

Report No. 11, June 2011

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Legislative Assembly of Queensland

Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

June 2011

Report No. 11

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

53rd Parliament

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

AG Act	<i>Auditor-General Act 2009</i>
CD	Compact Disc
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DES	Former Department of Emergency Services
DCS	Department of Community Safety
EMQ	Emergency Management Queensland
ESAC	Emergency Services Advisory Council
ESU	Emergency Service Units
FA Act	<i>Financial Accountability Act 2009</i>
FA&A Act	<i>Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977</i> . This act was replaced by the <i>Financial Accountability Act 2009</i> and the <i>Auditor-General Act 2009</i> which commenced on 1 July 2009.
Firecom	Fire Communications Centre
FMS	<i>Financial Management Standard 1997</i>
FPMS	<i>Financial Performance and Management Standard 2009</i>
FTE	Full time equivalent
F&RS Act	<i>Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990</i>
Hazmat	Hazardous Materials
iZone	Interface Zone
MOG	Machinery of government
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PAPWC	Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
PMS	Performance management systems
PWC	Public Works Committee
QAO	Queensland Audit Office
QAS	Queensland Ambulance Service
QFRS	Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
QGIF	Queensland Government Insurance Fund
RFB Manual	<i>Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010</i> refers to the hard copy Version 1.2 valid as at 10 June 2010
RFB	Rural Fire Brigades
RFBAQ	Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland Inc
RFS	Rural Fire Service
SES	State Emergency Service
The committee	Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
The parliamentary committee	Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

Role of the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

The Public Accounts and Public Works Committee is a statutory committee of the Queensland Parliament, established by the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*.

The committee's area of responsibility as described in section 95 of the Act is:

- (a) *the assessment of the integrity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government financial management by —*
 - (i) *examining government financial documents; and*
 - (ii) *considering the annual and other reports of the auditor-general.*
- (b) *works (public works) undertaken by an entity that is a constructing authority for the works if the committee decides to consider the works.*
- (c) *Any major GOC works if the committee decides to consider the works.*

In deciding whether to consider public works, the committee may have regard to:

1. *the stated purpose of the works and the apparent suitability of the works for the purpose; and*
2. *the necessity for, and the advisability of, the works; and*
3. *value for money achieved, or likely to be achieved, by the works; and*
4. *revenue produced by, and recurrent costs of, the works or estimates of revenue and costs for the works; and*
5. *the present and prospective public value of the works, including, for example, consideration of the impact of the works on the community, economy and environment; and*
6. *procurement methods for the works; and*
7. *the balance of public and private sector involvement in the works; and*
8. *the performance of —*
 - (i) *the constructing authority for the works; and*
 - (ii) *the consultants and contractors for the works;*

with particular regard to the time taken for finishing the works and the cost and quality of the works; and
9. *the actual suitability of the works in meeting the needs and in achieving the stated purpose of the works.*

Government financial documents are defined in section 79 of the Act as:

- a document tabled in the Legislative Assembly under the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*
- the annual financial statements and annual reports of a government owned corporation
- a document that would be a government financial document if it had been tabled in the Legislative Assembly as required by law.

The term does not include estimates of receipts for the proposed expenditure under an Annual Appropriation Act.

The committee may also refer issues within its area of responsibility to the Auditor-General for consideration.

An entity is a constructing authority for works if the entity is the State or a department. An entity is also a constructing authority for works if:

- the entity is established under an Act, or under State or local government authorisation, for a public, State or local government purpose; and
- the works are funded from the consolidated fund or the proceeds of a financial arrangement within the meaning of the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*.

A GOC is a constructing authority for works if the works are undertaken specifically or substantially for a community service obligation of the GOC or for major GOC works referred to the committee by the Assembly.

An entity (a commercial entity) is a constructing authority for works if, under an agreement for the works:

- (a) the state or another entity representing the State -
 - (i) has, or will or may have, a financial liability or interest; or
 - (ii) has granted, or will or may grant land, or an interest in land or another right, privilege, monopoly, concession, franchise or interest; or
 - (iii) has contributed, or will or may contribute, resources of any kind; and
- (b) the works have become, or will or may become, the absolute property of the State or another entity representing the State.

Major GOC works means works (other than public works) undertaken as part of a major infrastructure investment outlined in a GOC's statement of corporate intent.

If the committee makes a recommendation in a report that a minister should take particular action about an issue, the minister must table a response within three months after the report is tabled.

Chair's foreword

This inquiry was originally initiated by the Public Accounts Committee of the previous Parliament subsequent to the Auditor-General tabling Auditor-General's Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland. The Public Accounts and Public Works Committee resolved to complete the inquiry. The committee issued a discussion paper and received 63 submissions. It held public hearings in Cairns, Rockhampton, Emerald and Brisbane.

The committee was impressed by the number of organisations and individuals who took the time to provide written submissions and gave up their time to attend the public hearings both as witnesses and observers. We would like to express our deep gratitude to these people. These face to face meetings greatly assisted our understanding of this topic and we learned a great deal from talking to RFB volunteers throughout the state.

Both the submissions and regional hearings highlighted the enormous range of important issues. The committee also found that the interaction between RFBs, QFRS, councils and other government agencies was quite diverse across the state. Whilst there were a number of issues that the committee would have liked to pursue further, it decided to restrict its discussion to the issues it considered to be the most pressing.

The committee found that the existing funding structure was the source of great angst to both QFRS and RFBs and the committee considers that a lot of the issues stem from the lack of resources available to fund the RFS. The committee considers the current funding structure to be inequitable and has recommended a restructure of the funding arrangements.

The committee heard many times of the sometimes competitive nature of the relationship with the urban service. The committee would like to see closer interaction between both urban and rural fire services. Many RFB volunteers feel that they do not have a voice in QFRS. In order to give a voice to the some 34,000 RFB volunteers, the committee has recommended the appointment of an Assistant Commissioner, RFS. The committee expects that the first priority for this person would be work towards breaking down any barriers to enable all to be proud that they are part of one great service.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to formally thank all those organisations and individuals who took the time to provide submissions and additional information and who met with us during the course of this inquiry.

Finally, I would like to thank the other Members and support staff, including the Hansard staff, for their continuing hard work and dedication in ensuring that there was a thorough examination of all of the issues in this inquiry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne Wendt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wayne Wendt MP
Chair

Summary of Recommendations

The committee has made the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1 – that the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services undertake a comprehensive legal review in order to clarify the legal position of RFBs and their members.
- Recommendation 2 – that QFRS include consultation with rural fire brigades as mandatory when boundary changes are proposed.
- Recommendation 3 – that QFRS investigate and implement an internal email system for rural fire brigades.
- Recommendation 4 – that QFRS update its website to include the Rural Fire Service as part of its www.fire.qld.gov.au web presence.
- Recommendation 5 – that QFRS undertake a thorough review of Firecom’s systems, including data integrity and dispatch procedures.
- Recommendation 6 – that QFRS cover the cost of annual vehicle inspection certificates for rural fire brigade registered vehicles.
- Recommendation 7 – that the Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Local Government and Special Minister of State establish with local government a communication strategy to inform all residents about their fire prevention responsibilities.
- Recommendation 8 – that the QFRS investigate the possibility of insurance recovery when involved in vehicle retrieval activities at accident sites.
- Recommendation 9 – that QFRS implement procedures to provide a clear grievance process which is available to rural fire brigade volunteers.
- Recommendation 10 – that QFRS implement procedures to ensure that rural fire brigades receive written confirmation of the Commissioner’s approval after office bearer elections in compliance with section 81 of the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*.
- Recommendation 11 – that QFRS should establish a Rural Fire Service division within QFRS with the aim of integrating and strengthening the relationship between the urban and rural fire services.
- Recommendation 12 – that QFRS establish the position of Assistant Commissioner, Rural Fire Service to lead the proposed Rural Fire Service division within QFRS.

- Recommendation 13 – that the for Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services implement system of fire levies for landholders situated in urban, iZone and village brigade areas.
- 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.
- Recommendation 15 – that the for Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services ensure that the formula for distribution of funding as recommended above allows rural fire brigades to control any donation or sponsorship funding raised by individual brigades.

1. Introduction

1.1 Recommendations in this report

1. The recommendations in this report are addressed to the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services; and Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Local Government and Special Minister of State, where applicable, as the responsible ministers.¹

1.2 Conduct of the inquiry

2. The Auditor-General tabled Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland on 15 May 2008. . In August 2008, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) (52nd Parliament) agreed to further investigate the issues identified in the audit report but in particular the funding and resource allocations that are available to RFBs.
3. In February 2009 the 52nd Parliament was dissolved for the State Election held on 21 March 2009. The PAC and the Public Works Committee (PWC) of the 53rd Parliament were appointed on 23 April 2009. On 19 May 2009, the Legislative assemble passed the Parliament of Queensland Amendment Bill which merged the PAC and the PWC to form the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee (PAPWC). This bill received assent and commenced on 28 May 2009.
4. The PAPWC resolved to complete the inquiry and in November 2009 it tabled a discussion paper entitled ‘Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland’ detailing the inquiry issues and inviting written submissions. The closing date for submissions was 19 March 2010, however, due to the significant interest in the inquiry and the floods affecting interested parties in western Queensland, the committee agreed to extend the closing date for submissions to 19 April 2010. A copy of the discussion paper is contained in Appendix 1.
5. In February 2010, the committee was invited to attend the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland Inc (RFBAQ) general meeting being held in Toowoomba to discuss the inquiry.
6. In response to the discussion paper, the committee received 63 submissions. A list of those who made submissions is contained in Appendix 2. Copies of the submissions are available from the committee secretariat.
7. The committee held public hearings in Cairns on Monday 23 August 2010, Rockhampton on Tuesday 23 August 2010, Emerald on Wednesday 24 August 2010 and Brisbane on Friday 4 September 2010. The names of witnesses are detailed in Appendix 3. Copies of the hearing transcripts are available on the committee’s website. The committee also held a further in-camera hearing in Brisbane on Friday 4 October 2010. The committee also sought additional information from the hearing participants subsequent to the public hearings.

¹ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* (Qld), s.107 ministerial response to committee report

8. It should be noted that all references to the *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010* (RFB Manual) refer to the hard copy Version 1.2 valid as at 10 June 2010 provided to the committee by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS).
9. It should also be noted that, at the time of the audit, the applicable department was the Department of Emergency Services (DES). With the machinery of government changes in March 2009, the department was incorporated into the newly formed Department of Community Safety (DCS) which resulted from the amalgamation of DES and Queensland Corrective Services.
10. At the time of the 2008 audits, the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977* (FA&A Act) and the *Financial Management Standard 1997* (FMS) were the applicable legislation. This legislation was replaced by the *Auditor-General Act 2009* (AG Act) and the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* (FA Act) which commenced on 1 July 2009.
11. This report draws on the views presented at the hearings together with the submissions and other information sources.

2. Auditor-General Report No 3 for 2008 – Findings and Recommendations

12. The Auditor-General tabled Report No 3 for 2008 – *Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland* on 15 May 2008. The objective of this performance management systems audit was to determine whether suitable systems were operating to ensure the efficient and effective management of rural fire brigades (RFBs). The audit also considered whether adequate systems were in place to address any increased risk as a result of climate change and urban encroachment patterns.²

2.1 Background

13. The Auditor-General advised that under the provisions the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, the government has a responsibility to protect persons, property and the environment from fire emergencies. He noted that the government has established within QFRS two distinct models to deliver this service – the paid staff urban ‘red truck’ service model, to protect major cities and towns and the volunteer rural fire ‘yellow truck’ service model, to protect rural areas and minor townships and villages. He further noted that the rural fire service (RFS) is responsible for protecting approximately 17% of the population and 93% of the land area of Queensland.³
14. The Auditor-General highlighted three major reasons for undertaking the audit:
 - climate change;
 - the expanding rural/urban interfaces; and
 - the aging volunteer workforce.⁴

² Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 9

³ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 3

⁴ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 9-10

15. At the time of the audit, there were 1,525 RFBs split into four classifications as follows:
- 100 iZone brigades
 - 331 Village brigades
 - 458 Rural brigades
 - 636 Primary producer brigades⁵
16. The Auditor-General noted that at the time of the audit QFRS had recently modified their brigade classification model and brigades were automatically assigned a new classification based on their old one without a comprehensive review of each brigade's characteristics. The original classifications had not been reassessed for nine years and he considered that as the nature of brigade work is changing, the classifications may be inaccurate. He noted that QFRS were in the process of confirming the new classifications with each area director.⁶

2.2 Audit objective and coverage

17. The focus of the audit was on the Rural Operations division of QFRS, including the head office in Brisbane, regional and area offices and RFBs. The following areas were assessed:
- Research, information and analysis
 - Are there adequate systems in place across QFRS to ensure:
 - research related to climate change, urban sprawl and population growth have been used for decision making and to plan for the future requirements of RFBs; and
 - any changes resulting from this research is communicated to the district and RFBs as appropriate.
 - Risk modification
 - Are there adequate risk management systems in place to ensure appropriate bushfire prevention and mitigation strategies (such as fuel management and urban planning practices) are developed, implemented and communicated to reduce risk to life and property.
 - Readiness
 - Are there adequate systems in place to ensure RFBs are prepared to respond to the possibility of any present and increasing demands. The audit considered resources, training, planning and coordination and community awareness issues.

