.

Even though the brigades are a ready source of skilled manpower, there appears to be a concerted effort to negate this service, by the dispatchers’ at FIRECOM, not responding us to RTC, Motor vehicle fires etc, even though our brigades has been involved in these activities for decades. As Samford, Mt Nebo and Mt Glorious areas have become a mecca for weekend drives and motor cycle riders; the need for this brigade to be responded has increased dramatically. Again due to the inhospitable nature of the terrain in these areas, it is often the case that the urban appliances are unable to reach these incidents, which means that they reluctantly and belatedly call for assistance from us, or they call for further urban assistance from the Urban Rescue Vehicle (502L) stationed at Roma Street headquarters. This response can take up to 20 minutes to reach these areas, dependant on it’s availability at all. In the emergency response business time is critical; there is a genuine reluctance to use a readily available, trained and well equipment resource, which could respond in a matter of minutes.

This increased popularity of this tourist destination has seen a marked increase in traffic volume including the use of mini buses
taking tour groups up to the mountains on day trips. This creates the very real possibility of large scale multi vehicle incident, which would require a major timely response, which would be better covered by crews that possess good local knowledge. It would be prudent by QFRS to keep the rural component of the service actively involved in rescue response in order to provide the best possible cover for the community and visitors to the valley.

The major impact on the rural brigades will be as more houses are built in the rural Izone area; there is a push by QFRS to increase the response times of nearby urban brigades in order to cover more and more of the Samford Valley region. This will in turn push the fire levies up from $25 per house per year, to $108 per house per year (in outlying houses – up 400%) and up to $149 per house per year (for houses that would fall within the redrawn urban boundaries – up 600%). It should be noted that Samford Valley already have a structural fire fighting capability, and while not presupposing to replace the professional urban fire fighters, it will and has provided invaluable support to the urban brigades. The community must be made aware that the extreme increase in the fire levies would not see an increase service delivery. In fact should it be determined that an auxiliary station be established in Samford, the excessive increase would see the service level drop off, as auxiliary/urban brigades do not carry out hazard reduction burn offs.

What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire Service model?

The Fire Warden should have sufficient knowledge to determine under what weather conditions a fire can be safely lit and contained. The warden by this determination is carrying out the task of risk manager as well as undertaking a public safety role for members of the community. They should also possess sufficient knowledge that will allow them to carry out property assessments, in order to advise local residents of the best methods to either prepare (hazard reduction) or defend their properties (bush fire prepared communities) in case of a fire. Along with this knowledge it would be advantageous to have a good local and historical knowledge in relation to fire behaviour and activities in their area. The warden undertakes to control the use of fire within their allocated area and this can be done by granting or rejecting a permit, the placement of specific conditions upon a permit and act
under the legislation contained in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990. There should not be a specified fire season in which permits can be issued, as nature knows no calendar. To limit the capacity of fire wardens to issue permits in suitable fire weather conditions, introduces the real possibility of a very dangerous build up of fuel that would impossible to control should it catch fire.

Any other relevant matters that the committee needs to know?

I think the real question has not been addressed and that is - What should the expected level of fire cover be for regional areas of Queensland. There needs to be a comparison done between NSWRFS, CFS and CFA to determine and explain WHY rural areas in Queensland are different. If you were to live on the Qld /NSW border the service delivery either side of the border are vastly different, yet what makes that difference?

Volunteer services in every other state of Australia are advancing in their levels of skill, training and equipment levels, with the apparent exception of Queensland. The interstate volunteer services are trained for and involved in all aspects of fire and rescue work, and in many instances they are only form of response available to their communities. Volunteer services can be seen regular on national news broadcasts, taking the lead role in incident management, a position that QFRS are unwilling to even consider.

There also appears to be a much better and more harmonious working relationship between urban and rural volunteer services in the other states. Why is this so?

We are constantly feed a diet of the fact that we are one service. This however can be debunked by the following examples:-

- RFS volunteers have been instructed not to respond to emergency situations under lights and sirens, as they are not covered under the Fire and Rescue Act 1990 as it states “that they are not authorised fire officers as they are not employed by fire Services”. There needs to be an
amendment to Fire and Rescue Act similar to that which appears in the Transport Act – where fire fighters (Urban, Auxiliary and Rural are recognised as authorised fire officers for the purpose of driving emergency vehicles.

- The ongoing debate about the use of red/blue flashing lights on emergency services vehicles – why not on rural? There is documented evidence that blue/red lights offer better night visibility and therefore better safety. Isn’t this a basic tenet of the QFRS Zero Harm policy? While it is recognised that red/blue are more visible it is also noted that the mere presence of red/blue lights will not guarantee the safety of fire fighters whilst working on our roads, only due diligence by all members concerned can do this.

- The ongoing reluctance by FIRECOM/QFRS Management to call out our brigade even though we have a well trained and equipped resources waiting to respond – the non responses by FIRECOM is having a very marked effect on morale of the members, so far to their credit they have maintained their attendance at training again showing their dedication and commitment to their community. It is unusual that their appears to be an effort to undermine the volunteers when there is a directive from the Premier in the form of the Q2 Program, which advocates the greater inclusion of volunteers in the community based activities. There have been instances of genuine aggression shown by urban crews to volunteers attending jobs (they are rare, but it has happened).

- The failure by QFRS to respond suitable vehicles (4x4, light and medium attacks) to rural incidents which can and has resulted in lost time in responding.

- The failure by QFRS to provide our trained and qualified structural fire fighting PPE. The supply or rather the non supply of this equipment went on for 12 months, and in the mean time it not only prevented some of our crews with out of date equipment from responding, it needlessly put the community to needless risk. Is this public defensible?
The major thrust of my submission is that QFRS do not know or appear to want to know just what resources or level of skills exist within the Rural Fire Service ranks, and this “us” and “them” mentality is doing no good to the fire service as a whole. When all rural fire fighters want to do, is defend or assist their communities in the case of an emergency. As previously stated – volunteers want to be there, professionals have to be there.
Dear Ms Jeffrey

Queensland Rural Fire Service Review

I refer to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee’s current inquiry into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland. I wish to offer the following comments in relation to the matters relevant to the inquiry’s terms of reference.

The Current Model

The local management and coordination responsibility should remain with local brigades to prevent dilution of local ownership and accountability. If this structure changed it could result in less volunteer participation in local brigades. The volunteers are the strength of rural fire brigades and every effort should be made to continue to encourage participation which should include local management and accountability ie locals doing it for themselves.

Funding

Funding has seen huge progress over the last decade and hopefully this will be maintained. Many brigades are now fairly well resourced with sheds and equipment based throughout the region. There are still some brigades yet to benefit from these initiatives but if the programs are maintained, these resources should be applied equitably over time. However, in time it will more than likely be necessary to start a plant replacement program within the brigade to avoid the problems previously experienced.

The current system seems to recognise brigades in higher risk areas have a higher funding priority. Therefore resources seem to have been applied accordingly. This works effectively and should continue. The funding model also allows for local coordination between brigades and local government to increase funding where there is a demonstrable need for additional funding. This approach should also continue.
Encroachment of urban area

There has been some progress in relation to better planning and building controls in relation to fire hazards for new dwellings. In the Southern Downs region, it is believed that this is not a result of urban encroachment but more related to residential lifestyle choices in highly desirable rural landscape areas that are also often high risk fire areas. This could be assisted with tighter state controls supporting the efforts of local government planning and building enforcement regimes requiring more effort on the part of landholders as to where and how their home is built in rural areas, particularly in high risk areas.

It would also be helpful if resources and/or legislative support were available to retrospectively attend to the historic problems where people live in high risk areas and in some occasions without appropriate personal risk management plans and infrastructure such as appropriate on site water storage that rural brigades can connect to. This is also relevant to areas around homes and other buildings that are appropriately cleared in addition to having an emergency evacuation plan in the event that the primary access is cut off due to fire. Funding relating to local groups being able to support residents in these areas would be beneficial in reducing the risk in the event of an emergency.

