



**RURAL FIRE BRIGADES ASSOCIATION
QUEENSLAND INC.** ABN. 37 417 474 709

11 January 2019

Adam Stevenson
Executive Director
Executive, Ministerial and Corporate Services
Queensland Fire and Emergency Services

Legislative.Review@qfes.qld.gov.au

Dear Adam,

The Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland (RFBAQ) is the volunteer driven association that represents the 1,440 Rural Fire Brigades that defend 93% of Queensland.

We would like to thank you for inviting us to make a submission on our proposals to see that legislation reflects contemporary practice and most importantly, enables the communities across Queensland to be empowered to meet their individual needs.

The RFBAQ has been working closely with the QFES since our first legislative change meeting on the 19th February 2016 in the Emergency Services Complex at Kedron Park, subsequent correspondence culminated with a meeting with the Director of the Legislative Review Project Team ahead of the Terms of Reference being drafted.

The current QFES Act 1990 is a result of small sections of the comprehensive Rural Fires Act 1946 being crammed into a metropolitan fire centric Act that had no sympathy for or understanding of land management.

The resultant Act has not been Fit for Task since its inception 29 years ago. The QFES Act 1990 does not contain the word 'volunteer' once in its 216 pages.

With Rural Fire Brigades willingly volunteering to undertake a greater degree of community defence activities, the many shortcomings of this legislative hodge podge are now impeding the QFES and the 1,440 Rural Fire Brigades from providing true place based decision making. This current Act is disempowering locals from their ability to defend their communities and the State as a whole.

- The most fundamental change that the RFBAQ recommends is that the current terms "Fire Officer", "Fire Service Officer" and "Authorised Officer" be replaced with the new inclusive term "Emergency Officer".

The RFBAQ would then see that an Emergency Officer can be full time, part time or volunteer. The legislative concept of the one term that encompasses full time staff, part time staff and volunteers has been



successfully demonstrated in the Tasmanian Fire Service Act 1979. Tasmania is one of the only States that has one piece of legislation that incorporates full time, part time and volunteer firefighters.

The QFES is a department that currently has three service delivery arms; Fire and Rescue, State Emergency Service and the Rural Fire Service.

By the adoption of the new inclusive term 'Emergency Officer', the QFES will not only be empowering current paid staff and volunteers but also demonstrate how the department can support the three separate and distinct services with the flexibility of incorporating potential future volunteer organisations. The use of this new term would carry across into amendment of the Fire and Emergency Services Regulation 2011.

- The RFBAQ would also see that in the QFES Act 1990 section 66 *Fires in State forests etc.* be withdrawn inline with recommendation 45 of the Malone Review 2013. The Malone Review found through wide consultation that - *Volunteers raised concern during the consultation process that too many wildfires were starting on Government owned land due to a lack of controlled burning on that land and policies in relation to mitigation burns were sometimes not carried out, resulting in adjoining properties being put at risk.*

The removal of the exemption for the issuing of permits in State Forests, National Parks and reserves will mean that Government agencies in charge of land will require a permit to light a fire, just like every other Queensland landholder.

- The RFBAQ would also see the QFES Act 1990 reflect the command and control relationship between the three distinct services and provide a platform that allows for place based realtime decision making, the empowerment of local knowledge and a recognition of service specific professionalism in command and control.

This would discontinue the current ambiguities within the QFES Act 1990, such as how section 83 *Powers of first officer states* -

(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.



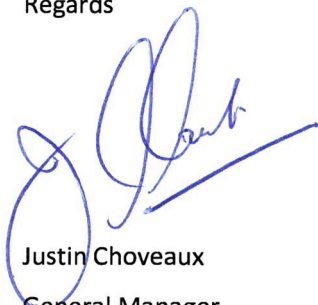
This section would allow for the local brigade to command and control a local fire using local knowledge and be supported by the QFES and Fire and Rescue fire officers; yet subordinate internal departmental directives are not consistent with the legislation and see control at many bushfires being taken away from those with the local knowledge of fire behaviour and local fire history.

The RFBAQ look towards the next complete rewrite of the QFES Act 1990 where we will submit that each individual service would be best served with a separate and distinct section within legislation that clearly outlines the goal of each service, the powers and responsibilities of each service and how that service best interacts with the other services within and outside the department. This would also be more accessible for other organisations to come under the Act in the future.

The RFBAQ is cognisant that QFES is currently reviewing the A to E class levies as covered in the Fire and Emergency Services Regulation 2011. Following discussions with QFES, the RFBAQ will await the draft discussion paper on potential levy changes.

The RFBAQ welcome the opportunity to elaborate on the above and also look forward to working with QFES on the draft changes that come from this first round of consultation.

Regards



Justin Choveaux
General Manager

Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland





RURAL FIRE BRIGADES ASSOCIATION QUEENSLAND INC. ABN. 37 417 474 709

QFESReview@kpmg.com.au

18 August 2021

RFBAQ Submission to the independent review into the future operations, structure and sustainability of Queensland Fire and Emergency Service conducted by KPMG.

The structure of the QFES goes back to 1666 and the Great Fire of London.

After the Great Fire, the first fire insurance company called “The Fire Office” was established in 1667. This commercial fire brigade employed small teams of Thames watermen as firefighters. Other similar companies soon followed and this was how property was protected from fire until the early 1800s. Insurance policy holders were given a badge, or fire mark, to affix to their buildings. If a fire started, the fire brigade was called. They looked for the fire mark and, provided it was the right one, the fire would be fought. Often the buildings were left to burn until the right fire company attended.

Before long insurance companies realised it would be more efficient to have a single, unified force to watch over London, and so in 1833 the London Fire Engine Establishment was created.

In about 1836 the first fire insurance companies began operating in Australia. These Brigades were largely local volunteers who used equipment supplied by the insurance companies.

In Brisbane during the 1860s no less than five volunteer fire brigades were formed and then disbanded due to lack of support and cooperation between the interested parties, namely the State, local governments and insurance companies.

Queensland town fire brigades continued to develop independently until they were amalgamated into the Queensland Fire Service (now known as the QFES) in 1990. This was also the same year that the Rural Fires Board was dissolved and the Rural Fires Act was emasculated into a few unempowering sections of the Fire Service Act 1990.

The culmination of 350 years of growth in the fire industry has seen Queensland adopt a fire service model that was created to support a high population density model in a constrained environment and has as a funding driver the ownership of property. This is why the emergency management levy is collected through rates notices.

Queensland is of course a large state with an enormous geographic footprint, low to very low population densities and the highest risk is posed from the areas that return the lowest revenue, so commensurately receive the lowest funding support; 5% of the QFES budget to defend 93% of Queensland.

The QFES Regulation 2011 is the enabler on how the QFES collects the whole of state levy (not the Rural Fire levy many brigades receive from local government). The current metro-centric regulation is a hardwired document that links increased funding to increased staffing and has no correlation to community risk or need. The driver under the current regulation is the communities capacity to pay and if a community can pay a lot then it receives a high service level of potential service delivery whether the risk is there or not.



A good example is Ascot in Brisbane. Very few house fires, doesn't flood, no bushfires, no major highways and associated car accidents; so what would be classified as low risk. Yet the householders in Ascot pay an annual levy of \$229.80 to receive a fire truck within 12 minutes 90% of the time as the population density supports the high-cost model.