⁵ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 12

⁶ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 12

- Response
 - Are there adequate systems to enable QFRS to:
 - research related to climate change, urban sprawl and population growth have been respond efficiently and effectively to fire emergencies, including coordination and logistics practices; and
 - measure and report on performance measures such as response times within operational reporting.
- Post event review
 - Are post event reviews undertaken to both learn from the present and any increasing risks of bush fires and is there a mechanism in place to communicate the results of these reviews to QFRS management.⁷

2.3 Audit results

18. The Auditor-General found that while the RFS currently provides effective management of fires within rural communities, the service is at risk of becoming unsustainable due to the combination of a number of external and internal factors. He found that there is a lack of forward planning and risk management processes as well as inadequate systems to effectively assess the funding and resource requirements of brigades. Effective decision making is hindered by inadequate performance measurement and there are limitations in the systems to ensure training and workplace health and safety standards are met.⁸
19. In the Auditor-General's opinion, these deficiencies become even more critical when allowance is made for: the potential for increases in the frequency and intensity of wildfire incidents as a result of climate change, urban encroachment and difficulties in recruiting and training new volunteers to replace the ageing volunteers.⁹
20. The audit identified a number of systemic issues requiring improvement including planning, risk management, performance measurement, brigade funding and resourcing and training.¹⁰
21. The Auditor-General also highlighted the area of the financial accountability framework of RFBs to be an issue that required urgent clarification. The Auditor-General's opinion at the time was that RFBs appeared to be managed as separate entities with their own financial accounts operated independently of QFRS. However, legislation provides for brigades to be part of the QFRS structure, with QFRS responsible for the liabilities of these brigades.¹¹

⁷ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 10

⁸ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 3

⁹ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 3

¹⁰ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 4

¹¹ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 3

22. The Auditor-General also highlighted the significance of the need to maintain a volunteer based service delivery model due to the cost to government of alternative models of fire service delivery. QFRS estimated that in the two years prior to the audit at least 350,000 hours of service had been undertaken by RFS volunteers.¹²

2.4 Audit recommendations

23. The Auditor-General made the following recommendations¹³:

FORWARD PLANNING

It is recommended that:

1. QFRS implement 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
 - a system to monitor and report on the implementation of strategies.
2. QFRS provide 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.

RISK MANAGEMENT

It is recommended that:

4. QFRS establish 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
 - 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.

BRIGADE FUNDING AND RESOURCING

It is recommended that:

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 implement a system to collate and analyse brigade funding information
9. QFRS provide assistance to brigades in determining and budgeting for their resource needs
10. QFRS utilise performance information on brigade activity as a factor in determining brigade resource and funding needs
11. QFRS implement a system to monitor the condition and safety of brigade buildings and equipment.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

It is recommended that:

12. QFRS determine the performance information needed to support effective decision making
13. QFRS establish a suitable process to reliably capture that information
14. QFRS introduce a system to collate and analyse performance information for use in management reporting and to support effective decision making processes.

¹² Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 3

¹³ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 5-6

TRAINING

It is recommended that:

15. QFRS continue to support area training staff in the development and implementation of brigade training programs and calendars
16. QFRS improve the capacity to address the brigade training gap by continuing to encourage and facilitate the accreditation of volunteer trainers within brigades where appropriate.

2.5 Government response to the audit report

24. The Director-General, DES, stated in their response to the audit report that QFRS treats brigades as community based organisations and strives to ensure that the relationship with their community is maintained. They advised that QFRS Rural Operations continues to monitor the profile of RFB volunteers and all indications are volunteer numbers continue to be sustainable and the age profile is being augmented by the recruitment of younger volunteers.¹⁴
25. The Director-General advised that RFBs are community self-help organisations with brigades expected to assist with funding their own operations, purchases and expenses. He also noted process whereby legislation enables, but does not compel, local governments to raise a levy for local RFBs. He highlighted that local governments collect a levy for a total of 392 (25%) of RFBs and that the levy amount is decided by local government in consultation with ratepayers, RFBs and QFRS. He noted that instead of raising a separate rural fire levy, some local governments choose to support their local brigades with funds from general rates.¹⁵
26. With regard to training of volunteers, the Director-General advised that the willingness and availability of volunteers to engage in training events is at the discretion of volunteers themselves and is a major consideration as a limiting factor in closing the training gap. He noted that, to further improve training engagement and completion rates, the department is developing flexible learning methodologies that include e-Learning. These alternative learning resources aim to encourage and support self directed learners with a resulting reduction in the demand for face-to-face training, thereby freeing up both volunteer and staff trainers to provide skill development training and assessment and to deliver supervisor and management courses and programs.¹⁶
27. In regard to Fire Wardens, the Director-General noted that the report did not recognise the role the 'Permit to Light Fire System' and the 2650 volunteer Fire Wardens covering 2634 Fire Warden districts play in mitigating the impacts of bushfire in Queensland. He advised that the Fire Warden has a pivotal role in addressing changing community attitudes to the use of fire, particularly in higher density areas of the state.¹⁷

¹⁴ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 6

¹⁵ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 6

¹⁶ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 6

¹⁷ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 7

28. The Auditor-General made an additional comment that during the audit departmental offices indicated that the role of the Fire Wardens was being reviewed and initial advice was that while the Fire Wardens are an important part of rural fire management, they operated at arm's length to QFRS Rural Operations. He further advised that the lack of integration of the Fire Warden network with QFRS Rural Operations was reinforced during the audit with no substantive references being made to these links. The Auditor-General opined 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.¹⁸

2.6 Committee comments

29. DCS provided the committee with an update of its progress in regard to implementation of the Auditor-General's recommendations in October 2010.¹⁹

3. Legislative requirements

30. The QFRS and RFBs are governed by the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* supported by the *Fire and Rescue Service Regulation 2001* and the *Building Fire Safety Regulation 2008*.

3.1 QFRS and DCS responsibilities

31. The act (s8A) specifies that QFRS consists of the commissioner and fire service officers.²⁰ The act (s8B) specifies that the functions of QFRS are:
- (a) to protect persons, property and the environment from fire and hazardous materials emergencies; and
 - (b) to protect persons trapped in a vehicle or building or otherwise endangered, to the extent that the service's personnel and equipment can reasonably be deployed or used for the purpose; and
 - (c) to provide an advisory service, and undertake other measures, to promote –
 - (i) fire prevention and fire control; and
 - (ii) safety and other procedures if a fire or hazardous materials emergency happens; and
 - (d) to cooperate with any entity that provides an emergency service; and
 - (e) to perform other functions given to the service under the Act or another Act; and
 - (f) to perform functions incidental to its other functions; and
 - (g) to identify and market products and services incidental to its functions.²¹

¹⁸ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 7

¹⁹ DCS, *Summary of the Department's Position (Status of Rural Fire)*, tabled at hearing on 4 October 2010 by Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS

²⁰ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s8A

²¹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s8B

32. The act allocates specific responsibilities to both the chief executive and the commissioner. The chief executive for the purposes of the act is the Director-General, DCS.²²
33. The chief executive's responsibilities include:
- the way QFRS performs its functions;
 - defining the objectives, strategies and policies to be followed by QFRS; and
 - ensuring QFRS performs its functions in an appropriate, effective and efficient way.²³
34. The chief executive's responsibilities include provisions affecting personnel of QFRS.²⁴ The chief executive is also responsible for the efficiency of RFBs and may provide training and other assistance to them.²⁵
35. The commissioner is appointed by Governor in Council, acting on the recommendation of the Minister. The person appointed to be commissioner must have professional experience in fire prevention and fire fighting.²⁶
36. The commissioner's responsibilities include:
- manage the service's operations under the objectives, strategies and policies defined by the chief executive;
 - issue codes of practice relating to the functions, powers, conduct and appearance of fire service officers; and/or
 - issue codes of practice relating to any functions imposed or powers conferred by or under the act on any other person other than the Minister or the chief executive.²⁷
37. The commissioner has the power to delegate powers to a fire service officer, an officer of a RFB, a fire coordinator, a chief fire warden or a fire warden.²⁸ The chief executive may delegate the chief executive's powers to the commissioner or an appropriately qualified fire service officer.²⁹

3.2 Establishment and functions of rural fire brigades

38. RFBs are able to be established by the commissioner. The commissioner has the power to grant or refuse an application by a group of persons applying for registration as a RFB. The commissioner also has the power to cancel the registration at any time.³⁰ The commissioner must notify a RFB of the area for which and the circumstances in which the brigade is in charge of fire fighting and fire prevention.³¹

²² *Acts Interpretation Act 1954*, s33

²³ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s8C

²⁴ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, Part 4

²⁵ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s85

²⁶ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s9

²⁷ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s18

²⁸ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s19

²⁹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s19C

³⁰ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s79

³¹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s82

39. RFBs 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 but these governing rules must be approved by the commissioner and the commissioner has the power to direct a RFB to amend, revoke or make rules.³²
40. The act requires that RFBs must elect a first officer to be in charge of the brigade for a period specified by the commissioner and may also elect other officers as it considers necessary. It also requires that any election is conducted in accordance with the commissioner's directions and has no effect unless approved by the commissioner. The commissioner has the power to dismiss or disqualify a person from any office held with a RFB.³³ Where the first officer is unavailable to act, the next senior officer of the brigade who is available is to act as first officer.³⁴
41. The act specifies that the functions of a RFB are fire fighting and fire prevention and other functions as directed by the commissioner.³⁵
42. When a RFB is in charge of operations for controlling and extinguishing a fire, the first officer of the brigade has control and direction of any person whose services are available at the fire. The act requires that any person exercising a power or discharging a function must comply with any code of practice and with any direction of the commissioner.³⁶

3.3 Equipment of rural fire brigades

43. The chief executive may provide with, or subsidise the purchase of, any equipment a RFB needs to carry out its responsibilities. However, all equipment provided or subsidised by the chief executive is and remains the property of the state and may at any time be repossessed by the chief executive.³⁷

3.4 Emergency Services Advisory Council

44. The act also establishes an Emergency Services Advisory Council (ESAC).³⁸ The council's function is to advise the Minister about the following matters:
- (a) the extent to which current service delivery by the service –
 - (i) meets community needs; and
 - (ii) contributes to the achievement of the government's desired outcomes for the community; and
 - (iii) meets community expectations about the use of fire as a means of hazard reduction and sustainable land management ; and
 - (iv) impacts on the environment;

³² *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s80

³³ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s81

³⁴ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s83

³⁵ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s82

³⁶ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s83

³⁷ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s84

³⁸ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s34

- (h) preparing for, and responding to, fire in rural areas including the operation of RFBs and the fire fighting or fire prevention function of emergency service units;
 - (i) fire safety, fire prevention and the reduction of fire danger in rural areas;
 - (j) using fire as a means of sustainable land management in rural areas;
 - (k) the functions, capacity and capability of the department in supporting disaster mitigation and response activity;
 - (l) anything else referred to it by the Minister –
 - (v) that is relevant to the functions of the service; and
 - (vi) that relates to activities carried out or funded by the department.³⁹
45. The DCS advised that the ESAC is a non-policy making, community based body that reports to the Minister on the extent to which the delivery of fire, ambulance and other disaster management and emergency services meets community needs.⁴⁰ Prior to 2008 the *Disaster Management Act 2003* also established a Rural Fire Advisory Council. This council was abolished in 2008 and the functions transferred to the ESAC.⁴¹