Fire Wardens

It is suggested that the role of Fire Wardens should be changed so that it has more of a direct link with the rural brigades to prevent some of the current communication issues which are being experienced locally.

Should you require further information in relation to this matter, please contact Council’s Governance Officer Jody Collins on 07 4661 0377.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Ireland
Director Corporate Services
Our Ref: AI:JMC

19 April 2010

The Research Director
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

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Andrew Ireland
Director Corporate Services
19 April 2010

The Research Director
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

On behalf of CANEGROWERS I wish to thank you for the opportunity to make the following submission in response to the Discussion Paper on the above.

About CANEGROWERS

CANEGROWERS is the peak representative body for Australian sugarcane growers. Around 80% of Queensland sugarcane growers are members of the CANEGROWERS highly successful lobby, representation and services group. Based in Queensland, the State that produces around 95% of Australia’s raw sugar output, the CANEGROWERS National Office represents the interests of cane growers Australia wide.

Government and business leaders recognise CANEGROWERS as the authoritative voice of cane growers. Membership ensures that growers’ needs are represented at the highest possible levels of industry and government decision-making. We safeguard growers’ interests on all issues likely to affect their business.

The CANEGROWERS organisation exists to:

- Provide strong leadership for cane growers within a viable sugar industry
- Deliver effective representation and valuable services to Queensland cane growers
- Ensure cane grower strength and influence at local, district and state/national/international levels through unity and shared common values.

Who we are

Our formal name is Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Ltd but everyone knows us as CANEGROWERS. We have been advancing and protecting the interests of cane farming families in Queensland since 1925. Grower directors (elected by their fellow members) determine organisational policy, which is implemented by staff based in a State office in Brisbane and 15 regional offices.

For many years State Government regulations made it compulsory for all cane growers to belong to CANEGROWERS but since 2000 membership has been voluntary. Our membership of over 80% is amongst the highest for agricultural organisations in Australia.
What we do

Some of the things we do on behalf of growers:

- Negotiation with Federal, State and Local Governments on industry issues
- Negotiation with government agencies and other industry bodies on significant issues affecting cane growers
- Collective bargaining with mill owners on cane supply, processing and payment issues, allowances and bonuses
- Cane testing and negotiation of cane and sugar quality schemes
- Environmental sustainability and property rights
- Irrigation, drainage and water pricing issues
- Harvesting equity arrangements
- Transport, licensing and fuel issues
- Growers’ financial circumstances including government schemes and major lending institutions
- Industry research and extension matters
- Sugar marketing and trade issues
- Workplace health and safety matters
- Cane firing arrangements and rural fires
- Industrial representation and advice
- Crop protection, rats, canegrubs and other pest issues
- Chemicals and fertilisers usage
- Local government matters including valuations

CANEGROWERS also offers a wide range of services. District offices provide services and advice tailored for local needs. Many also act as the secretariat for bodies involved in local industry and community planning, development and management.

Our Structure

CANEGROWERS operates as a single organisational entity, representing its members’ interests at area and district level, and in state, national and international forums. Structurally the organisation comprises autonomous business units at the various levels, which are controlled by elected grower directors.

CANEGROWERS represents growers, directly and indirectly, on every important body involved with the Australian raw sugar industry, ranging from purely local issues to matters of global importance. Policy, strategic direction and the range of services provided are determined by practising cane grower members who are elected by the membership every three years.

The organisation’s peak body is Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Ltd, based in Brisbane. Each of Queensland’s 24 sugar milling areas supplies a member of the Board. In cane growing regions, grower-controlled companies operate CANEGROWERS offices from which professional staff provide a range of services and represent the special interests of members locally.

The operations of CANEGROWERS are funded at all levels through annual fees paid by those growers who choose to become members, supplemented by income from various commercial activities. Members determine the amount of the membership fee, which is generally calculated on the basis of an amount per tonne of cane harvested.
In preparing this submission we have consulted with District CANEGROWERS Offices and we have encouraged them to lodge their own submissions in response to the Discussion Paper.

**The Important use of Fire in the Cane Growing industry**
The Queensland Sugar Industry produces around 95% of Australia’s raw sugar and is recognised as a world leader in innovation, product quality, efficiency and sustainable production.

CANEGROWERS is dedicated to a sustainable sugar industry which is recognised as environmentally responsible.

Whilst green cane harvesting has substantially reduced the number of fires with some 70% of Queensland’s cane crop being harvested as green cane; fire is still an essential management tool within the industry. There are sound agronomic reasons for the use of fire in certain circumstances as well as to assist the harvesting process by removing excess leaf and extraneous matter, eradicate vermin and to mitigate health hazards for harvesting crews.

Cane growers are skilled, responsible managers of fire. The harvest season traditionally occurs from early June to early December each year. For an average of 30% of the total industry crop fire will be used to prepare the cane for harvest. Fires in cane tops and trash residue may take place in all mill areas.

The Queensland Government has recognised the industry needs through the provisions of the Fire and Rescue Service Act, Regulations, Commissioner’s Notification and a Seasonal Permit system for the cane industry.

Cane growers commit considerable resources to the purchase and maintenance of fire fighting equipment for fire management on the farm. Many cane growers are active members of the local Rural Fire Brigade. The fire fighting equipment, generally owned by cane growers and largely maintained by growers also benefits local communities. There are many cane growers who are the local Fire Wardens serving the community.

**Objective**
Our objective is to provide sugar cane industry specific information to assist the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee to complete this inquiry into the Management of the Rural Fire Services in Queensland as set out in the terms of reference contained in the Discussion Paper.

**Issues to Consider**
We set out here under our submission in relation to the main issues listed in the Discussion Paper for consideration for the Committee.

1. **Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?**
The Queensland Government recognises that it has a responsibility to protect persons, property and the environment from fire emergencies. These obligations are provisions of the Fire and Rescue Service Act. As mentioned in the Auditor General’s report there are two distinct models to deliver this service. The paid staff urban ‘red truck’ service model to protect cities and towns (i.e. the urban community) and this service is funded by an Urban Fire service levy. Secondly, there is the Rural Fire Brigades manned by volunteers (the ‘yellow truck’ service model) providing protection to rural areas and minor townships and villages. There are Rural Brigades operating in the rural areas on the fringes of townships that
would not necessarily be regarded as minor townships. The Rural Brigades are responsible for protecting approximately 17% of the population but 93% of the land area of Queensland.

As you will be aware Rural Fire Brigades are very much community self-help organisations with the brigades expected to assist with funding their own operations, purchases and expenses. CANEGROWERS has supported the situation where a Rural Fire Brigade in consultation with the local Authority identifies specific equipment and resourcing needs for the local Rural Fire Brigade/s, develops a budget and subject to general agreement and support of the community at a public meeting introduces a voluntary levy on the ratepayers in the local Authority area. Such levy income raised by the local Authority must remain in the local Authority for allocation to the Rural Fire Brigade/s within the local Authority area.

For many in rural areas the development of QFRS organisational structures over the last 10 years or so has seen the urban arm of the QFRS take greater control and exercise increased influence on the traditional Rural Brigade operations. As an observer the status of the Rural Fire Service within the QFRS appears to have been downgraded. CANEGROWERS submits that there needs to greater equity afforded to the Rural Fire Service which oversights some 1,525 rural brigades involving approximately 35,000 dedicated volunteers and with rural fire brigades coving 93% of the land area of Queensland. Land management and hazard reduction continues to be the prime focus of Rural Brigades as well as responding to wild fires.

Historically, the Rural Fire Service has functioned well but increased bureaucracy, more demands on volunteers' time and reduced access to equipment that local rural brigades consider to be appropriate and warranted has created some disquiet about the adequacy of the level of support offered to rural brigades.