Kilcoy householders on the other hand pay an annual levy of \$112.40 for exactly the same promised service within 12 minutes 90% of the time yet this town floods, has bushfires, a major highway and associated car accidents yet the community's capacity to pay is lower due to density.

The promised service in the same 12 minutes 90% of the time yet two distinctly different prices that householders have to pay. And this is where the feudal nature that stretches back to 1667 becomes apparent, as 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.

A major difference in Queensland between now and 1667 is that Insurance Companies do not compulsorily contribute. Every household insurance policy that has storm or flood cover has a component built into the premium to cover the cost of storm and flood clean-up by commercial providers, yet during storm, flooding and cyclone clean-up, Rural Fire Brigade volunteers contribute their labour and equipment free to washout affected properties and chainsaw cyclone damaged households with no insurance company contribution.

In the 93% of Queensland that is covered by the 30,000 members of the 1,400 Rural Fire Brigades there is no guaranteed service, yet householders still are levied \$112.40.

And what do landholders in rural Queensland receive for their money?

60% of Rural Fire Brigades do not have a fire truck.

Many of the brigades that do have a truck do not have a fire shed to put it in.

Many of the fire sheds that are owned by QFES are not connected to electricity, running water or have a toilet.

Rural Fire Brigade firefighters are not supported in universal First Aid training even though fire trucks are fitted with defibrillators and as the pretext for Blue Card brigade members are classified as Health Care Providers.

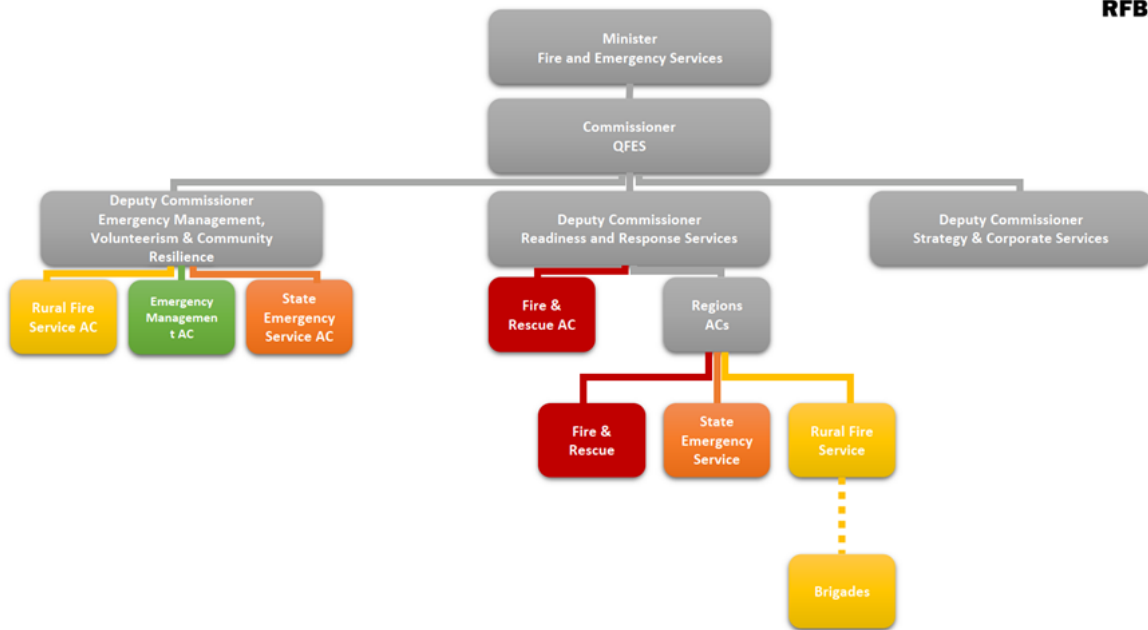
The lack of funding for frontline services is not replicated within The QFES, as there has been an increase in media and Frontline Enabler (Support) staff of 98 FTE over the last 3 years (QoN 2019/20 Estimates).

This is what the QFES has created and this is what the QFES supports and this is why the QFES should be dissolved.



The inequity of the QFES is again exemplified by the regionalisation structure imposed by Fire Service Senior Officers, without consultation, on the Rural Fire Service and Brigades in March 2019.

Current Structure



In the current structure it is easy to see that Rural Fire Brigades report to a regional Assistant Commissioner, and every regional Assistant Commissioner in Queensland is from a Fire and Rescue Service background. These Senior Officers report to a Deputy Commissioner for Readiness and Response who is also from a Fire and Rescue Service background. The Deputy Commissioner for Volunteerism and Emergency Management has no volunteers and the Assistant Commissioner for the Rural Fire Service has no direct support line to brigades.

Major recent failings such as ‘Regionalisation’, the Blue Card rollout debacle, the disempowering of Brigades to put ‘fire on the ground’ during fire season, Rural Fire paid staff not industrially allowed to progress beyond the rank of Superintendent in the regions, the dismal build numbers of Rural Fire trucks, the complete lack of legislative support for volunteer firefighters (the word Volunteer does not figure once in the whole 216 pages of the Fire Service Act 1990), the list just goes on and on, is an indictment against the QFES.

Another prime example is the 30-minute delay in responding Rural Fire Brigades to fires. On the 8th of this month (August, 2021) this resulted in a Rural Fire Tanker not being sent to a house fire in a Rural Fire area and the house was lost.



The QFES for many years has been delaying the callout of brigades or not calling them at all for fires in their brigade areas and the QFES have stated that due to the callout computer programme being purchased to support Fire and Rescue it is unable to track brigade appliances or know where brigade stations are. The CARA report into the RFSQ from 2016 recommended that the QFES start sending the right fire truck to fires, yet at the time of writing this is still not possible.

On the topic of Reviews into the QFES that make recommendations that never happen, the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee review of 2011, Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland *Recommendation 2 – that QFRS include consultation with rural fire brigades as mandatory when boundary changes are proposed and Recommendation 14 – that the for Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services undertake a thorough review, including consultation with rural fire brigades, regarding the proposed formula for distribution of funding.* These recommendations have been so thoroughly ignored, that at the time of writing the QFES has defunded 5 brigades in the vicinity of Brisbane without consultation or an ongoing future funding model. As has been happening since the report of 2011, the QFES will say sorry, try to do better next time and then keep on truckin’.

The QFES would have to be the most reviewed department in the State and at great cost we have had the above-mentioned Public Accounts and Public Works Committee review 2011 and;

Report to Parliament No. 8 for 2011 Follow up of four audits completed in 2008 and 2009 by the Queensland Audit Office;

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry 2011;

The Malone Review by Ted Malone MP 2013;

The Keelty Review 2014 by Mick Keelty AO APM, Former Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police;

The Allison Review 2014 by Margaret Allison;

The unfinished CARA review 2016 - ;

Follow-up of Bushfire prevention and preparedness Report 5: 2018–19, Queensland Audit Office;

C4I Foundations Review 2018 by Maurie McNarn AO Major General (retd);

2018 Queensland Bushfire Review by the Inspector General Emergency Management;

The Blue Water Review 2018 by Campbell Darby DSC AM Commodore (Retd);

SES Review 2020 by Campbell Darby DSC AM Commodore (Retd);

and now the Independent Review by KPMG 2021.