3.5 Control and prevention of fires

46. The act stipulates the powers of authorised fire officers in both dangerous situations and for preventative or investigative purposes. This includes the ability to enter premises to burn, remove or otherwise deal with vegetation or other material or substance whether flammable or inflammable at the premises.⁴² The commissioner also has the power to impose fire bans.⁴³
47. The commissioner has powers relating to the authorisation and prohibition to light fires. He also has the power to grant permits to light a fire, however, this excludes national parks and state forests.⁴⁴
48. The act requires that where a fire is burning on any land and the lighting of the fire is not authorised then the occupier of the land must take all reasonable steps to extinguish or control the fire and report the existence and location of the fire.⁴⁵
49. The act specifies that the commissioner has the power to require any occupier of premises to take measures for the purpose of reducing the risk of a fire occurring.⁴⁶

³⁹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s35

⁴⁰ <http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/about/councils.htm> [27 May 2011]

⁴¹ *Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2008*, Explanatory Notes: 2

⁴² *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s53, s55

⁴³ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s86A

⁴⁴ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s61, s63, s64, s65, s66

⁴⁵ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s67

⁴⁶ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s69

3.6 Fire Wardens

50. Chief fire wardens and fire wardens may be appointed by the commissioner and such appointments must be made in writing by the commissioner. However, where the appointee is a public service officer or a police officer, the appointment must be made by Governor-in-Council.⁴⁷ Fire wardens are entitled to be paid expenses.⁴⁸

3.7 Funding

51. The act allows that a local government may make and levy certain rates or charges and contribute amounts raised to RFBs.⁴⁹
52. The act allows for the charges for any service provided under the act to be prescribed by regulation. It also allows the chief executive to fix a charge.⁵⁰

3.8 Legal liability and insurance

53. The act (s129) states that no matter or thing done or omitted to be done by any person pursuant to the act or bona fide and without negligence for the purposes of the act subjects that person to any liability. Where any question arises as to whether a person's liability for any act or omission and the person claims to have acted pursuant to or for the purpose of the act, the burden of proof of negligence and the absence of good faith lies upon the person alleging to the contrary.⁵¹
54. It also states that a person (and any assistant) who discharges a function or exercises a power under the act in order to avert or reduce actual danger to any person or property or to the environment may use force to a person that is reasonable in the circumstances and that does not cause and is not likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm and is not liable to be charged with any offence in respect of the use of that force.⁵²
55. The RFB Manual states that public liability coverage is extended to all bona fide brigade operational and training activities. However, in regard to fundraising, the RFB Manual states that the insurer requires advance notice of the intended activity as a condition of coverage and that the event is deemed an authorised activity of DCS.⁵³ The RFB Manual defines a bona fide brigade activity to be:
- Any activity undertaken by a RFB authorised by the First Officer according to his or her powers for controlling and extinguishing a fire pursuant to section 83 of the act. Fire prevention includes taking measures in readiness for fire so as to reduce potential danger to persons, property or the environment; and

⁴⁷ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s75

⁴⁸ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s76

⁴⁹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s128A

⁵⁰ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s144

⁵¹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s129

⁵² *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s129

⁵³ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D4.1: 1

- Any activity which is in accordance with the RFB Manual incorporating the Brigade Management Rules or Brigade rules approved by the QFRS Commissioner; and
 - Any other function the QFRS Commissioner may direct.⁵⁴
56. In regard to motor vehicle insurance, the RFB Manual states that QFRS holds a comprehensive motor vehicle accident insurance policy that covers brigade appliances and identifies the extent of the coverage.⁵⁵ In addition, the policy will also cover privately owned vehicles and machinery made available to brigades during a bona fide brigade activity. However, the onus to insure privately owned vehicles and machinery remains with the owner and the owner is required to claim under that policy in the first instance.⁵⁶
57. It should also be noted that the act (s138) allows unregistered vehicles to be used on a road where it is being used by a rural fire brigade to carry persons or equipment for the purpose of preventing, controlling or extinguishing a fire or for training purposes or is being used for any other purpose authorised in writing by the commissioner provided it bears clear identification as a vehicle of a rural fire brigade and there is in force a contract of insurance providing an indemnity in respect of injury caused by, through or in connection with the vehicle.⁵⁷
58. The RFB Manual also states that QFRS provides insurance coverage for brigade equipment and fire stations with the coverage provided through the Queensland Government Insurance Fund (QGIF) and through self insurance. This coverage excludes personal items left or stored in a fire station.⁵⁸

3.9 Workers Compensation

59. The *Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003* (s14) allows that WorkCover may enter into a contract of insurance with the authority responsible for management of a RFB. The contract may cover a member of the RFB and a person covered by the contract is entitled to compensation for injury sustained only while performing duties, including being trained, as a member of the RFB.⁵⁹
60. The act also allows that WorkCover may enter into a contract to cover a volunteer fire fighter or a volunteer fire warden and the person covered by the contract is entitled to compensation for injury sustained only while attending at a fire or practising, or performing any other duty, as a volunteer.⁶⁰
61. The Director-General, DCS, confirmed that the department has WorkCover policies in place that provide compensation for any loss of income that arises out of injuries that occur while volunteers are on duty as fire fighters.⁶¹

⁵⁴ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D4.2: 1

⁵⁵ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D4.2: 1

⁵⁶ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D4.4: 1

⁵⁷ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s138

⁵⁸ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D4.3: 1

⁵⁹ *Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003*, s14

⁶⁰ *Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003*, s15

⁶¹ Mr McGowan, Transcript 4 October 2010: 2

62. The RFB Manual notes that the department has a range of insurance policies in place to assist staff and volunteers including that volunteers registered with the RFS are covered for workers' compensation insurance through a policy held with WorkCover Queensland. Entitlements include:
- Payment of wages if the volunteer is a wage earner and is unable to work;
 - Payment for replacement labour if the volunteer is self employed;
 - Payment for reasonable medical expenses;
 - Rehabilitation costs;
 - Agreed travel expenses; and
 - Prosthetic appliances.⁶²

3.10 Brigade rules

63. The RFB Manual states that:

Legal advice is that a Constitution is a set of rules which are adopted by an entity which is recognised at law. Clubs and Associations that are incorporated under the Association Incorporations Act 1981 are recognised at law. A Rural Fire Brigade is not incorporated and has no powers under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 and therefore should not have a Constitution. The powers under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 are given to the First Officer of the Brigade and it is by virtue of that power that the Brigade has the power to function

However, Brigades need to be managed in a consistent way in order to achieve their objectives and undertake their functions. The Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 does allow for the making of Rules. The attached Brigade Management Rules replace the existing Brigade Constitution in outlining the requirements for managing the proceedings and internal governance of Rural Fire Brigades.

The Brigade Management Rules are the sole reference for any dispute resolution process or other matter affecting the Brigade. The current Brigade Management Rules are attached for adoption by all Brigades. Previous Brigade Constitutions are no longer effective.

Section 80 of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 allows a Brigade to make additional Rules for the purpose of further regulating the proceedings and operations of the Brigade. A Rule has no affect until approved by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Commissioner.⁶³

4. Legal status of rural fire brigades

64. The Auditor-General found in Auditor-General's Report No 3 for 2008 that the brigade accountability requirements that are specified by QFRS in the RFB Manual are not consistently complied with by brigades. Furthermore, these financial accountability requirements treat the brigades as separate entities from QFRS and therefore do not meet the accounting and reporting obligations of the FA&A Act.⁶⁴

⁶² QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section C2.1: 5

⁶³ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section CD1.4: 1

⁶⁴ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 20

65. He stated that as QFRS maintain ownership and responsibility for RFB buildings and equipment, it is essential that it has an adequate system to ensure these assets are maintained in a serviceable and safe condition.⁶⁵
66. At the time of the audit, the Auditor-General was of the opinion that the legislation provides for brigades to be part of the QFRS structure, with QFRS responsible for the liabilities of these brigades. However, the RFBs are managed as separate entities with their own financial accounts operated independently of QFRS.⁶⁶
67. The Auditor-General recommended that QFRS review the financial accountability and audit requirements of the RFBs to reflect their status as part of QFRS.⁶⁷
68. The RFB Manual states that a RFB is not an incorporated body as it is created under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* which regulates its affairs. It states that a RFB is not a legal entity and therefore cannot be sued or enter into legally binding agreements in its own name.⁶⁸ A RFB is unable to hold land in its own name, however QFRS is able to acquire or lease land on which a fire station is located on the brigade's behalf.⁶⁹
69. Subsequent to the committee issuing its discussion paper, the Auditor-General wrote to the committee advising that since tabling his report there had been further correspondence between himself and the department regarding this recommendation and he had undertaken further research on this topic.⁷⁰ He advised that he had undertaken this additional research because the recommendation was not supported by the department.⁷¹
70. The focus of the Auditor-General's research centred around the issue of control, which requires considerable judgement and needs to be considered in light of a range of factors. The Auditor-General advised that from a public sector perspective, in the absence of any ownership interest, control can be demonstrated through the accountability of the other entity to Parliament, the executive, a Minister or department.⁷²
71. He considered that in the case of RFBs this could be demonstrated through accountability arrangements provided for in the Fire and Rescue Services Act. However, taken as a whole he considered that there is insufficient evidence to clearly identify that the department has control over RFBs. He considered that the legislation is deficient in how the RFBs are ultimately accountable to the department.⁷³ He concluded that there are requirements within the legislation which indicate a degree of influence and accountability is intended.⁷⁴

⁶⁵ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 21

⁶⁶ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 3

⁶⁷ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 21

⁶⁸ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D1.3: 1

⁶⁹ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D5.1: 1

⁷⁰ Correspondence from Mr G Poole, Auditor-General of Qld, to PAPWC dated 3 February 2010: 1

⁷¹ Correspondence from Mr G Poole, Auditor-General of Qld, to PAPWC dated 3 February 2010: 2

⁷² Correspondence from Mr G Poole, Auditor-General of Qld, to PAPWC dated 3 February 2010: 3

⁷³ Correspondence from Mr G Poole, Auditor-General of Qld, to PAPWC dated 3 February 2010: 3

⁷⁴ Correspondence from Mr G Poole, Auditor-General of Qld, to PAPWC dated 3 February 2010: 4

72. He suggested to the committee that it is critical that the issue of the RFB status and the level of actual control is confirmed to ensure that QFRS can effectively fulfil their responsibility under the act, via the deployment of RFBs and the assets under RFB custody. He considered that clarification of the relationship and responsibilities is imperative regardless of whether it is considered necessary for the relationship to extend to control over the brigades by the department.
73. In order to clarify this issue the committee held an in-camera hearing, with officers from DCS, QFRS and QAO in attendance, on Monday 4 October 2010.
74. The Director-General, DCS, advised the committee that RFBs are registered by the commissioner but are not required by the act to acquit for moneys which they have raised not, in their view, were they covered by the FA Act. He advised that members of RFBs are not employees of the department but as volunteers they are covered by indemnities when they are carrying out their work and by the equivalent of workers compensation.⁷⁵
75. The Auditor-General advised the committee that at the time they wrote the report QAO was of the opinion that RFBs were part of the department. However, subsequent to the report they had changed their view and he now considered that RFBs are not controlled by the department and they appear to be unincorporated bodies.⁷⁶
76. The Auditor-General indicated his concern that the lack of clarity about the various arrangements creates a lot of difficulty for both the department and volunteers.⁷⁷
77. Whilst the Director-General, DCS, did not disagree with the Auditor-General in broad terms he advised that he remains concerned that an imposition of additional requirements by the fire service on volunteers would be resisted.⁷⁸
78. The committee was advised that no consideration had been given to incorporating RFBs.⁷⁹ The Commissioner advised the committee that the current model has left a legacy position where people have had to pay for their own fire protection ever since 1949 when it was incorporated.⁸⁰
79. The Auditor-General advised that whilst he understood the issues that the Director-General raised in relation to the sensitivity of this matter, he indicated that his belief is that the lack of clarity actually adds to the sensitivity rather than helps it. He advised that with the increasing requirements, including workplace health and safety and training, the relationship needs to be clarified.⁸¹
80. The Auditor-General advised that the department needs to decide whether it is either:
- (a) 'shopping' for a product, where the department is responsible for the service but has decided not to deliver it themselves but to buy it from another organisation; or
 - (b) whether it wants RFBs to be like a P&Cs and form part of the department.⁸²

⁷⁵ Mr McGowan, Transcript 4 October 2010: 1

⁷⁶ Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 2

⁷⁷ Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 2

⁷⁸ Mr McGowan, Transcript 4 October 2010: 3

⁷⁹ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 4 October 2010: 3

⁸⁰ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 4 October 2010: 3

⁸¹ Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 3

⁸² Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 3-4

81. He advised that either way the legislation needs to reflect the decision. He advised that if they do not want these bodies to be part of the department then they need to ensure they are set up properly as incorporated associations and have a proper arrangement with them. Alternatively if they want them to form part of the department then they need to amend the legislation to reflect this situation.⁸³
82. The Auditor-General highlighted that the audit found that currently QFRS is doing an adequate job. The concerns that the audit identified are about the future. He advised that there were deficiencies in the areas of forward planning, risk management, brigade funding and resources and performance measurement and training. These deficiencies were there because the department could not control the brigades. He advised that the responsibility for fire protection in Queensland rests with the government not with the volunteers and it is a government policy choice as to how they deliver that.⁸⁴
83. The Director-General advised that currently the model is based on a relationship between the fire service, local government and the community. He indicated his concern that by incorporating structures within government there will be consequences for those relationships. He advised that the three-way partnership needs to be recognised and sustained in any changes that might be made.⁸⁵
84. The Commissioner advised the committee that the partnership arrangement between the volunteers, the community members, local government and the role of the state government is critical to the success of the service. There is a very strong culture and history for 50 years of service to the community. However, now it is a fire service that operates on the rural-urban interface and it is much more sophisticated and there is a different style and structures in which they operate.⁸⁶
85. The committee asked whether either the department or QAO had sought legal advice from Crown Law on this issue. The committee was advised that neither the department nor the Auditor-General sort a legal opinion on this issue.⁸⁷

4.1 Committee comments

86. The committee agrees with the Auditor-General that the legal status of RFBs in Queensland needs to be clarified. However, any decision regarding this needs to be made in conjunction with consideration of the RFS structure.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services undertake a comprehensive legal review in order to clarify the legal position of RFBs and their members.