Proposed QFRS changes to Urban Fire Service Areas for levy purposes without consultation with the stakeholders and more particularly without increasing the effectiveness of fire service delivery to the local community is opposed by local cane growers and the CANEGROWERS organisation. Such action by QFRS has been seen as a grab for funding and a transfer of costs to cane growers. Coupled by the fact that such action does not increase the effectiveness of fire service delivery CANEGROWERS suggests the following for consideration. Aspects of the current model fails to ensure adequate consultation with Rural Brigades in strategic planning and does not recognise Rural Brigades, their funding methods and their assets as part of the “system”.

Suggested alternatives:

A. A model which encompasses all Fire Services (Urban and Rural) as part of the one system and classifies/classes brigades according to a set of predetermined criteria, (e.g. area covered, population, types of fire risks); or

B. A model which completely separates Rural Brigades through the Rural Fire Service from QFRS and establishes a separate management and funding structure for Rural Brigades.

The fundamental natures of the two arms of the Fire service are vastly different. Rural Brigades are about land management, hazard reduction and combating wild fires in the landscape whereas the Urban Brigades are about extinguishment of fires in building structures, road accident rescue and search and rescue following a natural disaster (e.g. earthquake) or terrorist activity.

Therefore, the structure of each arm of the Fire service needs to be more closely aligned with the service outcomes that they provide and their client base.
2. **Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?**

CANEGROWERS has received a number of expressed concerns about the lack of choice and availability of equipment as well as the suitability of available equipment and their cost.

There has been a call for increased government funding for the provision of resources suitable for use by Rural Brigades.

Certain equipment that was considered appropriate for use by rural brigades located in the cane growing industry has been removed from the subsidized equipment list and calls have been made for this equipment to be re-introduced.

The method of collecting what is local voluntary levy monies from the community is best collected by the local Authorities for and on behalf of the local Rural Brigade/s and such monies must remain in the local Authority area for allocation to the respective Rural Fire Brigade/s within that local Authority area. Purchases made by the Rural Fire Brigade can be acquitted through the relevant local Authority. Access by QFRS to such monies is not supported by CANEGROWERS.

Historically, the Rural Fire Service has not been well funded by government and the service is to be commended for its achievements in this area of roll out to Rural Brigades despite the low level of funding to the Rural Fire Service.

The operation of the Rural Fire Service through the Rural Fire Brigades has been an appropriate service to the local community at a very low cost to the Government and the Community.

CANEGROWERS is of the view that the current model can be amended to provide better support to Rural Fire Brigades.

3. **What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?**

Proposed QFRS changes to Urban Fire Service Areas for levy purposes without consultation with the stakeholders and more particularly without increasing the effectiveness of fire service delivery to the local community is opposed by local cane growers and the CANEGROWERS organisation. Such action by QFRS has been seen as a grab for funding and a transfer of costs to cane growers. Coupled by the fact that such action does not increase the effectiveness of fire service delivery CANEGROWERS suggests the following for consideration. Aspects of the current model fail to ensure adequate consultation with Rural Brigades in strategic planning and does not recognise Rural Brigades, their funding methods and their assets as part of the “system”.

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Urban Fire fighting vehicles and equipment are not appropriate for fighting fires on cane growing properties—in many cases tractor/trailer combinations are the only vehicles suitable to access run-away fires – rural property owners can only have their fire fighting and
protection needs met fully if the Rural Brigades continue to operate in their areas to supplement the Urban Fire Services.

The situation where a Rural Fire Brigade calls for assistance by the Urban Brigade to be on hand as a safeguard just in case a wild fire should escape or spread thus threatening a household structure and in so doing (i.e. the Urban appliance being on standby) the QFRS sends a bill to the householder is in appropriate and unwarranted. This puts the volunteer Fire Officer in a dilemma and imposes unreasonable pressure/tension on the Rural Fire Brigade First Officer at a time when his focus should be in combating the wild fire and not having to be concerned about cost implications for the landholder/householder should the Urban Brigade attend the scene. Charges can be made notwithstanding that the Urban Brigade takes no part in combating the fire.

The continuation of burning programs for hazard reduction purposes is required. It should not be more difficult to obtain a hazard reduction permit. Some public opposition to landholders burning under a permit system is vexatious and therefore should not prevent the issue of hazard reduction permits.

The role of Fire Wardens should remain ‘as is’. Local Fire Wardens know the terrain, understand the local weather and are respected and experienced members of local rural brigades and have no hesitation in saying ‘No’ when conditions dictate. Most Fire Wardens have been in the role for many years with no major rotation of wardens being experienced.

4. How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Whilst training is valuable it must be remembered that members of Rural Brigades are volunteers with job, family and other obligations. Therefore, training on a voluntary basis should be offered. Training requirements must take into account the volunteers work and family obligations.

It is recommended that the Rural Fire Service and local Government develop a standard information pack that the local Government could provide to each new landholder to inform them of the Rural Fire Brigade and the services provided.

The Rural Fire Brigade members are volunteers and should not be required to develop one year operational plans and three year management plans. Such activities for the development of plans should be part of the role of the Regional Fire Management Committee where such committees are in place (e.g. the Hinchinbrook Fire Management Committee) and these activities should not be imposed onto members of the volunteer Rural Fire Brigades.

Another problem that Fire Officers are faced with, is the situation where a volunteer is hurt, or worse still, die because he followed a direction made in “Good Faith” by the Fire Officer. If circumstances changed beyond the control of the Officer, such as an unexpected wind change causing the fire breaching a break, the Fire Officer now will find himself in a Court of Law defending himself without the support of QFRS. Previously, if the same Fire Officer made a decision “in Good Faith” (The Official Term) but circumstances changed beyond his control or expectations, he was guaranteed protection under the act. This, no longer applies. As a consequence of this change, Fire Officers have relinquished these positions and many current officers are indicating that they will not remain in their roles for long, as it is too stressful. Fire Officers need and deserve increased legal protection.

As expectations of these volunteers increase, more volunteers are exiting the Rural Fire Brigades.
Should the Rural Fire Service be forced to impose compulsory training, this is likely to have an immediate negative impact on the number of fire fighter volunteers.

Since the Rural Fire Service has been moved directly under the umbrella of the QRFS and referred to as QRFS Rural Operations, volunteers have seen a change that they are not comfortable with, as opposed to a “stand alone” service that they could relate to, a service that did not give them the feeling of being overbearing with increasing expectations and demands. It should be a Committee consideration to provide the Rural Fire Service with a ‘stand alone’ service that the volunteers can relate to.

5. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?
With regards to accountability the current system could be improved with the Rural Fire Service District office maintaining a register of equipment purchases for and/or on behalf of the local Rural Fire Brigades.

An annual inspection and reporting on machinery and equipment would overcome concerns regarding condition and safety of Rural Fire Brigade equipment.

A strengthening of the link between the individual Rural Fire Brigades and the Rural Fire Service Area Director would benefit the parties and the service.

Rural Brigade Fire Officers need and deserve increased legal protection.

Clearly, the current confusion over whether Rural Brigades are separate entities or part of the QFRS system means that appropriate accountability measures are not in place. A revised structure model should address this confusion and also include accountability structures that are practical and easily understood by all parties.

6. What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?
CANEGROWERS supports current model with local wardens with local knowledge and experience being able to issue permits.

CANEGROWERS supports the continuation of the provisions of the Commissioner’s Notification and the maintenance of the seasonal fire permit availability for cane growers conducting pre-harvest burning of standing cane and for burning sugar cane tops and trash.

This has been a tried and tested successful facility for cane growers.

7. Are there any other relevant matters the Committee needs to address?
The requirements for Rural Fire Services in the Wet Tropics would vary greatly from the needs of other brigades across the state. For this reason, it is disappointing that the Committee set up to consider submissions, review and evaluate the management of Rural Fire Services does not have balanced representation drawn from across the State.

Nevertheless, we commend this submission for the Committee’s favourable consideration.