These are the headline external reviews conducted publicly and calling for submissions. The QFES has undertaken multiple internal reviews with companies such as Deloitte Australia and other paid consultants and we are unaware of how many, when and at what cost; but we are aware of the ramifications when the QFES announces changes to the department based on these anonymous review recommendations.

Speaking of internal QFES reviews and audits, the RFBAQ was asked to participate in a Legislative Changes programme run by QFES. The first meeting we attended was on the 19th February 2016 (yes, well over 5 years ago) where we put forward our proposal to better empower brigades and brigade members. As mentioned above, the current Act does not mention volunteers once in its 216 pages and is so dis-empowering that Queensland volunteer firefighters are not classified as fire officers. To best show the lunacy of this was during the Commonwealth Games where the local Rural Fire Brigades were part of the co-ordinated state emergency response and recovery plan yet had to drive their fire trucks on the highway in the left-hand truck lane as they are not classified as emergency vehicles. The RFBAQ offered to bring up volunteer firefighters from NSW or Vic, or any other state or territory, as these volunteer firefighters in Queensland are classified as Fire Officers but a Queensland volunteer firefighter in Queensland is not. The QFES attempted to solve this issue by giving a note to go in the glovebox of each truck to show to police if requested. This is a perfect example of how the QFES Senior Officers and bureaucrats do nothing to enable brigades rather reinforces the status quo or actively go out of their way to disempower brigades. After years of meetings and submissions the best that the Legislative Review team and the QFES could come up with was an attempt to change the Fire Act to allow the Commissioner to sack a brigade member. Thankfully a number of Members of Parliament from a number of political parties contacted the RFBAQ with their offers of support in fighting the draft amendments and the whole thing died away during the state election process.

This was not the first time that Rural Fire Brigades have needed the protection of Parliament from the QFES. In 2015 the QFES championed unfair and discriminatory cancer coverage and this necessitated the RFBAQ having a fair cancer coverage private members bill tabled that allowed all members of Parliament to show their support for volunteer firefighters. Now Queensland volunteer firefighters have the highest level of presumptive legislative cancer coverage support in Australia and this was thanks to Parliament and no thanks to the QFES.

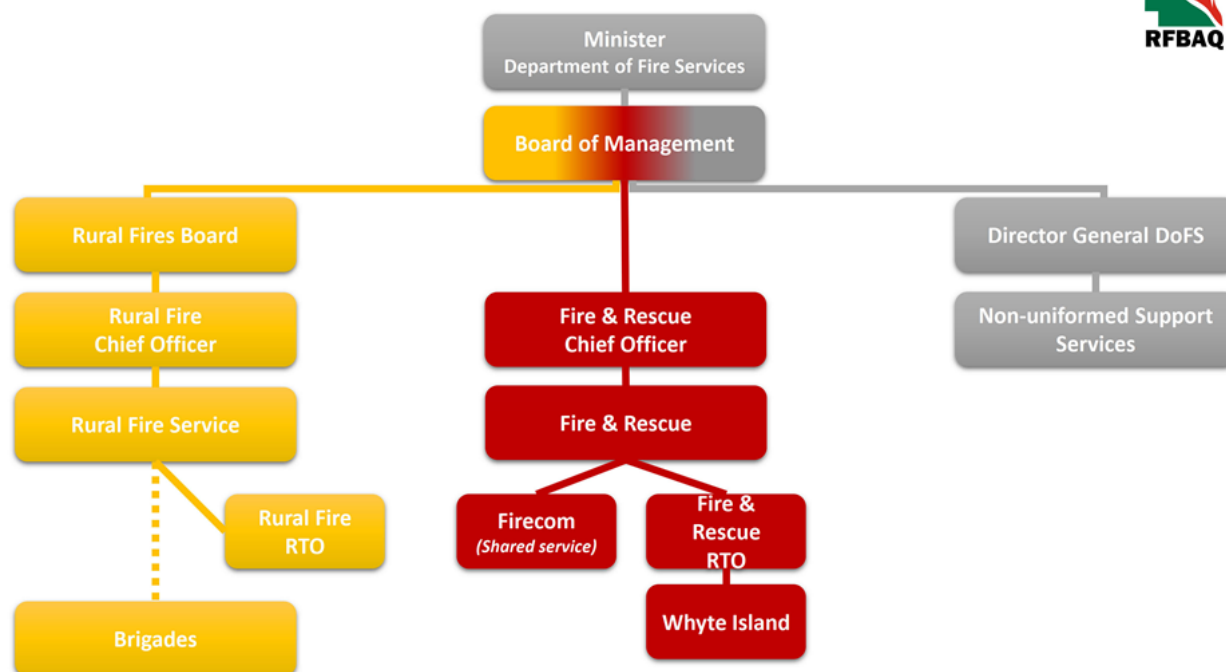
To empower the Brigade Members, Brigades and Rural Fire Service staff and ensure that 'Rural Fire' is supported and enabled by a model that meets both current needs and future community requirements the RFBAQ recommends a restructure of fire services in Queensland.



At a Special Meeting of the RFBAQ held on Saturday 1st August 2020 there was overwhelming support for the creation of a Department of Fire Services (below).

Of note, at the Special Meeting, not one RFBAQ Representative voted in support of The QFES in its current structure.

Department of Fire Services

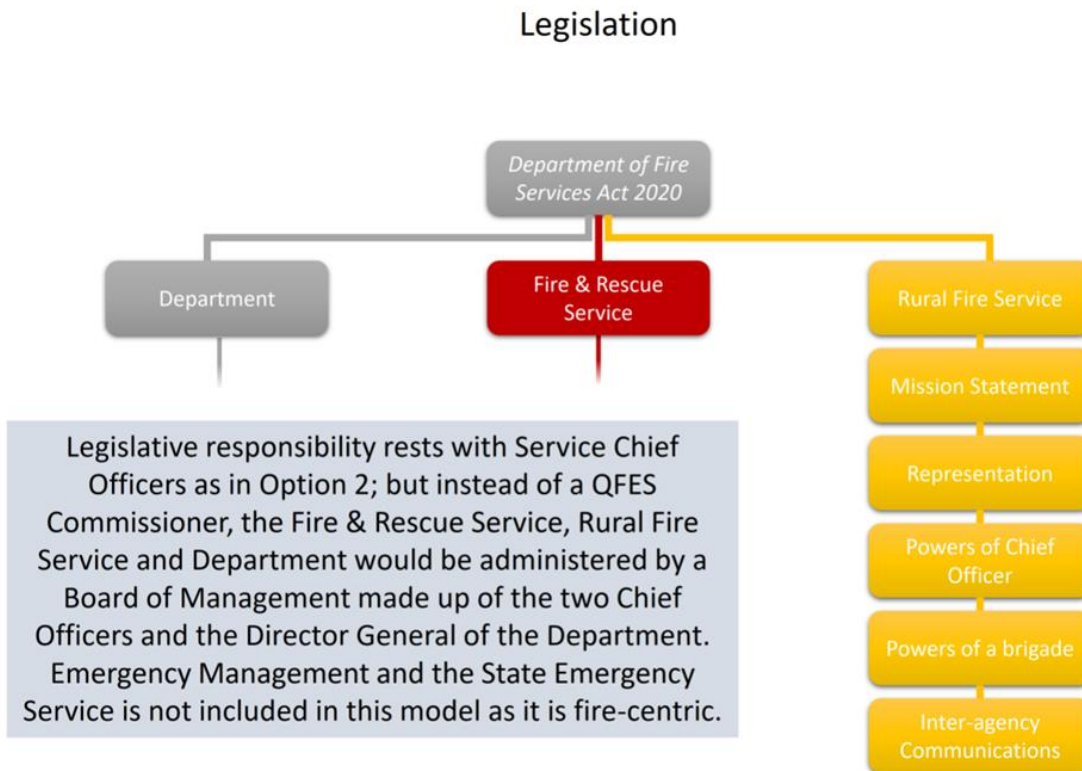


To enable this it is imperative that the Department of Fire Services structure as detailed in the above diagram be implemented.