⁸³ Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 4

⁸⁴ Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 9

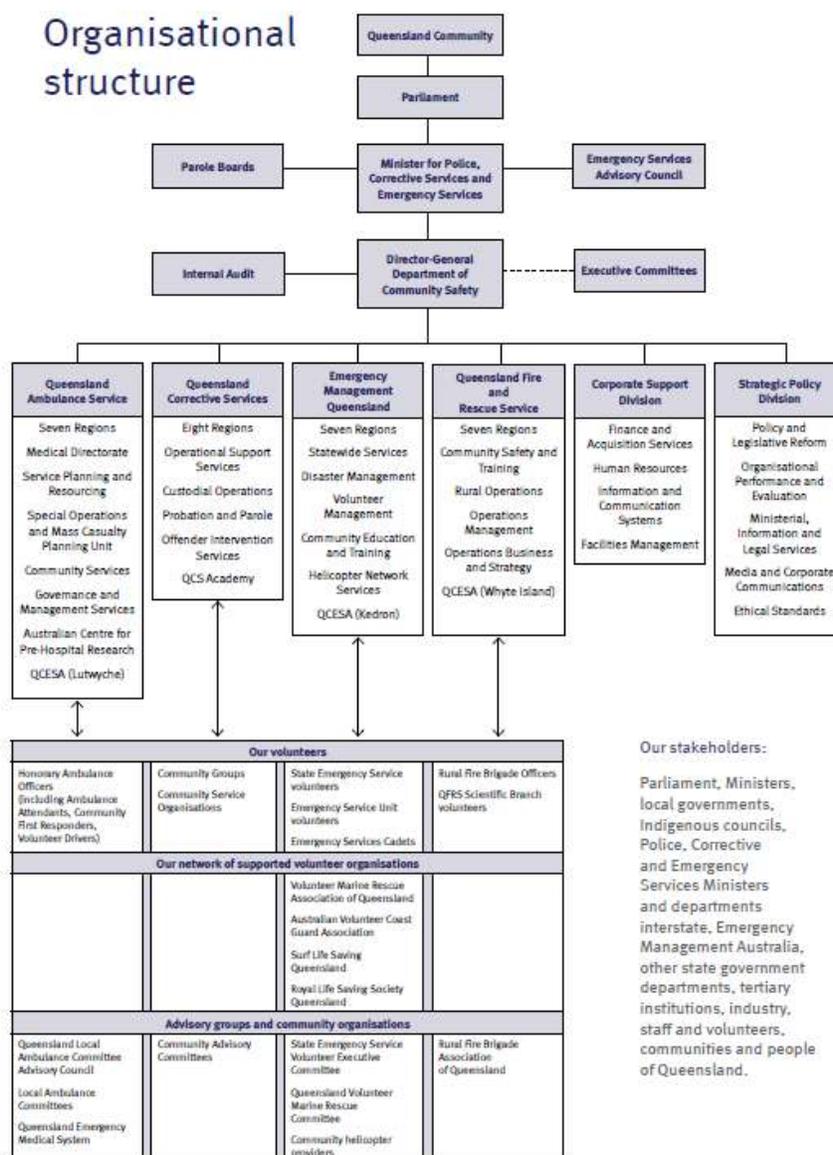
⁸⁵ Mr McGowan, Transcript 4 October 2010: 5

⁸⁶ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 4 October 2010: 7

⁸⁷ Mr McGowan and Mr Poole, Transcript 4 October 2010: 5

5. Existing Structure

87. DCS provides services covering all phases of emergency and disaster management in Queensland.⁸⁸ DCS has four operational divisions which are the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) and QFRS. The department also has two support divisions, Strategic Policy Division and Corporate Support Division.⁸⁹
88. The following diagram depicts the DCS organisational structure as at June 2010:



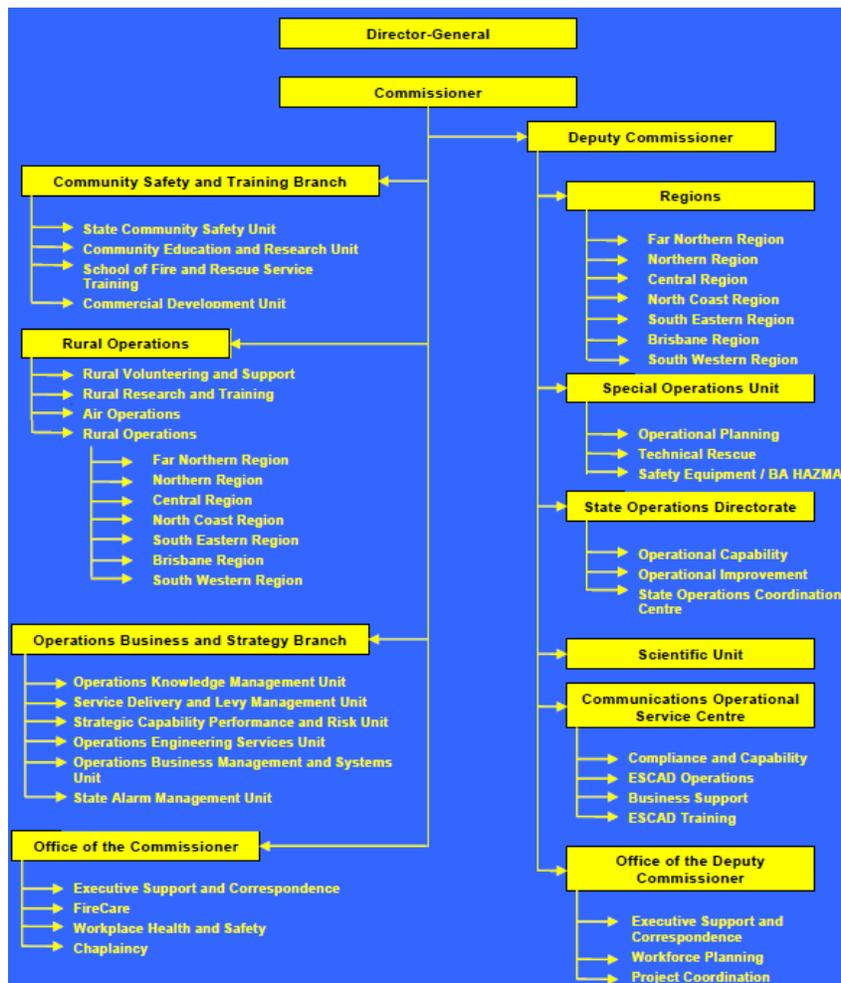
Source: DCS, *Annual Report 2009-2010*, September 2010: 14

⁸⁸ <http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/about/> [30 May 2011]

⁸⁹ DCS, *Annual Report 2009-2010*, September 2010: 4

5.1 QFRS

89. The QFRS is a division of DCS and is the primary provider of fire and rescue services throughout Queensland.⁹⁰ QFRS provides expert advice and services related to hazard mitigation, community education, fire prevention, hazardous material management, fire fighting and rescue services. QFRS is divided into seven regions with Regional Assistant Commissioners holding overall operational and financial responsibility for their region. Each region is divided into a number of geographical areas each headed up by an Area Director, who is responsible for the operational and financial management of the fire stations in that area.⁹¹
90. As at June 2010, QFRS had 2,922 FTE employees, 243 urban fire and rescue stations, 1 special operations centre and 1,477 operational volunteer rural fire brigades, of which 442 have rural fire stations.⁹²
91. The following diagram depicts the QFRS organisational structure:



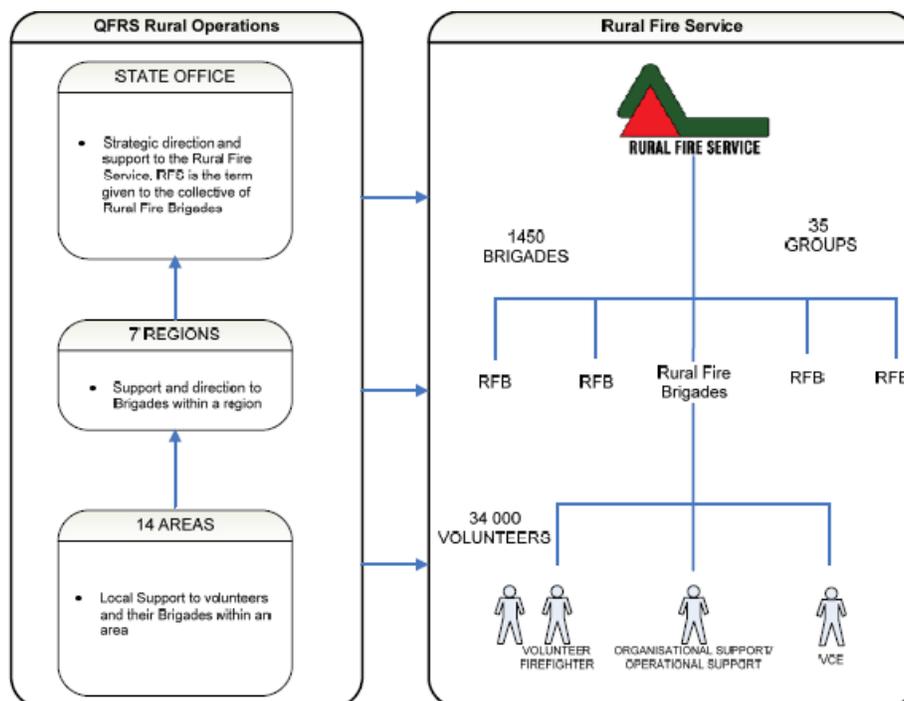
Source: <http://www.fire.qld.gov.au/about/structure.asp> [27 May 2011]

⁹⁰ http://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/About/About_the_QFRS.asp [30 May 2011]

⁹¹ <http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/about/> [30 May 2011]

⁹² DCS, *Annual Report 2009-2010*, September 2010: 40

92. QFRS utilises a command structure with origins from the military. While there is strong tradition around this chain of command, it serves as an effective operational structure for the varying environments of both urban and rural operations.⁹³
93. QFRS Rural Operations is the arm of QFRS that provides services and support to the RFS. Rural Operations is the lead agency for rural fire management in Queensland and is responsible for providing services to approximately 93% of the State (1529 700 square kilometres).⁹⁴
94. The support services provided to volunteers by QFRS Rural Operations include:
- Volunteer and brigade support;
 - Uniforms and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE)
 - Workplace Health and Safety guidelines and support
 - Access to geographic information systems;
 - Training and development;
 - Workers compensation;
 - Protection from liability; and
 - Counselling and support services.⁹⁵
95. The following diagram depicts the QFRS Rural Operations and RFS structure:



