



**Examination of Queensland Audit  
Office Report 5: 2018-19  
*Follow-up of Bushfire prevention  
and preparedness***

**Report No. 49, 56<sup>th</sup> Parliament  
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee  
September 2019**

## **Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee**

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### **Acknowledgements**

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## Abbreviations

Auditor-General	Queensland Auditor-General
committee	Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
former committee	The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee of the 55 <sup>th</sup> Parliament
QAO	Queensland Audit Office
QAO report	Queensland Audit Office Report 5: 2018-19 <i>Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness</i>
QFES	Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
this report	Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, Report No. 49, 56 <sup>th</sup> Parliament, Examination of Queensland Audit Office Report 5: 2018-19 <i>Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness</i>
2014 QAO report	Queensland Audit Office Report 10: 2014-15 <i>Bushfire prevention and preparedness</i>

## Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee's examination of Queensland Audit Office Report 5: 2018-19 *Follow-up of* Bushfire prevention and preparedness.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Queensland Audit Office, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and the committee's secretariat for their assistance with the committee's examination of the Queensland Audit Office report.

I commend this report to the House.



Peter Russo MP

Chair

## Recommendation

### Recommendation

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The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the contents of this report.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Role of the committee

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee (committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>1</sup> The committee's primary areas of responsibility are:

- Justice and Attorney-General
- Police and Corrective Services
- Fire and Emergency Services.<sup>2</sup>

One of the committee's roles is to consider the reports of the Queensland Auditor-General (Auditor-General) that fall within its portfolio area.<sup>3</sup> The committee may examine and inquire into the reports, and make recommendations and report on them to the Legislative Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 Role of the Auditor-General

The Auditor-General conducts independent audits—financial audits and performance audits—of the Queensland public sector and certain other entities.<sup>5</sup> The Auditor-General makes recommendations to improve service delivery, accountability and transparency in reports to Parliament on the audits.<sup>6</sup> The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) supports the Auditor-General.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 Referral of Queensland Audit Office Report 5: 2018-19 *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*

The Queensland Audit Office Report 5: 2018-19 *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness* (QAO report) was tabled on 9 October 2018. It was referred to the committee on 18 October 2018.

### 1.4 Committee's inquiry process

In order to gain meaningful understanding of the audit outcomes, the committee held a private meeting with Ms Daniele Bird, Acting Auditor-General, and Mr David Toma, Director Performance Audit, from the QAO on 1 April 2019 to discuss the QAO report in detail.

On 29 April 2019, the committee wrote to Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) seeking an update on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations in the QAO report. The response received from the QFES is available on the committee's website.

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<sup>1</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88; Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly, standing order 194. The committee commenced on 15 February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly, schedule 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 94(1); standing order 194B.

<sup>4</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, ss 79, 92.

<sup>5</sup> *Auditor-General Act 2009*, s 3. A financial audit assesses the financial statements of a public sector entity: *Auditor-General Act 2009*, ss 40, 58. A performance audit evaluates whether any or all of a public sector entity's activities are achieving their objectives economically, efficiently and effectively, and are compliant with relevant legislation. It does not question the merits of government policy: *Auditor-General Act 2009*, s 37A.

<sup>6</sup> Queensland Audit Office, 'The Queensland Audit Office', <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Auditor-General Act 2009*, s 6.

## 2 Examination of Queensland Audit Office report

### 2.1 Background and audit objectives

In 2014, the QAO tabled its Report 10: 2014-15 *Bushfire prevention and preparedness* (2014 QAO report) in the Queensland Parliament. The 2014 QAO report examined whether Queensland was better able to prevent and prepare for bushfires following the:

- 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission inquiry
- Malone Review into Rural Fire Services in Queensland 2013
- Police and Community Safety Review 2013.<sup>8</sup>

In 2018, the QAO conducted a follow-up audit in which it examined whether QFES effectively implemented the recommendations in the 2014 Auditor-General Report and whether the actions of the QFES has addressed the underlying issues that led to the QAO recommendations.<sup>9</sup> The QAO report is a summary of the QAO's findings upon conducting the follow-up audit.

### 2.2 2014 Auditor-General Report recommendations

In the original 2014 audit, the QAO concluded that Queensland was not as prepared for the threat of bushfires as it could be. The QAO found that the QFES was response-focused, to the detriment of coordinating effective mitigation programs. The QAO also found that the QFES was unable to efficiently target its educational activities, and as a result, was unaware if community members were prepared for bushfires.<sup>10</sup>

The QAO made two recommendations containing seven parts. QFES fully agreed to five parts and partially agreed to two parts of the recommendations where QFES needed input from other stakeholders to completely address the recommended action.<sup>11</sup>

Specifically, the 2014 Auditor-General Report recommended that:

- QFES strengthens its oversight role as lead agency for mitigating Queensland's bushfire risk to acceptable levels by:
  - coordinating land managers' efforts to assess and mitigate bushfire risk
  - formalising the role of fire management groups to manage Queensland's fuel loads, including reporting planned and conducted hazard reduction burns and the effectiveness of hazard reduction burns
  - amending its bushfire mitigation planning to address prevention, preparedness, response and recovery and to manage Queensland's residual bushfire risk
  - developing and implementing a coordinated strategy to address arson, deterring would-be offenders and rehabilitating convicted offenders
  - working with local councils to develop and communicate local bushfire plans for communities located in high risk, bushfire-prone areas
- QFES improves engagement with communities to prepare for and respond to bushfire by:
  - increasing focus on monitoring the effects of educational materials it develops

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<sup>8</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 3.