Rural Fire Brigades are volunteer unincorporated community organisations and Fire and Rescue firefighters are career officers in a paramilitary organisation. These are two sociologically different groups who need to be treated separately while acknowledging that they both exist to defend their communities, yet the support that is required for each is different. This is the other major failing of the QFES, where for the bureaucratic convenience of chair bound Senior Officers and the burgeoning QFES public service, the Brigades and Fire and Rescue Stations were lumped together.



To acknowledge the differences of the services within the same department, we suggest that both Fire and Rescue and Rural Fire Service have separate sections in legislation (as below) and that this new legislation have a section for the departmental component that is separate from the defined services.



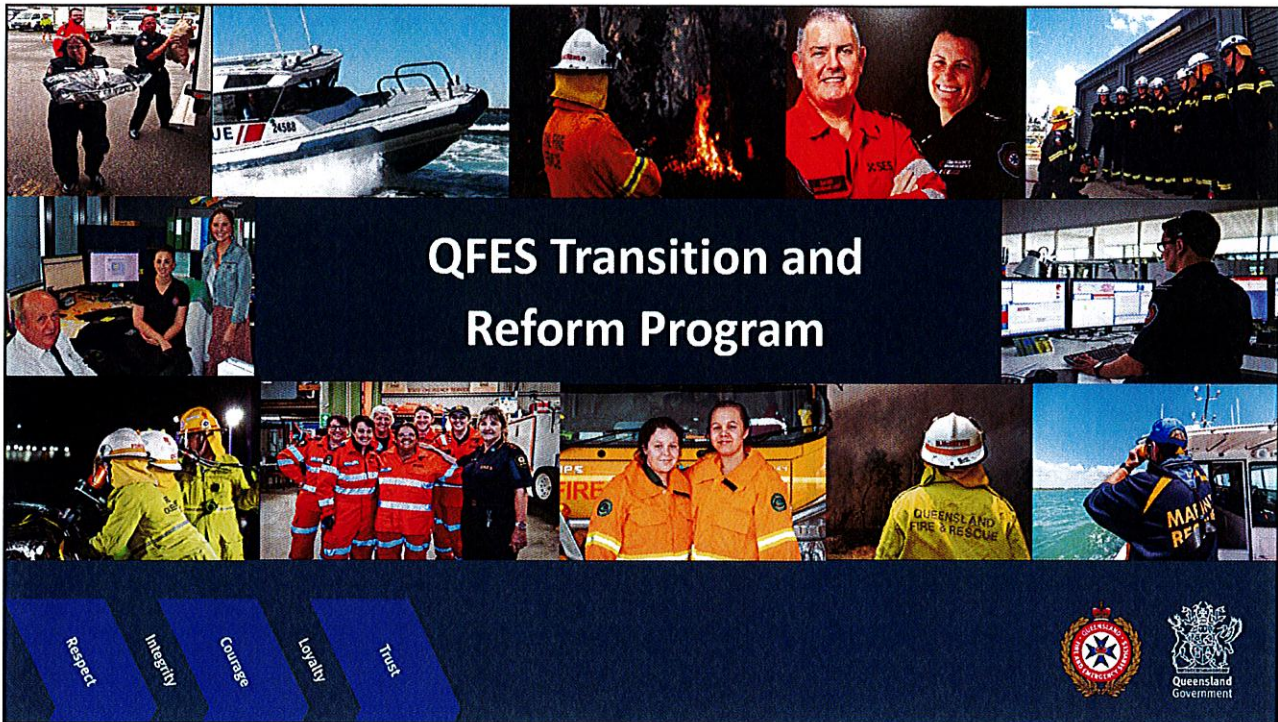
The RFBAQ would like to thank KPMG for the phone interview of Friday the 13th and for accepting our submission outlining the failings of the current model and our recommendation for a way forward.

The brigades exist to defend their communities and we need to get back to having a fire service that supports the brigades in doing that.

Regards,

Justin Choveaux
General Manager
Rural Fire Brigades Association Qld





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Why the change?

Changes are not a reflection on the performance of QFES

Implement government policy to deliver fire and emergency services best positioned to meet climate change challenges

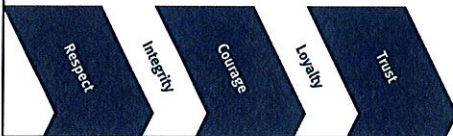
Informed by Reviews: some form of change was identified as needed to improve effectiveness of current arrangements



2

Background

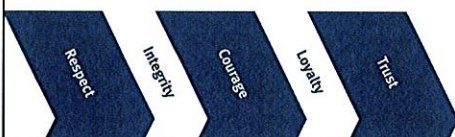
- 2-3 year journey
- Allison, McNarn reports
- Stakeholder influence
- KPMG Independent Review / SES Review / Bluewater Review



3

Structure QFD

The government decided to establish the 'Queensland Fire Department' (QFD), a dedicated fire services Department consisting of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and the Rural Fire Service (RFS)



4

Leadership

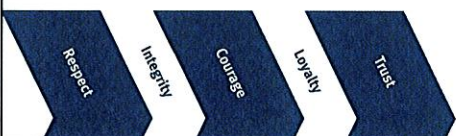
The government decided to establish the role of 'Chief Fire Officer' as a statutory position responsible for assurance, culture, integration, research and best practice



5

Governance

The government decided it requires clear chains of command for incident response with definitions that recognise the role and expertise of departmental personnel



6

Excellence

The government decided that professional standards will be embedded for the FRS, including at operational leadership levels



7

Structure RFS

The government decided to establish the Rural Fire Service (RFS) as a separate entity within the department, with its own dedicated budget and an Advisory Board

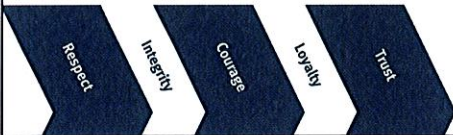


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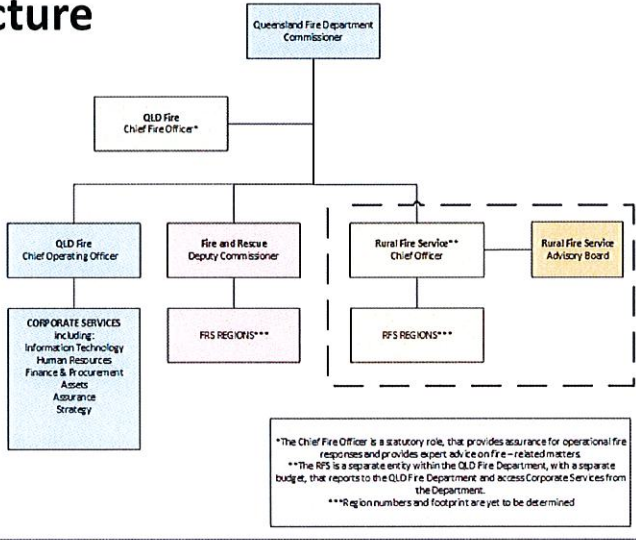
Transitions to QPS