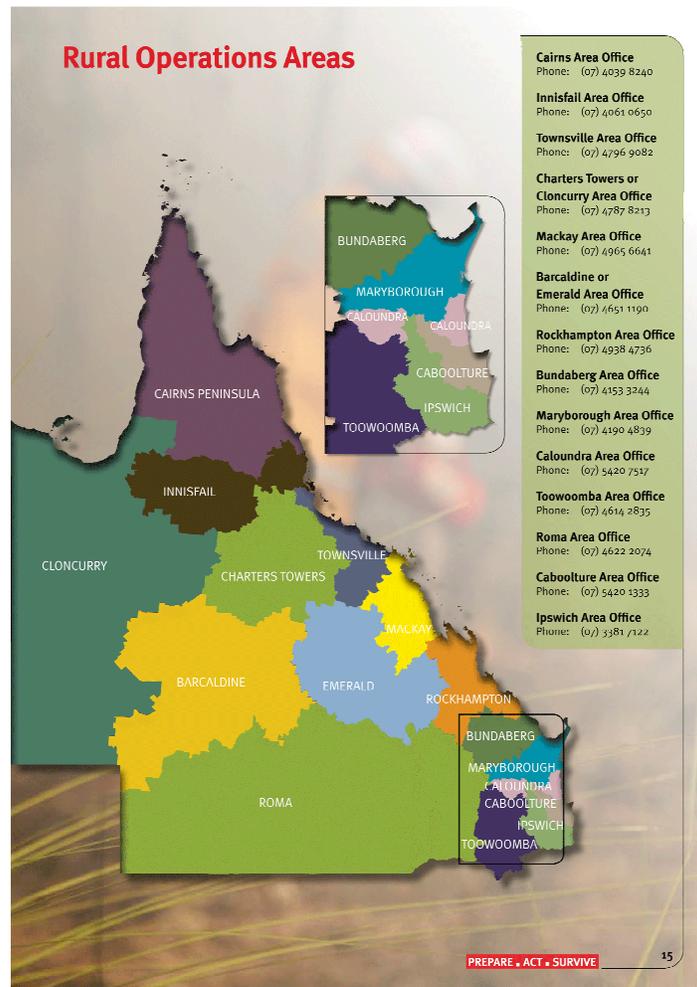
Source: QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Introduction: 1

⁹³ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 30

⁹⁴ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Introduction: 1

⁹⁵

96. The following diagram depicts the fourteen regional areas:



Source: <http://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/About/> [3 June 2011]

97. The RFB Manual identifies that to fulfil its role under section 85 of the act, QFRS Rural Operations has developed policies and procedures to guide the conduct and management of RFBs and their volunteer members. It notes that brigades have input into the management and decision making process through their representative of the RFBAQ. It also notes that brigades have obligations towards QFRS, the community that it serves and other brigades. It describes the relationship between the brigades and QFRS as one of mutual cooperation and benefit.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Introduction: 2

98. The RFB manual also identifies the role of various parties within QFRS Rural Operations as follows:⁹⁷

Central Office	Located at Kedron Park in Brisbane. The Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations, is responsible for the overall management and direction of Rural Operations. Reporting to the Assistant Commissioner are three Directors with state wide responsibilities – Director, Rural Operations; Director Rural Volunteering and Support; and Director, Rural Research and Training.
Regional Offices	The State is broken into seven regions. Regions are managed by seven Regional Managers Rural Operations who are located in the DCS Regional Offices at Toowoomba, Beenleigh, Brisbane, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns. The Regional Managers report to the Director, Rural Operations.
Area Offices	The seven regions are broken into fourteen areas across the State. The area Director Rural Operations has prime responsibility for the management and administration of the fire wardens and brigades within the area. They are the first point of contact for any inquiries on rural fire management, volunteer or brigade issues. The Area Directors report to the Regional Managers.

5.2 Types of rural fire brigades

99. There are five types of RFBs: Primary producer brigades; rural brigades; village brigades; iZone brigades; and Specific Service Delivery brigades.
100. The Queensland RFB model has been designed to accommodate the risk profile of areas, the varying landscapes and local environment in which RFBs operate and the disparate functions that may be required within the local context.⁹⁸
101. In 2009 QFRS undertook a review of existing brigade classifications. This review identified that in many parts of Queensland the traditional rural fire brigade concept of community members coming together to help their neighbours and protect their community from fire still underpins the operation of a rural fire brigade. However, members of brigades in these traditional rural areas were increasingly at odds with the demands placed on all brigades over matters such as organisational compliance and in particular demands for reporting and training.⁹⁹
102. The review further identified that a need to introduce a new class of brigade to ensure service delivery and area support appropriate for this particular group of brigades was maintained, and that traditional practices and volunteer skills were retained. QFRS introduced the Primary Producer Brigade classification which has a more “arms length” relationship, more in keeping with the infrequent and episodic nature of the activities of these brigades.¹⁰⁰
103. The committee was advised that the Primary Producer brigades are predominantly west of the Great Dividing Range.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Introduction: 2

⁹⁸ Submission 46: 3

⁹⁹ QFRS, *Rural Fire Bulletin*, November 2009: 11

¹⁰⁰ QFRS, *Rural Fire Bulletin*, November 2009: 11

¹⁰¹

104. The urban interface zone or iZone classification has the greatest interaction with the urban ‘red truck’ fire service. Conditions in iZone areas are complex, requiring fire fighters from urban and auxiliary services or volunteer rural brigades to work closely together.¹⁰²
105. Attachment 5 contains a map of Queensland identifying RFBs by type.¹⁰³
106. There are classification descriptions for each of the various types of RFBs. Each represents a different capability as follows:¹⁰⁴

SPECIFIC SERVICE DELIVERY BRIGADE

Risk

- The Brigade provides a specific service to meet a community need through an agreed service delivery model and does not fit the characteristics of the other Brigade types.
- Examples of Specific Service Delivery Brigades are Combined Auxiliary/Rural Brigades, industry Brigades and Brigades with CABA.
- Brigades with CABA require a specific model and agreement to ensure all requirements of a Brigade utilising CABA equipment are met.

PRIMARY PRODUCER BRIGADE

Risk

- Land use is based on primary production and fire is an integral part of farm production.
- The Brigade area does not contain a settlement or village or any rural residential areas.
- Contains no areas of urban-rural interface.

Community

- The Brigade’s primary focus is self interest. That is it is about their livelihood and neighbour helping neighbour.
- There is a high involvement of community members in the Brigade (above 50%).
- All members reside within the Brigade’s boundary and are all generally owner/occupiers.
- The Brigade adds to community structure and social capital.

Operations

- The Brigade’s response is usually from local notifications or via Firecom.
- The Brigade primarily responds to bush and grass fires.
- The First Officer frequently co-opts landowners/employees who are not members of the Brigade.
- The Brigade does not provide services outside of its area.
- Communication with Firecom is generally via phone.

Training

- The Brigade requires a minimum of four people trained to Officer level.
- Members other than officers are required to undertake RFS Awareness training as a minimum.
- Brigade members do not participate in out of area strike teams or deployments.

Resources

- The Brigade relies mainly on property based equipment for fire-fighting purposes.
- The Brigade has no fire appliances or dedicated fire station.
- The Brigade does not collect a Rural Fire Levy.

¹⁰² Submission 46: 4

¹⁰³ Submission 46: Attachment 2

¹⁰⁴ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D1.1: 1-5

RURAL BRIGADE	
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade area contains a significant number of rural producing properties and may contain small rural residential developments. • The Brigade area may contain a small village (as a guide less than 20 buildings) however community infrastructure will generally be absent or dispersed. • There will not be significant amounts of bush fire prone urban interface or significant amounts of rural residential development with bush fire prone vegetation. • Major risk is to the environment, unimproved pasture and bushland and primary production property such as crops, managed plantations and pastures with additional risks to ancillary structures.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principle role of the Brigade is to assist land owners with hazard reduction burning, or burning for property management. • Brigade's hazard reduction activities are not necessarily included in the local area Wildfire Mitigation Plan. • The Brigade membership profile needs to be in balance with the communities needs and ensure the Brigade is not remote from the community they serve.
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade's response is usually from local notifications or via Firecom. • The Brigade primarily responds to bush and grass fires. • Responses typically require a minimum of two firefighters as an initial response to a Level One incident. First Officer frequently co-opts landowners/employees who are not members of the Brigade. • The Brigade and community are largely self-sufficient for short duration Level one (1) incidents. Anything above this will require external resources. • The Brigade when requested may respond into areas outside of their Brigade area. • Communication with Firecom during an incident is by radio or land line phone.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade requires two firefighters trained to Officer level in addition to two Crew Leaders and eight Firefighters for a total of twelve operational volunteers. • Brigade members do not participate in out of area strike teams or deployments.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade may have one fire appliance or share one with another Brigade. • The Brigade may have slip-on units carried on private vehicles or community fire trailers located on Brigade member's properties. • The Brigade may have a fire station if it has an appliance or may have equipment stored at private residences or a shed for centralised storage of equipment. • Land owners support Brigade operations with private equipment at times of bush and grass fires. • The Brigade engages in fundraising to obtain community support. • Local Government may provide financial support annually for the Brigade to obtain and operate community owned equipment.

VILLAGE BRIGADE	
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade may have a small amount of medium or high bushfire prone area. • The surrounding areas will be principally rural properties or interspersed rural residential. • The Brigade area contains a village of twenty (20) or more buildings within a defined area or a considerable amount of rural residential development such as in an estate. Note: The 20 structures is a guide. If a Brigade area is marginal consider where the fire station is located. If the fire station is within the village, it is classified as a village Brigade. If the fire station is located away from village it is probably a Rural Fire Brigade. If there is an Auxiliary or Urban Brigade in close proximity it will be given consideration for classification as a Rural Fire Brigade. • A number of the following will be present in the village; school, hall, service station, pub, sporting facilities, shop, industrial buildings. • There will be potential for structural fires to threaten adjacent structures because of their proximity within a village. • The village will have significant importance within the community profile.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigade actively supports and promotes community safety through delivery of the PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE. concept. • Brigade supports and engages in maintenance and construction of fire breaks and is active in supporting and carrying out hazard reduction. • Brigade's hazard reduction activities are included in the local area Wildfire Mitigation Plan. • Residents of the village will hold some of the Brigade Officer positions and be firefighters within the Brigade.
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade is capable of a response mobilised within fifteen minutes of receiving notification of an incident. • Responses typically require a minimum of three (3) firefighters as an initial response to a Level One incident. • Brigade is able to support initial response to a Level One incident and may be able to resource protracted operations of up to 24 hours from within own membership. • The Brigade often assists neighbouring Brigades.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade (with 2 appliances) requires three firefighters to be trained to Officer level in addition to four Crew Leaders and twelve firefighters for a total of eighteen operational volunteers. • Brigade exercises with nearby Urban Brigades for joint operations at structural fires. • Brigade is likely to require training in fighting fires in remote and isolated structures. • Active firefighters participate in out of area strike teams and deployments.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigade can communicate with Firecom or are identified on a communications plan for linking with FireCom. • Brigade has a well equipped fire station. • Notionally equipped with up to two fire appliances with at least one being suitable for attending structural fires and protecting exposures. • The appliances will be complimented with private equipment. • The Brigade requires annual funding from Local Government.

IZONE BRIGADE	
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigade area is adjacent to or contains a considerable amount of medium or high bush fire prone vegetation. • Brigade area contains considerable rural residential development or a township. • There is a history of or potential for bush fires to threaten numerous structures at the same time requiring a multiple Brigade and/or combined urban - rural response at times of high or greater fire danger.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigade actively supports and promotes community safety through delivery of PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE. concept. • Brigade encourages and engages in the maintenance and construction of fire breaks and works with the community to ensure acceptable defensible spaces are maintained around structures. • Brigade's hazard reduction activities are included in the local area Wildfire Mitigation Plan.
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade is capable of a response mobilisation within seven minutes of receiving notification of an incident. • Responses typically require a minimum of 2 appliances and 6 firefighters as an initial response to a Level One incident. • Brigade is able to resource protracted operations for 2 shifts, which could extend up to 36 hours, from within their own membership. • Combined resources of Rural and Urban Operations are likely to be required to protect the community at times of significant fires. • The Brigade frequently assists neighbouring Brigades. • Where a Group exists, the Brigade is a member of a Group structure.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brigade (with 3 appliances) requires four firefighters to be trained to Officer level in addition to eight Crew Leaders and eighteen firefighters for a total of thirty operational volunteers. • Joint training sessions between Rural and Urban Operations are required to ensure efficient operations. • Active firefighters may participate in out of area strike teams and deployments.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigade is able to communicate with Firecom, Urban appliances and other agencies via an established communications system. • Brigade has a well equipped fire station including training/meeting room. • Notionally equipped with three fire appliances appropriate to undertake hazard reduction and for fire suppression. • Requires access to a fire ground repeater. • The Brigade requires a Local Government levy to support activities.

