

2023 AGM – General Manager Report

Since we came together last year in Townsville the current and future world that brigades operate in to defend their communities across 93% of Queensland is going to change dramatically.

The RFBAQ were instigators of this change with the Special General Meeting that was held in August 2020 and the subsequent letter to the Premier requesting that the QFES be shut down and that a Department of Fire Services be created to replace it.

In October 2022 the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services released the KPMG Review into the QFES and then announced that the QFES will be dissolved and the largest single reform package to emergency service delivery in Queensland.

This encompasses internal restructure within RFSQ and the external environment that governs our ability to succeed.

The key drivers for what volunteers will be limited or empowered to do for their communities are –

Empowering Legislation (Authority to prepare has been approved by Cabinet and now new legislation will be drafted for consultation, hopefully to be distributed to brigades and representatives in November. To copy and paste the current legislative hodge podge of fire officers, fire service officers, authorised officers and powers of an authorised officer would be to squander this generational opportunity and lead to a campaign by the RFBAQ and brigades seeking to amend the bill when it goes before Parliament, potentially in the first quarter of 2024.)

Legal Status of Brigades (Completed in 2018 and while understood by brigades and volunteers, still not accepted, or understood by the QFES.)

Assured and sufficient funding (RFSQ is close to having control of its own budget soon, but the Emergency Management Levy is a metropolitan fire construct that is built around a community capacity to pay rather than risk and need. There has been no conversation with RFBAQ regarding building a new model where the QLD Fire Department moves away from the current feudal system of department driven taxation. It is only landholders who subsidize the fire services in Queensland. Whether there is one person in the household or six it is the same fee. If your household has one car or six it does not matter as the funding model is driven by land ownership. If the QFES can drive around it then they will bill you for it.)

Functions of RFSQ & Rural Fire Brigades (a clearly defined reason for why the Rural Fire Service Queensland is established, which is to service and support the brigades and a clearly defined understanding that brigades exist as a desire of a community to be able to defend itself to a level that the community wishes to support. An acknowledgement that these communities have been raising and sustaining brigades for generations and that a brigade is sociologically different.)

Leadership (33 years ago sections of the Bushfires Act was rolled into a slightly renovated metropolitan fires act and Rural Fire staff were industrially barred from progressing into regional Chief Superintendent positions and other roles that required training that they were not able to access. The Queensland Police Service commenced a professional development programme for senior officers and the fruits of this is being seen in the ability of their senior officers to engage, understand, assimilate and adapt to new information and operating environments. It will be many years until RFSQ can progress a brigade member through to Chief Officer and implement our own

development programme. This will be the challenge in finding a leadership team to take the brigades and service forward through the change and implementation process.)

The last 12 months has also seen the hugely popular \$1,000,000 Buy Local Brigade Grants Programme that saw applications called for 200 x \$5,000 Buy Local Grants. This saw 264 grant applications with the average grant value at \$4,000. Broken into 4 rounds this programme was commenced at last years Annual General Meeting and applications closed on the 2nd October 2023.

This programme is something that I suggest we should do again in a year or so and after we have raised another \$1,000,000.

The FusionCruiser was given to Booie Rise RFB in the Burnett RFSQ Area in early August and this project was valued at \$133,459 plus the expenses of fuel, maintenance, accommodation and food which was very kindly funded by RFSQ to the value of \$6,311.

The RFBAQ designed, QFES funded/build managed Bushfire Heavy Attack is near completion, following an initial delivery date of March 2023. This vehicle is a assimilation of ideas and uses that brigades have been implementing themselves when they build a vehicle with the extra crew safety equipment that was on the FusionCruiser.

The RFBAQ designed Landcruiser v2 with the rotomoulded tank is now being built by the RAAF as a grassfire fighting vehicle for their airfields. The RAAF managed to source 2 Landcruiser single cabs and are building 2 of our design vehicles.

I believe that the RFBAQ is well placed to ensure that the new RFSQ is built for the benefit of the brigades and communities, and that the RFBAQ State Executive will keep their brigades informed of the proposals and changes as they come forward, and that we are meeting the objectives of the association as set in our constitution –

The objects for which the Association is established are: -

- 1. To consider and make representation in matters affecting the welfare and efficiency of Rural Fire Brigades and Brigade Members.*
- 2. To provide financial assistance and support to Rural Fire Brigades and their Brigade Members.*

This is the generational opportunity that we have been working towards and I hope that the intent of the change that we initiated for the betterment of brigades and community defence across Queensland is not lost in the scramble by other stakeholders for increased staffing and positions.

In this triennial election year I would as Returning Officer like to thank those former representatives who have given many years of service to their brigades and communities, Nellie Baron, Lesley Brand AFSM, Warren Kelly and Matt White.

I would also like to welcome the incoming representatives, Sandy Brown, Gaven Bunker, John Muscat and Jim Besgrove AFSM.