The government decided –

- To transition to the Queensland Police Service (QPS):
 - The State Emergency Service (SES) as a separate entity within QPS
 - Volunteer marine rescue service functions, under the soon to be established Marine Rescue Queensland, as a separate entity within QPS
 - Certain disaster management functions (and to Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA)), subject to the Inspector-General of Emergency Management’s Review
 - Responsibility for relevant service agreements with Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ), Royal Life Saving Society Queensland (RCSSQ) and PCYC Queensland (PCYC)
- On extra resourcing for the QRA to strengthen its resilience functions to better align nationally

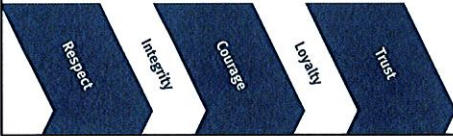


Proposed QFD structure



*The Chief Fire Officer is a statutory role, that provides assurance for operational fire responses and provides expert advice on fire-related matters
 **The RFS is a separate entity within the QLD Fire Department, with a separate budget, that reports to the QLD Fire Department and access Corporate Services from the Department.
 ***Region numbers and footprint are yet to be determined

INDICATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE



Questions???



Respect

Integrity

Courage

Loyalty

Trust



11

QFD – Transition principles

- Ensure continuity of service delivery
- Achieve preferred outcomes with least disruption to the workforce
- Ensure new model is cost effective, efficient and sustainable
- Engage workforce and stakeholders on structural matters
- Conduct individualised consultation with affected employees where relevant

Respect

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Trust



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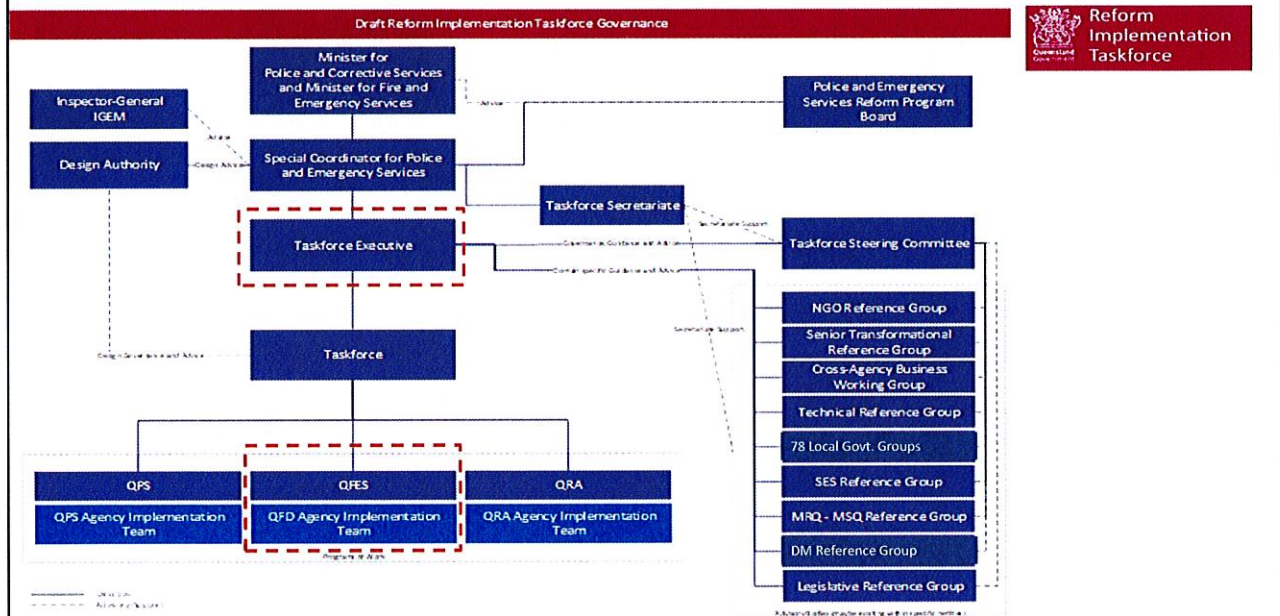
QFES Reform principles

- Whole of government approach
- Continuity of service
- No job losses
- Consultative process
- Constructive and open communication with all stakeholders
- Negotiating in good faith