5.3 History of rural fire services in Queensland

107. RFBs were originally established on the premise of self-help with volunteers coming together to form groups at the local level to protect their families, their neighbours and their communities from the impact of bushfires.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Submission 46: 8

108. The first piece of formal legislation for rural fires was the *Act to Prevent the Careless Use of Fire 1865*. Following disastrous fires in central in southern Queensland in 1920s, a body to coordinate, oversee and administer rural fire control in Queensland was introduced. The *Rural Fires Board and Rural Fires Act 1927* was subsequently promulgated and 18 fire wardens were appointed in 1928.¹⁰⁶
109. The original Rural Fires Board was abandoned in 1929 as a result of the economic constraints associated with the Great Depression. The Rural Fires Board was reformed in 1946 when the *Rural Fires Act 1946* was passed.¹⁰⁷
110. Between 1948 and 1990 fire services were provided through 81 local Fire Brigade Boards with the urban and rural services operating as separate organisations. Provisions were put in place to register Bush Fire Brigades.¹⁰⁸
111. With the enactment of the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990* (previously *Fire and Rescue Authority Act 1990*; originally *Fire Service Act 1990*) a single state wide fire service.¹⁰⁹ The Queensland Fire Service and the Rural Fires Council were formed in 1990 to replace the Fire Boards and the Rural Fires Board.¹¹⁰
112. In 1996, amendments to the act created the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority, incorporating the Queensland Ambulance Service.¹¹¹ QFRS was established in 2001.¹¹²

5.4 Role of rural fire brigades

113. There is no urban fire service coverage of rural, semi-rural and some urban fringe areas.¹¹³ The role and degree of activity of RFBs varies across Queensland. In some rural areas, the brigade may consist of a group of property owners using their own resources for protection of their own mutual property. In areas closer to urban areas, the brigades have a more formal operational and administrative structure with more specialised equipment.¹¹⁴
114. RFBs provide assistance to communities through:
 - Fire suppression in rural areas;
 - Community awareness of fire hazards;
 - Training;
 - Management of hazard reduction burns; and
 - Management of prescribed burning.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 23

¹⁰⁷ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 23

¹⁰⁸ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 23

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/about/history.htm> [27 May 2011]

¹¹⁰ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 24

¹¹¹ <http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/about/history.htm> [27 May 2011]

¹¹² DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 24

¹¹³ http://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/About/About_the_RFS.asp [27 May 2011]

¹¹⁴ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 16

¹¹⁵ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 16

115. QFRS has identified that 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.¹¹⁶
116. The government encourages RFBs to be largely responsible for the day to day running of brigade business while providing a framework within which to operate. The QFRS Commissioner has command and control responsibility of both urban and rural arms and in a major fire event all of QFRS resources may be utilised to assist at the local level.¹¹⁷
117. The vast majority of RFBs in Queensland are classified as Rural and Primary Producer brigades. Their major risk factor is a vegetation fire that threatens infrastructure, livelihood and the environment. These vegetation type fires are a moving fire and not stationary like a structural fire. The type of equipment, resource and training required is much different to that required by an urban fire fighter.¹¹⁸
118. The committee was advised that QFRS does some risk profiling of areas to determine service delivery. However, the forming of a RFB is dependent on the community itself. The community makes the determination as to whether or not they require a RFB.¹¹⁹

5.5 Volunteers

119. Volunteer fire fighters make up the rural brigades across the state. Volunteers receive no remuneration. Their recruitment is based on local rural brigade requirements and often stems from a sense of mutual obligation to support neighbours and their local rural community.¹²⁰
120. Rural volunteers provide a depth and capacity that would not be achieved through a service made up of paid fire fighters. Apart from the emergency services they provide to their local communities, volunteers are part of the fabric of many rural towns and localities.¹²¹

6. Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?

121. The issue of whether the current model of RFBs is suitable prompted a range of responses and highlighted a number of critical issues causing concern to RFBs.

¹¹⁶ Submission 46: 11

¹¹⁷ Submission 46: 3

¹¹⁸ Submission 5: 2

¹¹⁹ Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 3

¹²⁰ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 76

¹²¹ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 34

6.1 Operational model

122. The QFRS Commissioner explained to the committee that at the moment the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations is the operational head of rural operations right across the whole state with management teams in the regions. The urban fire service has assistant commissioners in each region in charge of their operations. However, at certain levels of operational activity, the assistant commissioner urban is the commander and the person overall responsible to the commissioner in times of major fire fighting.¹²²
123. The committee was advised that the existing structure has inherent difficulties and benefits. In practice, brigades function at times as if they are part of QFRS and at other times as if they were a separate legal entity.¹²³
124. One of the concerns raised was the evolving operational model in iZone brigades as urban sprawl encroaches onto traditional rural land and the ongoing funding and sustainability of a team of trained rural fire fighters.¹²⁴

6.2 Recognition of rural fire brigades' expertise

125. A recurring issue raised both in submissions and at the public hearings was the lack of recognition of volunteer experience particularly by urban fire officers.
126. The QFRS Commissioner advised that one thing he will not tolerate is non-cooperative activity. He said that he expects that rural volunteers are respected and that everyone is understanding of the role of the volunteer and the effort they put in.¹²⁵
127. The committee was advised that an underlying concern is that there is insufficient consultation with rural volunteers and, in places, an urban culture that appears to be both arrogant and ignorant which has not allowed the RFS to develop into a professional complimentary fire service that can work side by side in confidence with urban fire fighters.¹²⁶
128. The committee understands that there is a desire by most RFB volunteers to see a complimentary team arrangement with the urban and auxiliary branches.¹²⁷ The committee understands that this is also the desire of QFRS management.
129. The committee heard examples of excellent working relationships between urban and rural brigades which have developed as confidence by urban fire fighters in RFB volunteers has been brought about by the experience of working together.
130. The committee can understand that a lack of trust may develop due to the experience of working with RFBs with differing standards and abilities. Fire fighting is a dangerous occupation and mistakes can have life threatening consequences. Individual fire fighters must have complete trust in those around them and if previous experience is poor this lack of trust can develop.

¹²² Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 24

¹²³ Submission 63: 2

¹²⁴ Submission 2: 1

¹²⁵ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 24

¹²⁶ Submission 2: 1

¹²⁷ Submission 2: 2

131. From its examination of the issues the committee believes that in some places an adversarial culture does exist between the RFS and QFRS. The committee considers that the existing structure, where there is little contact between urban and rural fire fighters, has contributed to that culture.

6.3 Brigade classifications

132. Section 5.2 above details the various brigade classifications. The committee was advised that risk factors of the various classifications vary according to type, however, some village brigades mirror the urban risk type operandi model of buildings and structure clustering.
133. The committee considers that the RFB classification system established by QFRS is generally supported by RFBs. The committee believes that there should be an expectation of greater professionalism and therefore training and qualifications placed on iZone brigades whilst the traditional rural fire brigade system is more appropriate for primary producer and rural classified brigades.

6.4 Boundary alignments

134. The RFB Manual stipulates that each Area Director is required to conduct regular reviews of the bush fire risk across local government and brigade areas. Any changes to brigade classifications, boundaries or the formation, amalgamation, or deregistration of brigades can only be done through consultation with members and/or the community.¹²⁸
135. DCS advised the committee that boundary amendments are undertaken as part of a 12 month cyclic process. QFRS has a policy outlining the process for boundary amendments. According to the policy document, urban boundaries are determined by travelling time parameters of up to 12 minutes. The policy states that all boundaries are to be reviewed annually. The policy also states that if another authority or a RFB provide a service to an area which is under consideration to be included in an urban district, a change management process will be required and consultation must take place with the relevant Rural Area Director, local government and other relevant stakeholders to ensure all are aware of the proposed amendments.¹²⁹
136. The issue of boundary changes was discussed at length at the committee's public hearings in Rockhampton. The committee heard evidence where boundary changes requested by RFBs, due to the expansion of housing estates, have taken significant amounts of time.¹³⁰ Whilst the committee was assured that if a fire occurred in these areas urban units would attend, it seems obvious to the committee that a simple boundary change would ensure that the appropriate service was delivered.
137. The committee considers that this issue is more significant because of the existing funding arrangements. Any alterations to RFB boundaries, between rural and urban areas, manifests itself in a usually adverse effect in funding available to RFBs. This impact is more significant for brigades in iZone areas.

¹²⁸ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section D1.2: 1

¹²⁹ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 2

¹³⁰ Mr Scott, Transcript 24 August 2010: 6

138. Local RFBs have the relevant local knowledge necessary to ensure that any proposed boundary changes do not result in unintended consequences. The committee considers that consultation with RFBs is of vital importance to ensure the best outcomes and should be mandatory when boundary changes are proposed.
139. The committee also considers that there should be mechanisms put in place to allow easy boundary changes due to events which may occur outside the regular review timeframes. The committee considers that these boundary changes should occur in a timely manner.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that QFRS include consultation with rural fire brigades as mandatory when boundary changes are proposed.

6.5 Communication

140. The term ‘communication’ raised a range of multi-faceted issues including interpersonal communication within QFRS, electronic communication and communication with the public.

6.5.1 Interpersonal communication

141. The Committee was provided with many examples of both good and strained communication and relationships between urban brigades and RFBs. The committee found that this differed in different parts of the state and was often dependent on the individuals involved.
142. Many RFBs felt that the current structure allows for little consultation with brigades and management decisions come by directive.¹³¹ The committee considers that this is probably attributable to the military style command structure and could be mitigated with better explanations of management decisions. The committee considers that many of these directives are put in place to ensure the safety of all staff and volunteers.
143. The committee understands that departmental interaction is heavily dependent on Rural Operations Inspectors and Area Offices. Inspectors are out and about and usually interact heavily with RFBs.¹³² Part of an Inspector’s role is to communicate any changes or updates to policy direction to RFBs as well as providing information back to the department.¹³³
144. Another issue raised with respect to communication was the slowness of response times to requests directed to Rural Operations. There also appeared to be a lack of dissemination of information to RFBs. The committee was provided with an example where the letter advising of the date to switch radio bands was dated after the change over date. Whilst the committee accepts QFRS’s explanation that this was an ongoing issue that had been communicated previously, this sort of important information should be communicated well in advance of the proposed date. QFRS acknowledged the lateness of this information to RFBs.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Submission 3: 3

¹³² Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 3

¹³³ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 5

¹³⁴ Mr Fisher, Transcript 24 August 2010: 23

145. QFRS needs to ensure that its communication protocols allow sufficient time for all information to be communicated to RFBs in a timely manner. Additional time should also be allowed for dissemination of information to individual RFBs members. The committee understands that the RFBQA also assists by being the nexus between the volunteers and the RFS.¹³⁵

6.5.2 Email and website presence

146. The committee is aware that currently the RFS has a separate website to QFRS, although links are available from the QFRS website. It seems to add to administrative constraints by having to maintain the separate website. The committee can see no reason for the maintenance of this second website and recommends the integration of the two existing websites. The committee also suggests that data on the websites needs to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is up to date with the latest material.
147. The committee also heard that RFB volunteers are required to use their personal email addresses for brigade contact. This can lead to communication issues due to maintenance of current information.
148. DCS has acknowledged that effectively communicating with approximately 34,000 RFS volunteers is a challenge and they had found email not to be effective.
149. The committee considers that there is a simple solution and that is to establish an email account with the same domain name for RFS personnel. For example all DCS staff have an email address that has their name@dcs.qld.gov.au. That domain name would need to be established by DCS and should cover all RFBs.
150. The committee suggests that rather than names, the RFBs email should be by position. For example the First Officer at Julatten RFB might have FOJulatten@ruralfires.qld.gov.au and the secretary at Mt Alford RFB might be SecretaryMtAlford@ruralfires.qld.gov.au. It should be noted that the domain name 'ruralfires' is purely for illustrative purposes and it would be up to the department to decide upon an appropriate domain name.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that QFRS investigate and implement an internal email system for rural fire brigades.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that QFRS update its website to include the Rural Fire Service as part of its www.fire.qld.gov.au web presence.