<sup>9</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 1.

<sup>10</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 4.

<sup>11</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 4.



- reviewing and amending its bushfire warnings and alert protocols to provide clear and consistent messages to residents about the action to be taken before and during a bushfire.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.3 Former committee's 2015 report**

The 2014 QAO report was referred to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee of the 55<sup>th</sup> Parliament (former committee). In considering the 2014 QAO report, the former committee received a private briefing from the QAO. After considering the information provided by the QAO, the former committee sought an update from the Public Safety Business Agency and QFES regarding the progress of these undertakings, and the implementation of the 2014 QAO report recommendations.<sup>13</sup> On 2 December 2015, the committee held a public hearing and on 11 December 2015, QFES provided additional information responding to questions taken on notice at the hearing.<sup>14</sup>

On 15 December 2015, the former committee tabled its report titled Review of the Auditor-General Report to Parliament No. 10: 2014-15 *Bushfire prevention and preparedness*. The 2014 QAO report and the former committee's report are available on the committee's website.

### **2.4 Progress made by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services since 2014**

In March 2018, the QAO set out to establish whether QFES had effectively implemented the recommendations made by the QAO in the 2014 Auditor-General Report. The QAO found that QFES has made some progress but has only partially implemented them.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.5 2018 audit conclusions**

After its follow-up audit in 2018, the QAO concluded that QFES:

- has made efforts to address the underlying issues that the QAO identified in its original 2014 audit
- has increased its focus on bushfire risk mitigation activities state-wide and has also improved its engagement with key stakeholders
- is now able to better coordinate and manage Queensland's bushfire risk.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these efforts, the QAO concluded that more work is still needed to ensure Queensland communities are not exposed to higher levels of risk than they need to be.

In response to the QAO's original 2014 audit, QFES committed to implementing the agreed recommendations by 2015, but in this audit the QAO found QFES had not yet fully implemented any of the recommendations. The QAO acknowledged fully implementing the recommendations is a challenge where contribution from multiple parties is needed. For example, QFES in many cases is reliant on the actions of others such as volunteers and other state agencies to fully implement the recommendations.<sup>17</sup>

The QAO noted that:

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<sup>12</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 10: 2014-15, *Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2014, p 3.

<sup>13</sup> Legal Affairs and Community Safety Report No. 19, Review of the Auditor-General's Report to Parliament No. 10: 2014-15, *Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, December 2015, p 9.

<sup>14</sup> Legal Affairs and Community Safety Report No. 19, Review of the Auditor-General's Report to Parliament No. 10: 2014-15, *Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, December 2015, p 9.

<sup>15</sup> For a summary of the audit findings see Queensland Audit Office, Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 5 (especially Figure A which sets out the assessment status of the 2014 Auditor-General Report recommendations).

<sup>16</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 8.

<sup>17</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 8.

- QFES has not fully rolled out its new risk mitigation tools across all regions
- more training and continuous improvement is needed to make sure they are effectively used to strengthen Queensland's approach to risk mitigation.
- better engagement with local communities is also needed to understand their risks and help them prepare for bushfires.<sup>18</sup>

The QAO concluded that these actions will enhance the ability of QFES to manage and respond to bushfires, and make Queensland communities safer.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.6 Response from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services to Queensland Audit Office's recommendations**

As required by the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, the QAO gave a copy of the QAO report with a request for comments to the QFES Commissioner. In her response, Ms Katarina Carroll, the then QFES Commissioner, noted that 'it is pleasing to see that the report confirms significant improvements in several areas while highlighting areas for further improvement'.<sup>20</sup>

In its response to the committee's request for an update on progress of implementation of recommendations in the 2014 QAO Report, Acting Commissioner Mike Wassing summarised key areas of activity since 9 October 2018 including:

- increased engagement with Local Government Disaster Management Coordinators
- roll out of predictive tools to over 6,800 users, including Rural Fire Service volunteers and external partners
- expanded use of predictive modelling for risk identification in Operation Cool Burn 2019
- partnering with the South East Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium to program bushfire hazard assessment training in a number of locations across the state
- inclusion of a requirement for evaluation of at least one major hazard reduction burn in the Standing Order governing Operation Cool Burn
- updating of fire history datasets on the Risk Exposure and Disaster Information Portal to use the latest available fire history mapping
- development of new standardised templates for bushfire plans
- review of emergency alert templates for optimum clarity and timeliness of messaging.<sup>21</sup>

As noted above, the correspondence from the QFES is available on the committee's website.

## **2.7 Committee recommendation**

The committee recommends that the House notes the contents of this report.

### **Recommendation**

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the contents of this report.

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<sup>18</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 8.

<sup>19</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 8.

<sup>20</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 5: *Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness*, 2018, p 27.

<sup>21</sup> Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, correspondence dated 10 June 2019, pp 1-2.