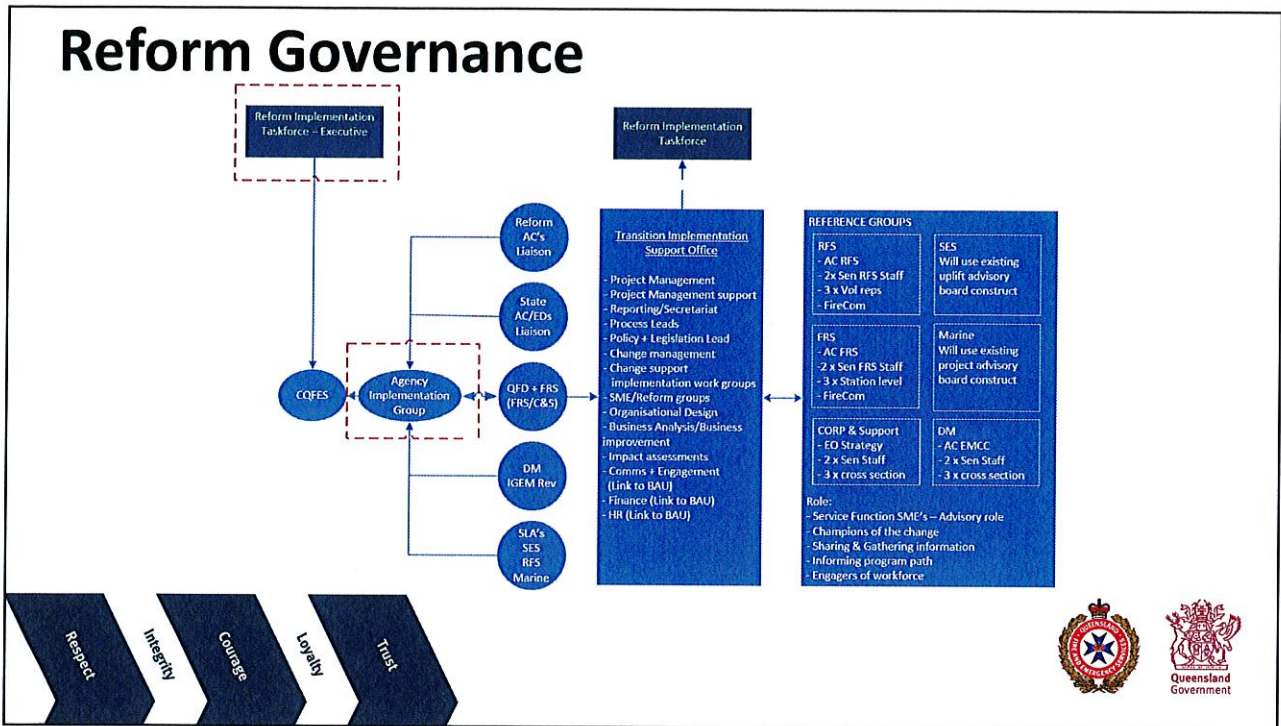


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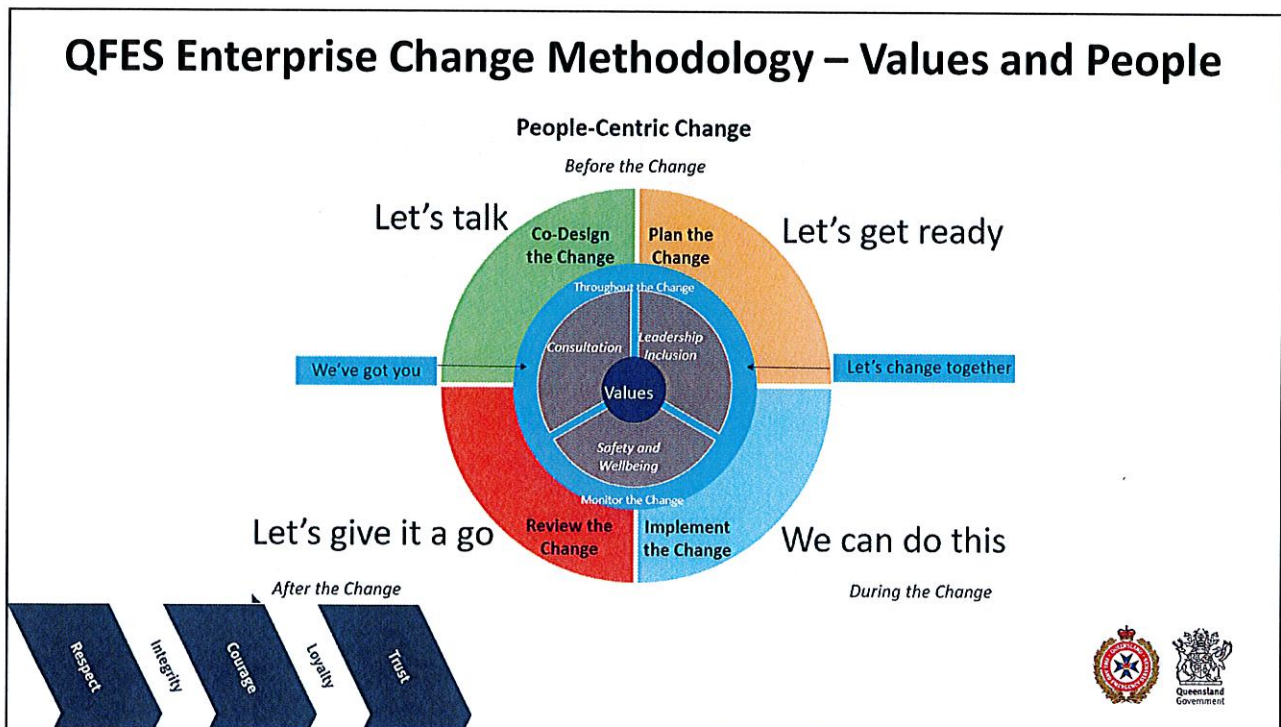
Reform Governance



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Questions???



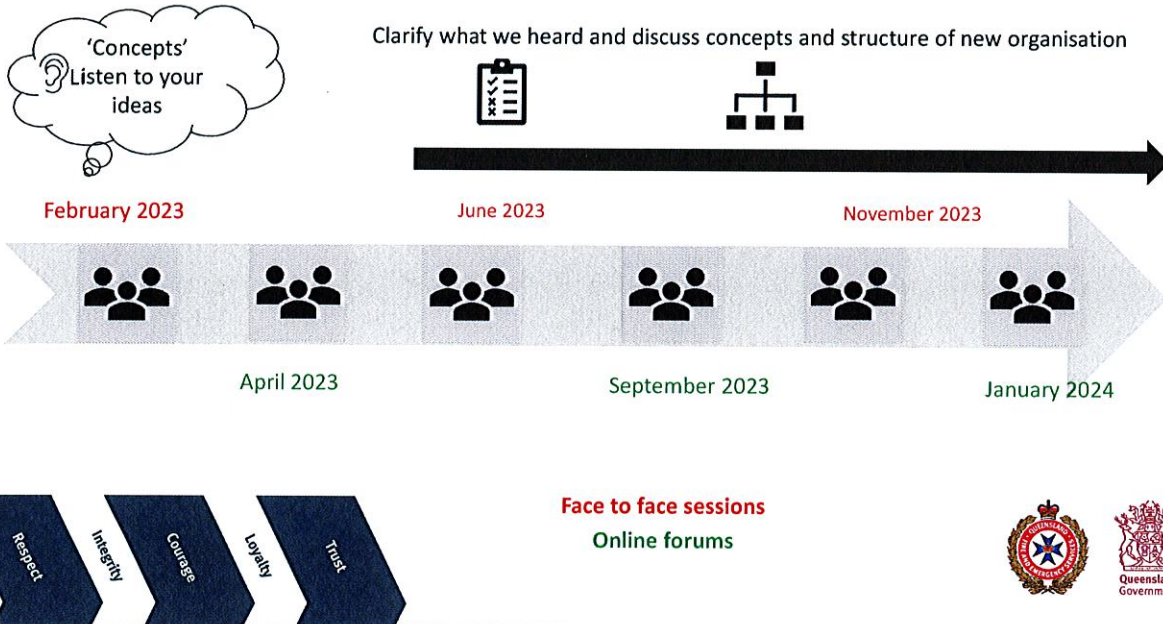
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Timeline



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Formal Engagement



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Questions???



20

The Future

Respect

Integrity

Courage

Loyalty

Trust



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Transitioning Services / Functions

- Outcome of the Disaster Management Arrangements Review (the Review) not yet known (due 29 April 2023)
- Transition is being led by RIT (subject to the Review) which will determine future state of services and functions transitioning
- Leadership of both QFES and QPS will collaborate to minimise the disruption to the workforce and service delivery, including deciding on a timeline

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Trust



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State Emergency Service (SES)

- BAU
- 'Uplift' work
- Concept of operations development
- Informed by SES Review and KPMG Independent Review
- Transition work



23

Marine Rescue Queensland (MRQ)

- Informed by Bluewater Review and KPMG Independent Review
- Build on work of Marine Project Implementation Team and Marine Rescue Implementation Working Group (MRIWG)
- Legislative development
- BAU for MRIWG will transition from QFES to QPS
- Transition of MIR Project will be treated separately to the development of legislation



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Disaster Management Arrangements (DMA)

- Disaster Management 'Chief Executive' move from Commissioner QFES to Commissioner QPS
- QRA functions being expanded
- Inspector General of Emergency Management (IGEM) Review
- 'Forward leaning' in the face of -
 - increasing disaster risk due to climate change and increased regularity and intensity of natural disasters and
 - changing face of communities and their expectations



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Service Agreements

- QFES support for:
 - Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ),
 - Royal Life Saving Society Queensland (RLSSQ),
 - PCYC Queensland (PCYC),

Will transition to QPS



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Questions???