¹³⁵ Mr Irwin, Transcript 25 August 2010: 6

6.5.3 Firecom

151. Urban and rural fire brigades respond to fires and other incidents which are coordinated through the Fire Communication Centre (Firecom). The QFRS computer aided dispatch system recommends the most appropriate response to any incident from available resources. This system recognises rural fire brigades as a unit and recommends their response if they are the closest brigade. Once dispatched, the brigade is then considered 'committed' and not available for further calls. The dispatch system will automatically select the next closest brigade to respond to any further incidents. The Officer-in-Charge of a responding appliance retains the ability to request the response of any resource known to be available.¹³⁶
152. The committee heard numerous examples of erroneous dispatching by Firecom. Examples included incorrect dispatching due to new systems not knowing real boundaries and misinterpretation of incoming 000 calls.¹³⁷
153. The committee was advised that the Escad system used by Firecom is designed for the urban environment. Ripley Valley RFB advised the committee that data integrity from the old system was not efficiently brought across to the new system. Errors included contact details, street names and primary response appliances for different streets. They suggested that roads and streets in iZone areas need to have agreed 'ownership' by either the rural or urban services via a consultative process between the two services.¹³⁸ The committee considers that this consultative process would need to take into account such factors as terrain, site access, and structure types.
154. The Ripley Valley RFB also raised the issue that Firecom's systems treat each RFB equally to one urban pumper unit. This becomes an issue where RFBs have more than one vehicle and can lead to multiple RFBs being deployed unnecessarily. They suggested that Firecom's systems need to be updated so that individual appliances, whether urban or rural, are managed and deployed appropriately.¹³⁹
155. Marburg District RFB advised the committee that part of the benefit of having rural boundaries is the local knowledge contained within RFBs. They advised that Firecom does not use these boundaries but dispatches the closest brigade based on distance. They consider that this model does not work for rural brigades.¹⁴⁰
156. It was also suggested that Firecom's systems need to take into account remaining capacity when callouts are decided. The committee was provided with an example where an urban unit was dispatched to a grass fire in a brigade area because the urban unit would be able to turn out quicker. A structural fire then occurred in the urban service area and the only available service was at the grass fire some distance from the house fire. The result was the house was lost.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 3

¹³⁷ Submission 2: 2

¹³⁸ Submission 2: 3

¹³⁹ Submission 2: 3

¹⁴⁰ Submission 4: 1

¹⁴¹ Mr W Scott, Transcript 24 August 2010: 7

157. The committee considers that Firecom's systems also need to take into consideration brigade capability and localised information. Julatten RFB advised that their brigade has made the decision to be capable of accident and on-road rescue ready. They have found that regularly they are the last to be called even though the closest ambulance and urban brigades may be 20 to 30 minutes away.¹⁴²

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that QFRS undertake a thorough review of Firecom's systems, including data integrity and dispatch procedures.

6.5.4 Communication Equipment

158. The issue of the radio network and equipment was a significant issue discussed at the committee's Rockhampton hearings. The committee sought clarification about this issue from the department.
159. DCS advised that QFRS uses both the UHF and VHF radio networks with both networks complimenting each other. The UHF network is for all QFRS personnel (urban and rural) to communicate with regional Firecom centres for daily incident reports. A network of linked repeaters connect to the communication centre in each region. This is a closed and private network for fire services only.¹⁴³
160. The UHF band plan also includes the 40 channel CB frequency. They acknowledged that most primary producer type rural fire brigades only have CB radios and this allows some limited radio communication between fire appliances operating with private volunteer vehicles on the fire ground. This is a public network and is not secure. QFRS urban operations use VHF simplex for the majority of day to day fire ground communication.¹⁴⁴
161. The VHF network has been developed over the past 10 years. This frequency was originally used by rural fire brigades many years ago, as it aligned to the forestry network. Only a couple of channels were provided. A system of QFRS VHF standalone repeaters has been established for all QFRS personnel to use, mainly for wildfire management. These repeaters are not linked. Prior to rural fire brigades having the ability to have UHF radios to communicate with Firecom, a number of channels were allocated in the VHF band to communicate with Firecom through a VHF/UHF crossband repeater. Using this was effective, however when brigades arrived at an incident, they had to change channels from the Firecom channel to a fire ground channel. This meant there was no longer a connection to Firecom. This method of using a UHF/VHF crossband is still in use by QFRS urban and rural appliances in some regions, however, is slowly being phased out.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Mr Hadley, Transcript 23 August 2010: 28

¹⁴³ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 3-4

¹⁴⁴ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 3-4

¹⁴⁵ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 3-4

162. Over the past 5 years, Rural Operations has endeavoured to have all appliances dual fitted with UHF and VHF mobile radios. This has allowed the UHF radio to be left on the Firecom channel at all times to ensure that the contact can be made with responding appliances and Firecom. The VHF radio could then be used for fire ground radio communications. Prior to dual fitting, rural fire brigades only had a VHF radio.¹⁴⁶
163. The committee was satisfied with the explanations provided.

6.5.5 Feedback

164. Another major criticism was that little to no feedback is received by RFB regarding paperwork they are required to submit.
165. The committee was advised that QFRS is putting in systems to assist brigade members so that the organisation can understand better what their needs are and to respond to them. However, without data they cannot respond appropriately. QFRS advised that there is still work to do to encourage RFBs so the data flows through.¹⁴⁷
166. Many of the submissions complained that they feel the data they provide to the department is not used to make decisions, particularly about how to allocate resources. The committee was advised that QFRS uses the information provided to consider risk and resource allocation.¹⁴⁸ The committee considers that this belief contributes to volunteers choosing not to provide relevant data.
167. The committee was advised that in examining the risk profile of brigades QFRS looks at the level of activity of a brigade and the level of risk. It considers whether there are a lot of brigades in a particular area to provide support to each other or whether there is a particular type of development or settlement within an area that might pose a greater risk. QFRS advised that they rely substantially upon brigades' first officers providing reports on attendance at incidents and annual operating plans. Recent changes have been made to allow for submission of forms electronically. This information is also used for resource allocation.¹⁴⁹
168. The committee wishes to stress the importance of RFBs providing information to QFRS. The committee is aware that many RFBs do not bother to complete incident reports for all incidents that they attend. This information is vital to QFRS when decisions are made regarding risk management, RFB work loads, resource allocation and equipment requirements.
169. However, the committee considers that feedback is a two way street. In exchange, QFRS needs to provide feedback to brigades. Brigade members need to understand why they are required to submit the various pieces of paperwork and they need to understand how it is used. Brigades need to understand it is not only a compliance exercise. The onus is on QFRS to provide this feedback.

¹⁴⁶ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 3-4

¹⁴⁷ Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 3

¹⁴⁸ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 4

¹⁴⁹ Mr Fisher, Transcript 24 August 2010: 19-20

6.6 Equipment

170. The Auditor-General found that there was a lack of an appropriate system for Rural Operations to monitor the condition and safety of RFB equipment. The Auditor-General considered that as QFRS maintains ownership of brigade equipment they need to have adequate systems to ensure that the equipment is maintained to a safe standard and any directions over the use of the equipment and restrictions on modifications are complied with.¹⁵⁰
171. The committee was advised that Rural Operations has conducted an audit of all their stations and appliances over the last five years and there has been a significant change made to appliances to bring them up to acceptable levels.¹⁵¹
172. The committee was advised that there is a lack of appropriate systems in place to monitor the conditions of safety equipment with the exception of the road safety of the fire appliance.¹⁵² The committee was advised that the level and consistency of vehicle maintenance between brigades is poor at times and potentially dangerous.¹⁵³ The committee also received suggestions that additional support was needed to assist with fire extinguisher servicing, vehicle servicing and inspection.¹⁵⁴
173. The committee heard many complaints about changes that have been made to the subsidised equipment list. In north Queensland, where one of the main hazards is cane trash fires, the RFBs felt that they were being disadvantaged by the changes to the equipment list, including the move from galvanised to poly water tanks.¹⁵⁵ Many RFBs advised the committee about constantly changing equipment lists.
174. QFRS provides a catalogue of standard items of equipment supplied by QFRS for use by RFBs. This equipment list contains items that are either not charged or are at a reduced cost to RFBs. The committee was advised that Rural Operations consults with Regional and Area Offices regarding what items are included on the subsidised equipment list.¹⁵⁶
175. The department advised that as part of an equipment reform process, some lower-cost equipment items have been removed from the subsidised equipment catalogue, which was aimed at removing costs associated with the need to invoice brigades and therefore also reduce the administrative demand on brigades. Some items have been removed because they are no longer considered appropriate or required for current operational activities.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No.3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008: 20

¹⁵¹ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 4

¹⁵² Submission 1: 1

¹⁵³ Submission 2: 4

¹⁵⁴ Submission 3: 3

¹⁵⁵ Mr Rossi, Mr Wienert and Mr Thompson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 16

¹⁵⁶ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 5

¹⁵⁷ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 5

176. The removal of lower-cost items from the subsidy scheme also allowed these funds to be redirected and enable the free issue of some larger cost items that brigades were previously required to provide a subsidy towards.¹⁵⁸
177. They advised that they recognise that there may be cases where some brigades cannot afford to pay for these lower-cost equipment items and they are encouraged to raise such difficulties with their Area Director.¹⁵⁹
178. The committee was also advised that vehicles are not included as part of the subsidised equipment catalogue, as they are considered to be capital items and are therefore not classed as equipment. RFBs are required to submit a business case through Rural Operations for new or replacement vehicles. The committee was advised that funding of appliances is on a 20/80 split with the government providing the larger proportion.¹⁶⁰
179. Vehicles are allocated on a priority basis in line with the Rural Operations appliance budget. When considering priorities for new appliances or whether existing appliances have reached the end of their operating life, the level of risk faced by the respective brigade is considered, along with membership training levels, the ability of the brigade to respond and support neighbouring brigades and an assessment of the brigades' financial capacity to contribute towards and maintain the vehicle.¹⁶¹
180. The committee was advised that RFBs are required to fund vehicle inspections. It is an impost on brigades in terms of both funding and the time to travel to specialist vehicle inspection services. The committee was advised that the urban service has a vehicle that moves around the state and does all the necessary minor repairs and inspections of appliances.¹⁶² QFRS confirmed that authorised vehicle inspections do come at a cost to brigades and they often have to travel long distances in order to locate an authorised inspector.¹⁶³
181. It was also suggested to the committee that there needs to be a review of equipment in order to transition to formats that are more complimentary to urban appliances particularly in iZone areas. Ripley Valley RFB provided the example that, in the current RFB appliance fleet, there is a great deal of variety in the plumbing and equipment between brigades which can prove challenging when crews are required operate another brigade's equipment.¹⁶⁴

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that QFRS cover the cost of annual vehicle inspection certificates for rural fire brigade registered vehicles.

¹⁵⁸ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 5

¹⁵⁹ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 5

¹⁶⁰ Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 4

¹⁶¹ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 5-6

¹⁶² Mr Irwin, Transcript 24 August 2010: 21

¹⁶³ Mr Lewis, Transcript 25 August 2010: 4

¹⁶⁴ Submission 2: 5

6.7 Training requirements

182. The level of required training is dependent on brigade classification and local area requirements, which may vary from tropical coast to inland bush.¹⁶⁵
183. There were four major issues raised with the committee in regard to training. These issues were:
- the quality and availability of training;
 - who is able to deliver training;
 - the cost of some training; and
 - the amount of required training.
184. With regard to the quality and availability the committee heard that the quality of training varied from being non existent, intermittent, inappropriate to excellent depending upon the region and the active involvement of QFRS staff.
185. The issue of who is able to deliver training was also an issue raised by a number of RFB volunteers. The committee was advised that, whilst available teaching materials have improved, instructors now need to have qualifications in order to deliver the training material. This has reduced the number of people available to do training but increased the time it takes to train new recruits.¹⁶⁶ This issue was also explored at the committee's Rockhampton hearings. The committee was advised that a bottleneck has been created due to the limited number of people available to run training courses.¹⁶⁷
186. QFRS has acknowledged that in order to maintain competent, skilled rural volunteers they need to commit significant resources to their training and development and promote volunteerism to ensure volunteers remain.¹⁶⁸
187. A major concern expressed was that recruitment procedures take too long. It was suggested training should be greatly streamlined so that a new member can join a crew after a short introduction course.¹⁶⁹
188. With regard to the cost of training, the committee was advised that there are very high charges made for:
- Training in Senior First Aid by QAS. Because EAR and CPR require a refresher every year and the course itself every three years this is a very significant ongoing cost;
 - Chainsaw user certification;
 - Driver training for light and heavy rigid vehicles.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 76

¹⁶⁶ Submission 6: 4

¹⁶⁷ Mr Dash, Mr W Scott, Mr Mulholland, Transcript 24 August 2010: 12

¹⁶⁸ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 34

¹⁶⁹ Submission 3: 3

¹⁷⁰ Submission 6: 4

189. The committee also heard many examples of combined urban/rural brigade training. However, it would appear that this type of training occurs on an adhoc basis with the majority being initiated due to existing relationships between individuals. The committee encourages QFRS to consider a more structured process in order to undertake combined training. The committee considers that this will both improve the skills of participants but also allow for relationship building between the two services.
190. Julatten RFB provided the example of their brigade's participation in fire brigade games. They found this to be extremely beneficial both from the interaction with the urban crews and the practical skill development.¹⁷¹
191. For volunteers training must be worthwhile to attract them to attend. It also needs to be flexible in terms of when it is offered.¹⁷²
192. It was also suggested to the committee that there needs to be additional training and assistance for administrative roles, especially the Treasurer position, in RFBs.
193. The committee considers that training is an issue that needs to be closely examined by QFRS. The committee does not have the expertise to decide which type of training is appropriate. However, the committee is satisfied that QFRS is serious about improving its training processes.