Summary
In summary, of course the use of fire is very important to cane growers. Equally cane growers commit significant resources to fire management, control and prevention with their equipment available for fire fighting activities to support the local community. The majority of cane growers are active office bearers and members of Rural Fire Brigades. Naturally, any decision by Government, Government Committee, Government Department or
Agency/Service (QFRS) which has the potential to transfer costs to cane growers and/or does not increase the effectiveness of fire service delivery to cane growers is of particular interest to CANEGROWERS and its members.

We would be happy to consult on any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Ian J Ballantyne
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Submission on Rural Fire Services Review
Dear Ms D Jeffery

MANAGEMENT OF RURAL FIRE SERVICES IN QUEENSLAND

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the operations and management of Rural Fire Services in our Region. My comments are placed in the order set out in your discussion paper and are limited to the operations of rural fire services in the Tablelands Region.

• Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

The current model is a working one. Most of these Brigades have raised funds, bought equipment and built sheds to house that equipment. Some of the equipment and sheds have been subsidized by both Local and State Governments. These Brigades are part of the community and draw their membership from the same community. The membership and drive to develop the Brigades varies from area to area depending on the make up of the various communities and their willingness to participate.

• Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?

Council currently has two methods of funding for Rural Brigades. For the Brigades in the old Herberton Shire area there is a direct donation from Council and in the remaining areas of the region Council collects a levy on behalf of the Brigades and passes this on to the Brigades. The levies vary based on what is needed by the Brigades for equipment and capital works and the levy is agreed at a public meeting and negotiated with Council. Council does not receive any remuneration for this administrative work.

Council is also aware that Brigades enlist the assistance of Gaming Funds and the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) as other sources of funding for vehicles, equipment and capital works. This does appear to be an unstructured approach to funding and leads to very different outcomes for the levels of funding and resources provided to Rural Fire Brigades.
What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?

Rural Fire Brigades report urban encroachment is having a massive effect in some areas where rural residential estates are established. These new residents do not pay a levy for service but expect one from Rural Brigades. A great number of these residents know very little or nothing about bushfires and have a reluctance to use hazard reduction burns as a method of mitigating major wildfires.

How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?

Rural Fire Brigades have differing increasing demands depending on local circumstances and population trends etc. Regional Councils should be liaising with Rural Fire Brigade Officers on access, water, power and fire breaks before subdivisions are approved. Councils should provide assistance in educating new residents of new subdivisions on fire management.

Local Councils know the Brigades in the regions and should be assisted by the State to oversee the operations of the Brigades. These Brigades should be fully supported by all levels of Government and local residents because of the vital work they carry out in Regional areas.

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

It is believed that more accountability should be built into the structure of funding for Rural Fire Brigades and copies of audited financial statements should be available to Councils before collected levies or donations are made. It is also important that financial affairs are controlled by the Brigades at a local level to retain a sense of ownership for the way finances are dealt with and allocated.

What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?

We feel that Fire Wardens should remain in the Brigade Areas with an Area Director as Chief Warden because

- they know the Area
- understand the conditions of that Area
- know when to approve permits.

Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

The operation of Rural Fire Brigades should remain localised with support from the State Government as locals know the local conditions, they know the local people and what is the best way to control local wildfire events. Liaison with local fire wardens is also very necessary for the operation of Rural Fire Brigades.

Once again thank you for the opportunity of commenting on the management of Rural Fire Brigades and we look forward to receiving the outcomes of your deliberations.

Yours faithfully

TIM O'BRIEN
MANAGER PARKS AND CONSERVATION
Dear Sir

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Reference is made to your discussion paper from November 2009 regarding the above subject.

As part of its 2010-11 budget deliberations in relation to the Rural Fire Special Charge, Council’s Special Budget Committee recommended (in part):

“That the Chief Executive Officer write to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee of the Queensland Parliament and request that the State Government consider fully funding rural fire brigades with Councils acting as revenue collection agents as they do for the urban fire brigades.”

It is anticipated that this recommendation will be passed at Council’s formal budget adoption scheduled for 21 June 2010.

I understand the deadline for receiving submissions has passed but would appreciate if the above recommendation is able to be considered by the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee.

Yours faithfully

Glen Potter
DIRECTOR ORGANISATIONAL SERVICES
For the Chief Executive Officer
This submission is from my personal perspective as someone who has been involved with the R.F.S. for almost twenty-five years, in either the role of an auditor of Brigades or as an active fireman.

The Report to Parliament No. 3 of 2008 - Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland by the Auditor-General of Queensland (the Auditor-General's Report) is, in my opinion, a very thorough synopsis of the current status quo of the Rural Fire Service as I know and experience it. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, my submission will not regurgitate what has principally been said in his Report per se, but will rather seek to add to and provide some grassroots substantiation to the issues raised therein.

On the whole, the current framework structure and system of the R.F.S. in Queensland appears to be suitable for its efficient and effective management. However, there are two potential dangers that I see, namely:

(i) the tendency to want to amalgamate some areas into fewer but larger areas (e.g. amalgamation of Miles into Toowoomba), which results in greater inefficiencies and frustrations where it matters most - at the Brigade level, and

(ii) the possibility that the R.F.S. could end up having too many ‘chiefs’ in paid positions in comparison to tangible volunteer ‘Indians’.
How things function within the framework and structure is more the issue. One key point, whilst often mentioned but often overlooked in practice, is that the R.F.S. is about volunteers - volunteers providing a service to their community. These volunteers are working people, whether unpaid work in the home or paid work in the community, who have busy everyday lives to live (e.g. spouses, children, aged parents, mortgages, education, etc.). Therefore, one is very cautious in suggesting a new form or new system, if it does not effectively streamline and reduce the time absorption required by the already existing paperwork and system. Extra systems and bureaucracy infringe on the already tight time constraints of the volunteers, and will only serve to alienate these people who otherwise have good intentions.

It is on this basis, especially bearing in mind that it is the volunteers who end up doing the hard yards, that I have tried to think of ideas and ways which will streamline the management and financial processes and make it easier for the functioning and operation of the Brigades. The complexity of these R.F.B. issues requires something universal to be developed so that as much as possible, a ‘one size fits all’ type approach can be applied to the four classes of rural brigades, viz. primary producer, rural, village and I-Zone. That in itself is very difficult.

This submission is divided into the following areas of concern:

i) Legal status of Brigades
ii) Membership (including Training) and Office bearers
iii) Financial Recordkeeping and Reporting
iv) Funding

**LEGAL STATUS OF BRIGADES**

At present under the Fire Act, brigades are part of the Q.F.R.S. and are not separate legal entities. This structure has inherent difficulties and benefits, some of which were alluded to in the Auditor-General's Report. In actual practice, brigades function at times as if they are part of the Q.F.R.S. entity, and at other times, as if they are a separate legal entity. The current G.S.T. treatment of assets, and the acquisition and disposal of assets, highlights this inconsistency.

Therefore, it must be decided if:

(i) the brigades are part of the Q.F.R.S. entity - in which case the financial transactions of all brigades must be reflected in the consolidated financial statements of the Department which oversees the R.F.S. (similar to how branches of companies are reflected in the consolidated financial reports of the parent company), or

(ii) the Fire Act be changed so that it reflects brigades as being separate entities for the purposes of financial and accountability requirements. That is to say, each brigade would become like a type of incorporated association within the larger organisation of the Q.F.R.S., but still retaining the insurance and other cover afforded by the Q.F.R.S. The latter would definitely require statute changes, and perhaps the former would too in order to clarify the exact status and responsibilities of the brigades and Q.F.R.S.

Opinion - option (ii) is preferred on the condition that greater management and financial accountability measures are introduced. Some of these issues are addressed in the Financial Recordkeeping and Reporting section.
**MEMBERSHIP (including training) AND OFFICE-BEARERS**

**Membership**

Too many brigades, it would seem, do not keep accurate membership records. There are three classes of membership, viz. firefighter, support member (catering, radio operation, logistics, etc.) and community member (provide fire education and management services to the community).