Respect

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Trust



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FRS – Design principles

- Maximise the use and value of all our shift/daywork, on-call and corporate / support personnel
- More consistent state-wide standards and spans of control (similar to approach to FRS New Station Crewing Model (NSCM))
- Corporate support – strengthen the system with minimal disruption/change

Respect

Integrity

Courage

Loyalty

Trust



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FRS – Purpose

- Reduce risk
- Improve public safety
- Increase Operational Capability and Capacity
- Recognition as efficient, effective, sustainable, highly valued, relevant community asset
- Ready FRS for future demands
- Appropriate ‘span of control’ for all aspects of the service



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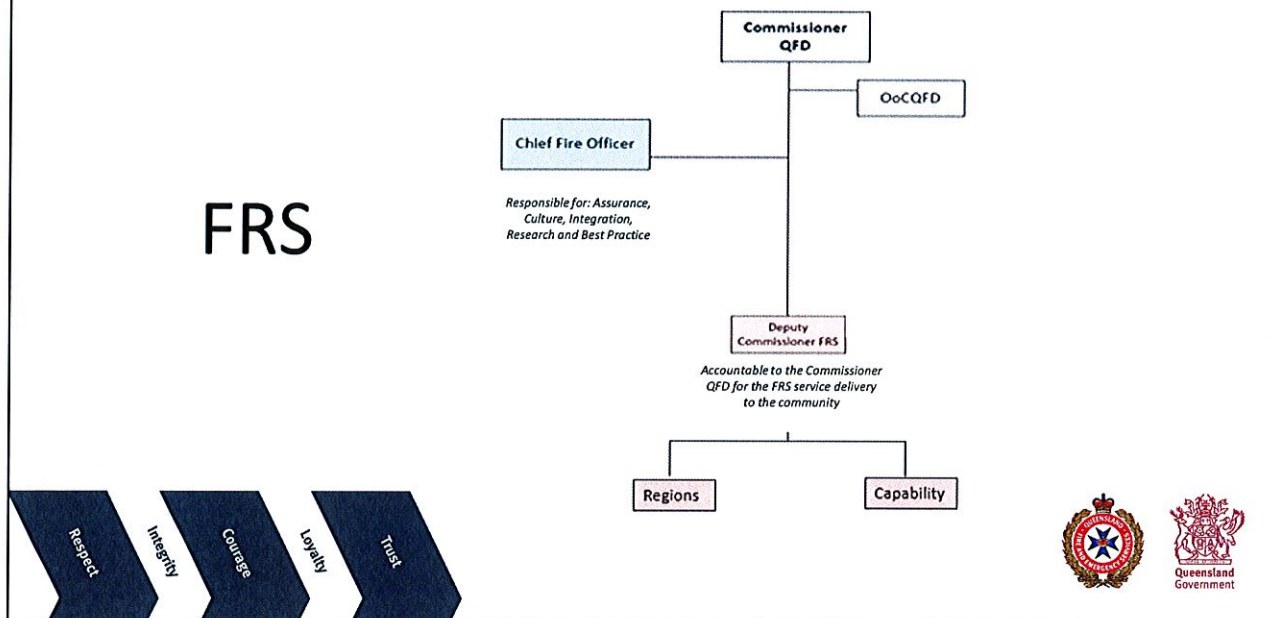
FRS – Objectives

- Enhance support for and connection to firefighters
- Enhance service delivery alongside communities
- Stronger focus on
 - Community engagement/education/connection and stakeholder/partnership management
 - Capability and capacity development
 - Operational and business planning
 - Asset management
 - Holistic training and development
- State-wide consistency tailored to local requirements
- Appropriate resourcing
- Agile, scalable and proportionate operations
- Enhancements informed by data



30

Queensland Fire Department (QFD) High level structure



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RFS – Design principles

- Separate function within QFD
- Maximise the use and value of all staff and volunteers including managing workload and spans of control better
- Enhance support for/connection to volunteers and Brigades
- Stronger focus on mitigation, landholder and wider community engagement
- Corporate support – strengthen the system with minimal disruption/change



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RFS – Purpose

- Support frontline volunteers
- Reduce risk
- Improve public safety
- Increase Operational Capability and Capacity
- Recognition as efficient, effective, sustainable, highly valued, relevant community asset
- Ready RFS for future demands
- Appropriate 'span of control' for all aspects of the service



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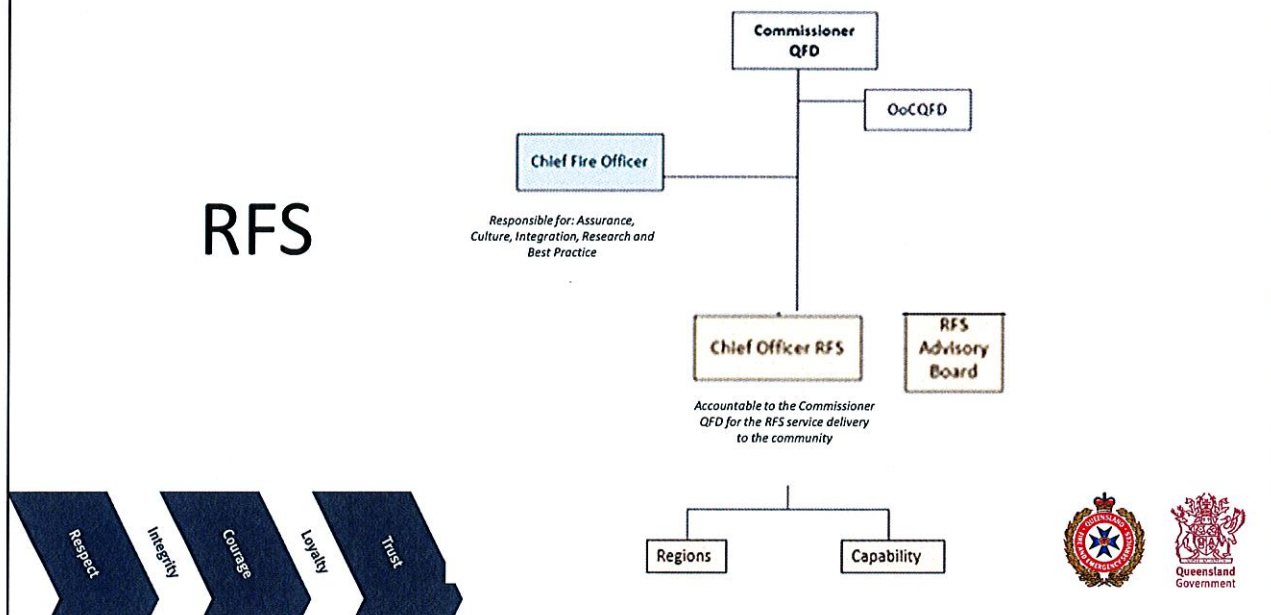
RFS – Objectives

- Enhance engagement, support for and connection to volunteers and brigades
- Stronger focus on
 - Mitigation
 - Landholder and wider community engagement
- Harness knowledge/networks of Fire Wardens
- Standardise training, systems and process
- Recognise not all Brigades are the same
- Volunteers training volunteers
- Mix of competency-based and proficiency-based training programs
- Better resourcing for appropriate support for volunteers and improved spans of control
- Enhancements informed by data
- Development of ConOps



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Queensland Fire Department (QFD) High level structure



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Corporate / Support

- Strategy and Corporate Services will continue to be undertaken internally
- FRS and RFS administrative support will continue to be delivered internally
- Support staff within transitioning services / functions will predominantly be required to move departments – BUT there will be NO job losses



36

Specialist Functions

- Specialist functions are still being discussed
- We welcome suggestions on the design and development for specialist functions remaining in QFD



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How does this affect you?