Especially in relation to firefighters, some Brigades are known to still have people listed as active members when in fact they either do not live in the district anymore or have become inactive as evidence by their lack of attendance at meetings, training and incidents.

The smaller brigades (i.e. 'primary producer' and 'rural' classifications) are a lot less structured and more informal than the larger brigades (i.e. 'I-Zone' & 'Village' classified brigades) - because of the area they cover and the type and frequency of incidents. As such, monthly training and regular meetings are not anywhere near as important for them as what they are for the larger classified brigades. It is noted that some larger brigades actively leave people listed as firefighters in order to satisfy (on paper) the level of minimum numbers of firefighters required for that brigade. In practise, this means that at an incident (especially one which goes for more than 12 hours), there is not the personnel to ensure the continuity of crews. This is a most undesirable situation and should not be tolerated as it jeopardises the safety and wellbeing of fire crews who do attend. It also unnecessarily places undue hardship on the attending crews, as well as extends the time it takes to bring an incident to an end. Brigades in this position need to be given pro-active assistance to recruit new members, including organised media releases, letter box drops, et cetera.

One point that needs to be mentioned and understood is this: the higher the brigade classification (from 'primary producer' at the lower end to 'I-Zone' at the higher end), the higher the degree of accountability and responsibility of that brigade, as exercised through the Officers and Management Committee Office-bearers. Primary producer brigades can get away with say one meeting per year (because these brigades consist of owner occupiers of land, often with only a handful of farming properties in the brigade unit, and their fire fighting equipment consists of slip-on units &/or trailers), whereas I-Zone brigades require more frequent (e.g. monthly) meetings, management and training. I-Zone brigades also have more public assets at their disposal as well as receive more public funds, be the funds through rate levy collections or the State Government or the community itself.

Perhaps a rule should be introduced stating that for I-Zone brigades, if firemen do not attend at least say four training events (and I am assuming it is proper skills type competency based training) per annum, then they be removed from the firefighter class of membership. For firemen in village brigades, perhaps say at least two training events per annum and for rural brigades, at least one training event p.a. If this is implemented, then in the case of I-Zone brigades, the brigade Training Officers will have to be pro-active in developing proper and meaningful training plans.

**Office-Bearers**

The common commercial practice of slowly but surely turning over executive, needs to be implemented into brigades. Successful corporations do this so as to ensure a continuous input of new ideas and thoughts into their organisational board and to prevent the board from becoming 'stale'. It also serves to ensure that if someone becomes incompetent, they don't remain in their position too long to cause too many issues or to hold back the organisation.

The same attitude needs to apply to brigades. It seems to be that on one hand, you have some brigades who cannot get people to take on positions, yet some other brigades have people who hang onto their position and keep others out, all to the detriment of the whole brigade itself. As a result, new people are turned off from taking on a role, so that the status quo remains and a brigade does not do what it should and/or slides backwards.
I am a firm believer in mentorship, however that is a personal value which could not be forcefully implemented in brigades. Office-bearers can be told about it and how to do it, but at the end of the day, it is up to the individual. One downside though, is that incumbent office-bearers can choose their mates and groom them for a future position, so that a brigade just ends up with new officer-bearers who continue to reinforce the direction and principles that the brigade has already been pursuing. What sometimes needs to happen is that brigades take on a new direction, and this can be thwarted by mentorship. However, one way to overcome this is to offer officer/office-bearer training (mentorship) to anyone who wants to take it on, and that way, it is up to the brigade members to decide who they would like in leadership and management roles.

I also believe it would be prudent to do what a number of community based organisations do, and that is to limit the number of years that a person can hold a position ('rotation of duties' is also a good internal control). I suggest a maximum of five (5) years. The person then becomes ineligible to hold that position, and in the case of brigade officers, a lower ranked position, for at least two (2) years, but at the expiration of that time, they are eligible to renominate.

**FINANCIAL RECORD KEEPING AND REPORTING**

The basis on which this is approached will be altered slightly by the outcome of the Legal Status of Brigades section.

**Assets**

If the brigade is not a separate legal entity to Q.F.R.S., then all assets are owned by Q.F.R.S. The cost, depreciation and proceeds on disposal should all be in the accounts of Q.F.R.S., not the individual brigade. An issue does arise though of what is done when a brigade buys an asset out of their own funds (i.e. funds from rate levies or fund raising, etc.) How are these accounted for? Technically, they also need to be recorded and depreciated in the books of Q.F.R.S. This is one of the reasons why, in my opinion, I believe the Fire Act be changed so that it reflects brigades as being separate entities for the purposes of financial reporting and accountability requirements. To account for assets in this way would be every Accountant's nightmare!

There needs to be much greater accountability by brigades for the assets under their control. Accountability by way of safety and maintenance of vehicles and equipment (e.g. annual roadworthy inspections; logs of when tyre pressures are checked; replacing tyres at the end of the manufacturer's stated life, even if there is still a lot of tread on them; etc.), and physical checks that all equipment is on hand ($800 hand held radios can easily go missing, as can chain saws, small tool sets, traffic cones, fuel containers, axes and other hand tools, etc.). The brigade Equipment Officer and First Officer should have to sign a statement each year, which would form part of the brigade's financial reports, stating that all equipment has been physically checked and is on hand and is in proper operational order. Any small equipment disposed of or scrapped, should only be done so by the authority of a member's meeting, and the Minutes of that meeting will reflect this decision. It is far too easy for small assets to "just disappear"!

Currently, if certain members of a brigade want to dispose of a vehicle to an associate/friend, they can easily do this (and do it) without following the necessary procedures in the Brigade Manual. How is this accomplished? Firstly, most members in a brigade don't know their Brigade Manual and therefore do not know that vehicles must all be put up for public tender. Secondly, Area Offices do not enforce the rules of brigades furnishing all the details to them when a vehicle is disposed of (too often, Area Offices are just too busy doing all the other work they need to do in a day and therefore things like chasing up vehicle disposals just slip through the cracks). These assets belong to the ratepayers and taxpayers, not to brigades. They are public assets, and their acquisition, maintenance and disposal must be fully transparent and open to scrutiny. But, this takes time, and time costs money. It really is a case of priorities, and I believe this should be made a priority by Departmental administrators.
In relation to assets, especially vehicles, whilst it is appreciated that the bag of government funds to buy equipment and vehicles is not bottomless, many firemen feel that vehicles and equipment are acquired on a “what is the cheapest thing available” basis. As a result, vehicles are fully loaded with a full compliment of crew, so small and sundry additional equipment (e.g. auxiliary pumps to be left at a dam, chainsaws, etc.) cannot be added without putting the vehicle over its legal load limit. This is pointless, as auxiliary pumps, chainsaws and the like are often used in bushfires. As well, the vehicle pumps (including motors) are often of cheap quality and are difficult to start, keep breaking down, etc. “Penny wise, pound foolish” is how the saying goes, and brigades can get these lovely new vehicles (for which they are very appreciative - that needs to be known), but they are hampered with what they can do with the vehicles. By adding another few thousand to the price of a vehicle (for which the Brigades can be charged if need be), things like plumbing the pump fuel into the vehicle fuel tank can be done (saves carrying a separate fuel container just for the pump - a small monetary saving as well as a reduction in risk due to not having a separate fuel container on board) and the pump electric start can be wired into the vehicle electrical system (saves having to buy $100 motor bike sized batteries all the time to attach to the pump - another saving).

Perhaps, when developing new vehicles, the opportunity should be offered to rural firemen (as the end users of vehicles and equipment), to inspect a prototype of proposed new vehicles (the vehicles could be taken to key regional cities like Toowoomba, Roma, Emerald, Charters Towers) and allow firemen to inspect and try out the vehicle before the decision is made to manufacture a bulk number of them. Yes there is a cost involved in doing this, but a better vehicle should result. This will save brigades having to spend money to make vehicles work better and more reliably (this saving offsets the cost of a prototype), and as well, makes the end user happier about the vehicle he has to work with and makes him more effective in his job.

Cheque Vouchers - refer Annexure “A”
Irrespective though of whether a brigade is or is not a separate entity, the basic record keeping and document retention will be the same. What is urgently required is greater accountability by brigades for the collection, retention and expenditure of funds. After consultation with some brigades, plus over 25 years of auditing community organisations and associations, I believe every brigade should use a cheque voucher system. The use of a “Cheque Voucher” system has a number of benefits and purposes. Not only does it ensure that all supporting documentation for payments is filed in strict cheque number order (which is handy for back referencing at a later date), but it serves to make sure that supporting documentation (tax invoice) is always obtained. As well, because the voucher must be initialled by the two people signing the cheque, the voucher provides additional assurance for all brigade and community members that the payment is proper, as well as providing peace of mind for the Treasurer because someone else has checked the authenticity of the payment before the cheque was signed. The vouchers will also facilitate the writing up of the Cash Book / input into a computer, in that it will provide an easy reference for the Treasurer to extract the type(s) of expense categories in order to correctly dissect the payment.

The vouchers are best kept in strict cheque number order in a lever arch folder with the first cheque for the year on the bottom and the last cheque written on the top. They are presented to the second signatory for review before he/she counter signs the cheque.

Manual Cash Book - v- Computerised Accounting Package
Most brigades write out very few cheques in a year and have very few receipts. Some of the bigger brigades (which are the small minority of brigades in number) could write out one hundred or more cheques in a year, but as said, these brigades would only be a small percentage of all brigades. Given that, I believe that for the greatest majority of brigades, the traditional manual bookkeeping system would be best, and in fact, I suggest that after appropriate consultation, Q.F.R.S. actually have the cash books printed up (one set for each financial year) and given to brigades. As an example of what such cash book would look like, please refer to Annexure “B” and “C”. The advantage of manual cash books is that they can be handed easily from one Treasurer to another.
As the years progress and with changes in computer technology and more and more people becoming conversant with computers, the reliance on manual systems will decrease. However, I don’t see that happening for at least a decade. The reason for that is that when you have a small number of transactions, it is far easier and more convenient to do things manually than by computer. When the time comes for computerised brigade records, perhaps a few software businesses could be approached to tailor one of their accounting packages specifically and exclusively for the brigades. I would however suggest that in order to gain economies of scale, it would probably have to be something which every State and Territory would do together, and with one preferred software supplier.

For the bigger brigades, they may desire to use a computer accounting package. The question is - which one? Some might want Reckon, others M.Y.O.B., others Cashflow Manager, et cetera. The current Treasurer might prefer this software while the incoming Treasurer may prefer a different one. Herein is an issue. It would also require brigades buying a dedicated treasurer’s computer for that purpose. Computers also require more stringent internal controls, as it is much easier to ‘cook the books’ on a computer system than a manual system. In addition, to the untrained mind (which would be all but a few brigade members), it is much more difficult to go through computerised accounting package reports to see and understand what is happening with the transactions. At least with a manual cash book, completed in biro, most people can have a glance and understand something of what has been happening. Therefore, the area of computerised accounting needs to be carefully considered, and stricter internal controls must be implemented.

Two other areas that need special consideration, and which will require the adoption of specific internal control measures, are electronic banking and the use of card accounts (e.g. fuel cards). It is not my intention to go into these in details in this submission, but rather to flag them as issues requiring attention.

To ensure that brigades regularly perform bank reconciliations, and to assist the Treasurer in this task, an example of a bank reconciliation statement and the procedural steps involved will be provided. Examples of these are in the Annexure “D”.

For brigades who conduct raffles, Annexure “E” is a suggested ‘Raffle Summary’ schedule which the ticket sellers can complete and hand to the treasurer with the raffle proceeds. Examination of the Raffle Summary will reveal a number of key internal controls which have been embedded in its design. It will also allow for easier audit checking and provide confidence to all peoples that raffle proceeds are ending up where ticket buyers believe they are.

**Budgets, 1 year Operational Plan and 3 year Management Plan**

I have yet to see a brigade that does these properly, for the very reasons stated by the Auditor-General in his said Report. The example of Rangewood R.F.B. in Section 3.1 (figure 4) in the said Report is very good, and it is from this example that my Group has developed their own (Annexure “F”). My Group has also developed in spreadsheet format, an associated budget for the one year operational plan, and this is attached in Annexure “G”.

Why are budgets and plans not being done? Probably for a number of reasons, including there being no accountability forcing brigades to submit them, brigades not knowing how to do them (there aren’t too many brigades with accountants amongst their ranks) and because R.F.B. Area Office staff are not accountants or bookkeepers and therefore are generally not that conversant with what could be required. This is where special training by accountants/bookkeepers should be offered, in the same manner as training is offered on fire extinguishers, etc. to firemen.

**Audit of Brigades**

This is an area which causes some confusion within brigades and with the people who actually perform the audits.
Due to the wide range in the number and types of transactions between the smaller brigades and the larger
brigades, coupled with the cost of having an audit done, there is a need to clarify what is required by the
audit and ascertain an affordable audit fee.

From personal experience of auditing small organisations over many years as beforementioned, one big
factor faced by auditors is the inconsistency of recording and record keeping between brigades. This is one
of the biggest cost factors with audits. I think I am right in saying that every auditor cringes when they are
presented with a shoe box of receipts, some of which are missing, and cash books that are not added and
which don’t balance! If the R.F.S. can overcome these issues by implementing the procedures and practices
mentioned in this section (i.e. common cash books and cheque vouchers, etc.), then the audit process will be
much more streamlined, audit fees reduced and will hopefully secure more willing auditors.

To assist in the audit of brigades, I have prepared an Audit Programme for rural fire brigades. This is
contained in the Annexure “H”. I have provided this programme to fellow Accountants for feedback
and changes, and what is contained in the said annexure is the result of many hours of refinement. The
programme has been written so as to accommodate any size of brigade. Auditors who are Accountants will
make easy sense of the programme, knowing how to apply it to small, large and in-between sized brigades.
For auditors who are not accountants or who are not familiar with a formalised audit programme, an
explanatory memoranda will probably need to be drawn up so as to assist them in the use of the programme
and in the execution of their duties.

**FUNDING**

It is my opinion that the principles of the present model of funding coming from a combination of State
Government funds and levies collected for local brigades by Councils on their Rate Notices is fair and
equitable.

The State Government, through Q.F.R.S. provide subsidised vehicles, equipment and personal protective
equipment/clothing to brigades, for without that subsidy, brigades would never be in a position to acquire
them. Due to the large area of the state covered by the R.F.B. and the small percentage of population, the
R.F.B. could not exist without State Government monetary support.

The main area I would like to concentrate on deals with the distribution of the levies collected for local
brigades by Councils on their Rate Notices. In the Toowoomba Regional Council area, a “Local Area
Finance Committee” (L.A.F.C.) comprised of R.F.B. representatives, staff from the Toowoomba Area
Office and Council representatives, has been formed and meets to decide how the levy will be distributed
between the various brigades. The amount of distribution is calculated from the actual financial statements,
the one year Operational Plan & associated budget and the 3 year Management Plan submitted by Brigades.
This brigade financial information is adjusted for specific policy and direction that the R.F.B. Area Office
desire to pursue as part of the overall strategy for the area. It is also the role of the L.A.F.C. to advise
Council what the levy should be for the ensuing year which Council charges on their rates notice. The
amount of the levy is dependent upon the financial requirements of the brigades in the regional council area.

This appears to be a good working model, but it is hampered by brigades not providing, in a timely manner,
all the financial reports they should. I believe close attention should be given to the Toowoomba Regional
Council L.A.F.C. as a model on which to base the formation of L.A.F.C. for other Council areas.