The Queensland Government has committed to no job losses

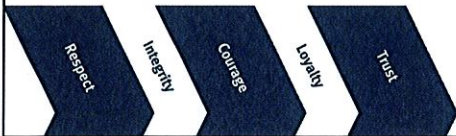
- Some people will be required to move departments, others may need to perform varied or different functions
- Staff impacts will be examined carefully and methodically
- You will be informed and engaged about any significant change to your day-to-day work
- Transition will minimise disruption to people and their day-to-day work
- For most of us, the reforms will mean limited changes to what we do every day

We will continue to respond to emergencies and disasters and work with the community to maximise public safety



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Questions???



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Where to from here?



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The right environment

▶ Creating the right environment for the right change to be sustainable:

- Your role
- The role of leadership
- Support available



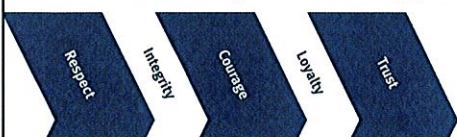
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Where to from here?

- Detailed functional and structural assessment
- Establishing Reference Groups – EOI for membership coming soon
- Future engagement sessions in June and November
- Disaster management functions – IGEM review (due 29 April 2023)
- Continue to deliver QFES Change Methodology training
- **For you**, engage with the information provided and contribute your ideas (via email or the form on the Gateway page)

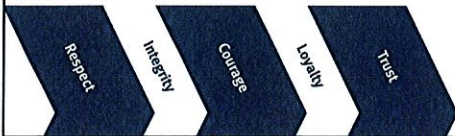
What can you do to find out more?

- Visit Reform Gateway page, including FAQ
- Read regular Commissioner's updates
- Ask questions of your line manager
- Submit question/suggestions to reform.questions@qfes.qld.gov.au
- Submit a question or suggestions via the Reform Gateway page



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Discussion and questions



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Timeline



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**RURAL FIRE BRIGADES ASSOCIATION
QUEENSLAND INC.** ABN. 37 417 474 709

25 January 2024

Hon Steven Miles MP, Premier

Hon Nikki Boyd MP, Minister

Dear Premier and Minister Boyd,

The Rural Fire Brigades Association Qld Management Committee met 19th January 2024, and it was the unanimous vote of the Committee that I write to the Premier and Minister rejecting totally the draft amendments to the *Fire Service Act 1990*.

The current Act is out of date and does not empower Rural Fire Brigades. It is however preferable to an unprecedented legislative power grab by a small clique of Brisbane-based senior Fire and Rescue bureaucrats.

The RFBAQ President Ian Pike AFSM was given 7 working days from the receipt of the draft legislation to consult with the Association's membership and supply our response by the 29th January. This is completely at odds with the assurances we received that there would be time for the RFBAQ to share the draft legislation with all registered Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland.

Our initial conversations and meetings with Deputy Police Commissioner Stephan Gollschewski and the Legal Director / Office of Special Coordinator were positive in intent to empower Rural Fire Brigades and volunteer firefighters, and to increase brigade capacity and functions in achieving a higher level of community defence across the 93% of Queensland that the 1,400 Rural Fire Brigades defend.

Since the departure of the permanent QFES Commissioner Greg Leach in late 2023 and the appointment of an Acting Commissioner from Fire and Rescue, the draft legislation has substantially and drastically changed.

The new draft legislation for the first time stipulates that the only person qualified to become Commissioner of the new Queensland Fire Department (QFD) that comprises both the Fire and Rescue Service and the Rural Fire Service, must be from Fire and Rescue. This is like legislating that the only person who can be the head of Queensland Health is a surgeon.

This Fire and Rescue Commissioner will for the first time be able to directly sack a member of a Rural Fire Brigade and decide who can or cannot be a brigade chairperson, treasurer or elected office bearer.

This is completely unacceptable and is not legally supported, as brigades are unincorporated associations that moderate their own membership.

The QFES has been adamant in their pursuit of being able to sack a brigade member since the botched introduction of Blue Card and previously attempted to amend the legislation to achieve this end.

The draft legislation has a new role of Chief Fire Officer. This person reports directly to the Commissioner on service delivery, integration, best practice, innovation and research. Again, this person's qualifications can only come from Fire and Rescue.



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The draft legislation states that an incident controller in the future can only come from people with expertise in large scale structural fires and bushfires, specialist and technical rescue, response to disasters and hazmat. This means that going forward all incident controllers can only come from Fire and Rescue; not Rural Fire, where most large incidents happen.

This one section completely disempowers landholders and brigade members who understand how fire moves through the environment.

One of the commitments to the RFBAQ from Minister Mark Ryan MP was a Rural Fires Board. This has also been watered down to an advisory committee. More significant changes made by Kedron since the departure of Commissioner Leach.

The KPMG Review into the QFES found that 86% of corporate services went to the Fire and Rescue Service, and only 6% went to RFS. KPMG also identified that this happened as corporate staff identified with the Fire and Rescue Service and that this was a cultural challenge that needed addressing. This draft legislation flies in the face of the Government's own report and policy.

2021 KPMG review into the QFES, page 105.

There is much, much more in the draft legislation that clearly identifies a power grab, and this will be to the detriment to the defence of all communities across Queensland.

Before this terrible draft legislation is presented to Parliament, it needs an Authority to Introduce from Queensland Cabinet. We urge you and your cabinet to not sign the Authority to Introduce.

The current out-of-date *Fire Service Act 1990* is far preferable to this draft legislation. This draft legislation will lead to upheaval and discord similar to that fracturing the Fire Services in Victoria.

In the coming weeks the RFBAQ will write to each political party asking them for a written commitment to Rural Fire becoming independent, and getting away from the toxic culture of entitlement that can produce such self-serving draft legislation.

The motion introduced by Ian Pike AFSM to the full meeting of the RFBAQ State Executive 14th October 2023 was:

That the RFBAQ write to every registered political party in Queensland prior to the 2024 State Election calling for a commitment in the next term of government for a fully independent Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ).

For the RFSQ to have a Chief Officer, from a brigade background, who reports directly to the Minister. For RFSQ to have a separate legislation and budget and for the reformed RFSQ to be comprised of rural fire brigades, Fire Wardens and rural fire staff.

Rural Fire Service staff are to provide support and training to the brigades and their members. These brigades and support staff help landholders mitigate risk from bushfire, respond to fires and other emergencies, provide education to Queenslanders relating to fire and perform other rescue functions as delegated by the Chief Officer of the RFSQ.

This was passed unanimously.

Yours faithfully,



Justin Choveaux