**Deductible Gift Recipient status**

Q.F.R.S. should apply to the A.T.O. and do whatever is necessary to obtain D.G.R. status for the entire
R.F.S. organisation. I personally believe, from what has been said to me by quite a number of people over
time, that more public support by way of donations would be forthcoming if people could claim an income
tax deduction. Presently, individual brigades have to apply separately just for their brigade.
Somewhere West Of Nowhere Rural Fire Brigade

- CHEQUE VOUCHER -

DATE: _____ / _____ / _____  CHEQUE NO: ________________

INVOICE $ __________
G.S.T. $ __________
TOTAL $ __________

PAYEE: ____________________________

DETAILS ____________________________
OF ____________________________
PAYMENT ____________________________

APPROVED BY: ________________  TREASURER: ________________
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<td>Aug.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>IBD Principal</td>
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<th>GRANTS ETC.</th>
<th>L.I.D. MATURITY</th>
<th>OTHER RECEIPTS</th>
<th>G.S.T. COLLECTED</th>
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<td>5,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUARTERLY TOTAL</td>
<td>10,000.00</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>2,000.00</td>
<td>5,000.00</td>
<td>24,005.00</td>
<td>3,000.00</td>
<td>300.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This amount appears on the B.A.S. if the Brigade is G.S.T. registered.
ANNEXURE "D"

**PROCEDURAL STEPS IN PREPARING A BANK RECONCILIATION**

1. Obtain previous Bank Reconciliation and check O/S Deposits and U/P cheques to current bank statement.

2. Tick the amounts in the "Bank" column of the C.R.J. off with the Bank Statement 'credit' column.

3. Any unticked credit items on the Bank Statements (e.g. direct credits) will need to be written into the C.R.J. except where the bank has reversed (bounced) your cheque, or reversed bank charges or payments by authority. These items are adjusted for in the C.P.J.

4. Any unticked items in the C.R.J. are the O/S Deposits. Write "O/S" next to the respective amounts.

5. Tick the amounts in the "Bank" column of the C.P.J. off with the Bank Statement 'debit' column.

6. Any unticked items on the Bank Statement need to be entered into the C.P.J. (e.g. bank charges, payments by authority, returned/dishonoured cheques).

7. Any unticked items in the C.P.J. are the DIP Cheques. Write "DIP" next to the respective amounts.

8. Total the "Bank" column of the C.R.J., and post to the debit side of the "Cash At Bank" general ledger account.

9. Total the "Bank" column of the C.P.J., and post to the credit side of the "Cash At Bank" general ledger account.

10. Balance off the "Cash At Bank" account, and carry the balance forward to the next accounting period.

11. Prepare the Bank Reconciliation as at a particular date.

12. Ensure the amount in the Bank Reconciliation (step 11) and the Cash at Bank account (step 10) are the same, except that the sign (Dr / Cr) will be the opposite.

**NOTE:**

The C.R.J. is now divided into two parts as follows:

(i) a listing, in date order from the 1st to the 31st, of all deposits physically received and deposited by the brigade; and

(ii) a listing of all direct credits from the 1st to the 31st

The C.P.J. is now divided into two parts as follows:

(i) a listing of all payments, in strict cheque number order, made by cheque; and

(ii) a listing of all non-cheque transactions - bank charges and direct debits (e.g. Account Keeping Fees, etc.)

Outstanding Deposits and Unpresented Cheques should appear on next month’s Bank Statement. Therefore, in a month’s time, these O/S Deposits and U/P Cheques should be ticked off to that following month’s Bank Statement so as to ensure that they have been presented.
### BANK RECONCILIATION STATEMENT

**FOR THE MONTH ENDED 30TH APRIL, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Balance as per Bank Statement</strong></td>
<td>$10,000.00 CR</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ADD: Outstanding Deposits</strong></td>
<td>$0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LESS: Unpresented Cheques</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td># 918</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
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<tr>
<td># 933</td>
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<td># 948</td>
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<tr>
<td># 949</td>
<td>$41.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 950</td>
<td>$903.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RECONCILED BANK STATEMENT BALANCE as at 30TH APRIL, 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>$8,650.00 CR</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- RAFFLE SUMMARY -

**TICKETS SOLD**

Numbered from _________ to _________

Total Number Sold ______ x $_______ per ticket = $________

**Less: CASH EXPENSES** (attach proof of expenses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPLIER</th>
<th>NATURE OF EXPENSE</th>
<th>$</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

Total Cash Expenses

NETT RAFFLE PROCEEDS $________

Proof of expenditures, unsold tickets & nett cash proceeds accounted for:

____________________________________________________________________

Ticket Seller/s _____ / ___ / ___  Treasurer _____ / ___ / ___
The 12 month Operational Plan is to be accompanied by a 12 month associated financial budget

(Brigade Manual 2007 D7.6 Rural Fire Levy p. 1 of 6)

This is a written statement which supports the 12 month associated financial budget.

Items for inclusion in a brigade’s 12 month operational plan. Ensure all items are addressed:

* Brigade membership: recruitment (include break-up of current membership according to age ranges, viz. 16-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56+ y.o.) (include numerical summary of members training qualifications)
  * training (as an example, refer Gowrie Little Plain 2008 Training Plan)

* Capital Equipment - identified equipment needs / replacements

* Community Education & Awareness
  - visits & displays at school/church/service clubs/show/shops
  - participation in local events (e.g. rodeo, Anzac Day, Aust. Day, etc.)

* Continuing training & development for Fire Officers and Management Committee Office-Bearers

* Hazard Reduction Programme
  - identified areas of high risk (see “Response to Wildfires” section below)
  - incorporate controlled burns into member training programme
  - planned liaison with stakeholders (land owners / occupiers, Crown land)
  - maintenance of any existing fire breaks

* Response to Wildfires - risk areas: comments on fuel loads, fire potential, exposure risk, etc.

* Station/Shed - maintenance and improvements

* Vehicles & Equipment - anticipated notable recurrent expenses (e.g. major maintenance, full compliment of tyre replacements, etc.)

Queries or assistance?

Contact Group Officer Bruce Finlayson - 4696 7225 finlayba@tpg.com.au

The Group acknowledges the Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade (North Qld.) planning ideas from which this plan has been developed.
## ANNEXURE "G"

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<th></th>
<th>JULY</th>
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<th>NOV</th>
<th>DEC</th>
<th>JAN</th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MAR</th>
<th>APR</th>
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<td><strong>SURPLUS/deficiency</strong></td>
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<td><strong>ACCUM. SURPLUS/deficiency</strong></td>
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</table>

### Opening Cash at Bank: $16,071.00
# AUDIT FILE INDEX FOR QUEENSLAND RURAL FIRE BRIGADES

## WORKING PAPERS

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Audit Report</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Financial Statements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Matters for Attention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes, Additional Comments &amp; Queries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audit Programme</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals, General Ledger &amp; Trial Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A - Receipts / Deposits</td>
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<tr>
<td>B - Payments</td>
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<tr>
<td>C - Bank Reconciliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>D - Petty Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td>E - Fixed Assets</td>
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<td>F - Investments &amp; Other Assets</td>
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<tr>
<td>G - G.S.T.</td>
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<td>H - Liabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>I - Budget</td>
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<td>J - Fund Raising</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>K - Minutes - Member &amp; Management Committee</td>
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<td>L - General</td>
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<td>M -</td>
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<td>N -</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

References in *italics* are to the Brigade Constitution e.g. *cl. 27(c)*
References in normal type are to the Brigade Manual 2007 e.g. *D8.3*
### A  RECEIPTS / DEPOSITS  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation / Rule</th>
<th>Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Confirm Receipt Book/s to Area Office Receipt Book Register</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record receipt number usage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vouch first receipt used this year to previous year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note last receipt used for audit period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure all cancelled original receipts are accounted for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peruse Receipt Book for unusual / extraordinary items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Vouch selected receipts from Receipts Book to Cash Book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Check Cash Book to Deposit Book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure duplicate deposit slip is Bank stamped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Check Cash Book 'Bank' column to Bank Statements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure deposits are banked intact and promptly</td>
<td>cl. 27(c)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> Test check Cash Book column and cross-caste additions</td>
<td>D 7.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check cash book dissection, including G.S.T. Collected</td>
<td>cl. 27(l)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong> Peruse Cash Book for unusual / extraordinary items</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### B  PAYMENTS  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation / Rule</th>
<th>Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Ensure first cheque used in audit period follows sequentially from last cheque used in previous audit period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record cheque number usage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure all cancelled original cheques are accounted for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure all cheque vouchers are correctly completed and signed</td>
<td>cl. 27(d)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Vouch selected cheques by:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) supporting invoice, etc. and cheque voucher</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(ii) check cash book dissection, including G.S.T. Paid</td>
<td>D 7.12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(iii) agree to bank statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(iv) payment approved in Minutes</td>
<td>cl. 27(g)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Verify major expenditures to Minute Book for specific approval (expenditures &gt; $XX require prior approval from Area Director)</td>
<td>cl. 27(g)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Peruse Bank Statements, and follow through on:
   (i) foreign cheque numbers
   (ii) direct debits have been properly authorised

5. Test check Cash Book column and cross-caste additions
   Peruse Cash Book for unusual / extraordinary items

6. For Groups:
   - individual Brigade operational costs as per Regional Council Budget are paid to the respective Brigades
   - Group operational costs do not exceed Regional Council Budget without valid reason
   - additional and/or capital payments to individual Brigades, or for the Group, are properly authorised.

C BANK RECONCILIATION

1. Ascertain bank account signatories from Minutes & copies of bank authority forms
   Note and investigate/confirm bank accounts opened and closed during the audit period

2. Obtain Bank Reconciliation as at period end:
   - vouch outstanding deposits to Cash Book
   - vouch unpresented cheques to Cash Book
   - check reconciliation additions

3. Vouch to subsequent bank statements:
   - outstanding deposits at period end
   - unpresented cheques at period end

4. Investigate long overdue Unpresented Cheques

5. Obtain number of last cheque drawn for period.
   By reference to subsequent bank statements, ensure no cheque with a number prior to last cheque drawn appears after balance date, save those listed as unpresented.

6. Vouch Reconciliation totals & balances to Cash Book
   Reconciliation &/or General Ledger
### C BANK RECONCILIATION cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation / Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
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</table>

7. Where deemed necessary, obtain Audit Certificate from financial institution as at balance date and agree balances with bank statements. Also check for closed accounts, opened accounts and other accounts not necessarily recorded on Balance Sheet.

### D PETTY CASH cl. 27, 28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation / Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
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</table>

1. Vouch payments to supporting documentation

2. Check Petty Cash Book dissection, including G.S.T. D 7.12

3. Test check Petty Cash Book column and cross-caste additions

4. Check float reimbursement with Cash Payments Book Check Minutes for changes in float amount. cl. 27(f)

5. Verify cash balance to financial statements cl. 27(h)

### E FIXED ASSETS cl. 28 D 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation / Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
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NOTE: Fixed Assets only includes capital expenditure in excess of $100. Fixed Assets which receive Q.F.R.S. subsidy are not shown in the financial reports, only in the Register of Assets. These assets are owned and depreciated by Q.F.R.S.

1. Confirm Register of Assets (Brigade Owned Assets) to the Financial Statements, and Q.F.R.S. owned assets to the ‘Notes to Accounts’ section of the Financial Statements.

2. Confirm current possession and control of all assets shown in the Register of Assets. cl. 12(b)

Reliance can be made on signed declarations from Management Committee / asset holders (where assets are not on Brigade property) and verification from Area Office.
3. Check non-Q.F.R.S. subsidised asset acquisitions, including
   - G.S.T., including recording on B.A.S.
   - Community Benefit Fund issues (see section J)

4. Verify non-Q.F.R.S. subsidised asset disposals as follows:
   - to financial statements, including Register of Assets
   - G.S.T., including recording on B.A.S.
   - Minute authorising disposal and acceptance of successful tender
   - Newspaper advertisement for tender (if applicable)
   - Cash Payments Book for payment of advertisement, etc.
     (if applicable)

5. Compare “Floating Assets & Tools” from previous year to list provided for current year. Enquire as to disposals. Ascertain pilfering has not occurred.

6. All vehicles have had a Safety Inspection certificate issued
   Vouch to Cash Book, the payment for the Safety Certificate/s

7. Ensure items of capital expenditure have not been expensed - check especially “repairs & maintenance”

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### E  FIXED ASSETS cont'd

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<th></th>
<th>Regulation / Working Paper Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Verify non-Q.F.R.S. subsidised asset disposals as follows: D 8.7</td>
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<td>- to financial statements, including Register of Assets</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- G.S.T., including recording on B.A.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Minute authorising disposal and acceptance of successful tender</td>
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<td>- Newspaper advertisement for tender (if applicable)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Cash Payments Book for payment of advertisement, etc. (if applicable)</td>
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### F  INVESTMENTS & OTHER ASSETS cl. 27(m)

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Regulation / Working Paper Reference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Confirm movements in to and out of Interest Bearing Deposits:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Minute authorising new deposit / renewal of existing deposit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- verify to Financial Statements</td>
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<td>- check all interest (including reinvested interest) is accounted for in the Financial Statements</td>
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2. Document details of other assets on working papers
   Confirm to Minutes any movement in other assets
   Check to Financial Statements
### G | GOODS & SERVICES TAX (where G.S.T. registered)

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<tr>
<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
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<tr>
<td>D 7.12</td>
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1. Reconcile Cash Book G.S.T. Collected (Receipts) and G.S.T. Paid (Payments) to Business Activity Statement/s

2. Obtain copies of all Business Activity Statements for the year and:
   i) verify amounts to cash books and records
   ii) verify to A.T.O. Integrated Client Account statement


### H | LIABILITIES

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<th>Regulation</th>
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<td>cl. 27(h)(ii)</td>
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1. Verify all closing balances to:
   - independent external third party confirmation
   - supporting documentation

2. Agree to financial statements

### I | BUDGET D7.6

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<tr>
<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Working Paper Reference</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
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1. Peruse 12 month Operational Plan and associated Budget for the audit period.

2. Peruse the 3 year management plan.

3. Make enquiries for any material variations from the budget to actual. Note in working papers. (refer also to 1-3 below)

### J | FUND RAISING

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<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Working Paper Reference</th>
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<td>D 7.9</td>
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1. Confirm gaming category by verifying Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation registration

2. Ensure compliance with Category 1 or Category 2 requirements
3. For small Raffles, vouch Raffle Summary for the following:
   - proof of cash expenses
   - Summary sheet correctly signed
   - nett proceeds promptly deposited in tact

4. Vet all applications for Gambling Community Benefit funding.
   Ensure either:
   (i) equipment received (refer also to section E)
   (ii) funding cheque received from Q.F.R.S. Rural Operations

5. Vet all applications for Jupiters Casino Community Benefit funding.
   Ensure both:
   (i) funding applied only as detailed in the application
   (ii) copies of documentation forwarded to Fund are retained on file.

---

K MINUTES

1. Peruse Minute Book/s (Management Committee & Member) for:
   - properly constituted meeting (quorum; frequency; etc.)
   - Minutes signed as true and accurate record

2. Matters of interest not covered by audit programme references:
   B2(iv); B3; D4; E3; F1; F2
   (Document in working papers)

3. Note in the working papers, any items which have, will have or possibly could have, an effect on the audit process and/or the financial statements.

L GENERAL

1. Review records to ensure financial resources have been used solely in promoting the brigade’s objective and exercising the brigade’s powers and not for the benefit of individual members.