6.8 Major fire events

194. There were a number of issues raised in respect of experiences from major fire events.
195. The experience of a number of RFBs in the greater Rockhampton area at their fires in 2009 was that urban crews took over incident control without having sufficient local knowledge. They felt that the experience of rural volunteers was dismissed. They also felt that the use of fire to fight fire was also rejected without due consideration.
196. The committee heard that fatigue management is often overlooked by administration on the fire ground and, on a number of occasions, food and drink has not been made available for fire fighters for in excess of 12 hours.¹⁷³ However, in other areas the committee heard that food and fuel are provided promptly.¹⁷⁴
197. The committee understands that reviews occur after major fire events. The committee was advised that debriefs after major events are often a whitewash. The committee was advised that this opinion may be different if debrief information is fed back to brigades.¹⁷⁵ The committee is keen to ensure that RFB members are included in these reviews and that they are provided with feedback from these reviews.

¹⁷¹ Mr Hadley, Transcript 23 August 2010: 22

¹⁷² Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 20

¹⁷³ Submission 1: 1

¹⁷⁴ Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 29

¹⁷⁵ Mr Irwin, Transcript 24 August 2010: 32

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

198. RFBs receive funding from a variety of sources to assist them in the performance of their duties. The current financial arrangements vary significantly between brigades across the state. The major issue of concern to the committee was fire levy funding. Other sources of RFBs funding is detailed in Appendix 5.

7.1 Funding from Fire Levies

199. Urban levies are collected via local government rates on behalf of QFRS. The Urban Fire Levy Scheme was introduced in 1985 to partially fund the QFRS. The act imposes a fire levy on certain property and places a legal obligation on local government to collect the levy.¹⁷⁶
200. The PAC (48th Parliament) conducted an inquiry into Fire Levies for Urban and Rural Brigades. That committee tabled its Report No 41 on 28 August 1997. The committee found at the time that RFBs had been previously left to their own devices regarding accountability for moneys received as a result of fundraising activities, however it considered that a high order of accountability must be applied to public funds which ratepayers are compelled to provide. It recommended that the Minister direct the Authority to undertake a review to be completed within six months into:
- the current system of rural fire levy funding, in consultation with representatives of local government, RFBs and other key stakeholders to identify appropriate acquittal mechanisms to enable rural fire levy funding to be accounted for in the most transparent, efficient and effective manner possible, and to establish a direct line of accountability for rural fire levy funding;
 - the existing provision within the *Fire and Rescue Authority Act 1990* regarding rural fire levies to insert clear accountability requirements for rural fire levy funding to protect ratepayers from potential misuse of public funds;
 - the *Guidelines for the Collection and Disbursement of a Rural Fire Levy* to highlight acquittal and accountability requirements for rural fire levies; and
 - investigate the potential advantages of requiring all RFBs to adopt a constitution.¹⁷⁷
201. The government tabled their response to Report No 41 on 27 November 1997 and advised the Parliament that:
- The Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority has commenced investigations to consider the issues raised by the Parliamentary Account Committee in regard to this recommendation with the aim of ensuring appropriate accountability mechanisms are in place in relation to the financing of RFBs.*¹⁷⁸
202. The act was amended in 1999 to allow for a local government to make and levy rates and charges and contribute amounts to RFBs.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ QFRS, *Urban Fire Levy Administration Procedures Manual*, October 2010: 5

¹⁷⁷ PAC, *Report No 41 – Fire Levies*, August 1997: 44

¹⁷⁸ Queensland Government, *Government response to Public Accounts Committee Report No 41 – Fire Levies*, November 1997: 7

¹⁷⁹ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s128A

7.1.1 Legislative Requirements

203. A Local Government may make and levy special rates and charges or separate rates and charges and contribute the amounts raised to RFBs.¹⁸⁰
204. The rates and charges to be levied for a financial year are to be decided by resolution at the local government's budget meeting for a financial year.¹⁸¹
205. A RFB is entitled to an exemption of the Ambulance levy as they are eligible for the Queensland State Government exemption due to their sheds and/or stations being on premises used to provide core government services or public infrastructure.¹⁸² The Ambulance Levy will not be added to the electricity account to be paid by the RFB.¹⁸³

7.1.2 Current practice

206. Currently it is up to brigades to organise and manage the arrangements with local government in relation to in-kind support or a rural fire levy. Some brigades choose not to organise a rural fire levy. It is up to individual brigades to make the determination of whether or not they seek support from the council to strike a rural fire levy.¹⁸⁴ The council fire levy is meant to assist in the funding of the RFB so that the RFB does not have to continually self fund.¹⁸⁵
207. The committee was advised that in remote parts of Queensland RFBs rely heavily on councils to support them. In many cases it is not really viable for RFBs to have a levy system due to large land areas and low populations. Etheridge Shire Council advised that to assist the RFBs their council provided in-kind support, for example providing heavy equipment, when there is a fire event.¹⁸⁶ They advised that council assists as best it can to assist the needs of RFBs, but they have no avenue of getting any funding back and it is done with the goodwill of the elected members to assist their constituents.¹⁸⁷
208. The Commissioner advised that that because the levy is not compulsory most local authorities in Queensland do not have a levy. Whilst some councils fund brigades of their own accord it still leads to tremendous inequity in terms of the funding base.¹⁸⁸
209. The committee also heard numerous examples of the various financial arrangements currently in place around the state. These range from being totally funded by members to being well funded from levies and other sources.

¹⁸⁰ *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, s128A

¹⁸¹ *Local Government Act 2009*, s94

¹⁸² QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Section: D3.8

¹⁸³ *Community Ambulance Cover Act 2003*, s37H

¹⁸⁴ Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 11-12

¹⁸⁵ Mr Sausman, Transcript, 23 August 2010: 17

¹⁸⁶ Mr Edmystone, Transcript 23 August 2010: 2

¹⁸⁷ Mr Edmystone, Transcript 23 August 2010: 4

¹⁸⁸ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 19

210. Quingilli and Behana Gorge RFBs advised the committee that they do not have a revenue stream and all equipment is paid for by individual members.¹⁸⁹ They advised the committee that members of the brigade are individual farmer/growers with their own units all over the district. They have received contributions from the RFS when purchasing equipment.¹⁹⁰
211. Where a local government does raise a Fire Levy, the amount and allocation to RFBs also varies. Some brigades have had no increases in fire levies for many years. Samford Valley RFB advised the committee that the fire levy received by their brigade has remained the same since 1988.¹⁹¹ Mt Alford RFB advised the committee that their levy is \$12.00 plus \$2.50 for a contingency fund but the land owners do not want to put the levy up.¹⁹² They advised that they have arguments with Boonah RFB Group about asking for a levy increase because a number of land owners are resistant to raising the levy and vote against it.¹⁹³ Aratula RFB which is in the Boonah RFB Group with Mt Alford RFB advised the committee that the levy in their area is inadequate. They advised that a big proportion of the levy collected over the past 10 years has been distributed to other brigades within the group. They supported the idea of a levy similar to the urban fire levy.¹⁹⁴ The Eudlo RFB also supported the idea that fund raising be addressed on a state-wide basis.¹⁹⁵
212. Julatten RFB advised the committee that their brigade receives a council fire levy and this works well for their brigade. They considered that the local council levy works well because it is local money and the council understands the different areas within council.¹⁹⁶ They also noted that they are able to apply for a loan through the shire, funded by the levy, which gives brigades a lot of purchasing flexibility.¹⁹⁷
213. Ripley Valley RFB advised the committee that they receive fire levies of \$8,000 pa from the Ipswich City Council. They require approximately \$28,000 pa in order to operate. The shortfall is met through donations. They noted that 'begging for money' adversely affects brigade members' motivation and they try to raise additional funds through corporate services such as charging land developers for hazard reduction burns.¹⁹⁸
214. The committee was advised that roughly there are only four out of 35 councils in the Cairns area (right up to the top of the cape) that are collecting a levy. Those four councils are the ones on the coast—Cassowary, Cairns, Tablelands and Cook. Predominantly all of those Aboriginal communities are funded by different means and in different ways. They get funding for a lot of other things.¹⁹⁹

¹⁸⁹ Submission 8: 1

¹⁹⁰ Mr Rossi, Transcript 23 August 2010: 15

¹⁹¹ Submission 6: 3

¹⁹² Ms Snelling, Transcript, 3 September 2010: 2

¹⁹³ Ms Snelling, Transcript 3 September 2010: 7

¹⁹⁴ Mr Tiffany, Transcript 3 September 2010: 3

¹⁹⁵ Mr Murdoch, Transcript 3 September 2010: 3

¹⁹⁶ Mr Sausman, Transcript 23 August 2010: 17

¹⁹⁷ Mr Hadley, Transcript 23 August 2010: 17

¹⁹⁸ Submission 2: 6

¹⁹⁹ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript, 23 August 2010: 12

215. Another issue raised on numerous occasions was the fact that RFBs, particularly in iZone areas, are called out to assist urban services but receive no funding in recompense.²⁰⁰ The committee was advised that where RFBs respond to incidents in an urban levied area and the brigade experiences genuine financial hardship resulting from out-of-pocket expenses relating to responding to incidents, then these brigades are encouraged to raise such difficulties with their Area Director.²⁰¹
216. The committee was provided with the example in the Gold Coast hinterland where the location of a new urban station has led to viability problems for four RFBs whilst the services these brigades provided are still required. Tallebudgera Valley RFB advised the committee that QFRS recognises the need for dual services in iZone areas but under the current system all levy money is directed to urban services. They agreed that a fundamental change in the funding base and distribution system needs to be addressed.²⁰²
217. The committee was advised that with urban encroachment QFRS expect the same level of service but from a declining funding base. As new urban stations open in areas RFBs are losing that funding. RFBs are expected to help out in those areas but they get no funding for it. It was suggested to the committee that a proportion of levy moneys raised in iZone areas should go to support rural brigades.²⁰³
218. The QFRS Commissioner advised the committee that the most strategic issue facing QFRS is the funding of the RFS. He advised that when he was appointed acting Commissioner in 2002 he realised there was two disparate fire services – urban and rural – operating unsafely and without collaborative effort. He advised that it is his belief that an enormous amount of work has gone into building the capability and capacity of the RFS since then. He noted that currently \$20 million of the urban fire levy funding goes towards the RFS. He advised that there is no formula for funding rural fire operations. The capital program for rural comes out of the QFRS urban capital budget. He advised that QFRS has 115 full-time equivalent staff to manage 34,000 volunteers.²⁰⁴
219. The QFRS Commissioner expressed the view that, whilst it is a decision for government how the service goes forward into the future and whether there is a state-wide levy or a wholly state funded service, the service cannot go on indefinitely the way it currently is. He advised that we have a very capable RFS and there are a lot of great things happening but there is much to do including having the ability to assist RFBs with administration issues.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Submission 3: 2

²⁰¹ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 5

²⁰² Submission 3: 2

²⁰³ Mr Jesssen, Transcript 3 September 2010: 2

²⁰⁴ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 22

²⁰⁵ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 22

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

220. The Auditor-General stated in Report No 3 for 2008 that Urban Encroachment (Urbanisation) is when the population shift into wildfire prone areas.²⁰⁶ These areas consist of high-density rural residential development and may contain significant sections of bushland where the predominant risk is to life, property and infrastructure.²⁰⁷ RFBs located in these areas are classified as iZone Brigades. Due to the difficulty in both terrain and access, urban and rural brigades provide a dual service to these areas.²⁰⁸
221. Many of the issues resulting from urban encroachment have been addressed in other sections of this report. The most significant of these issues is the call out of rural brigades in urban designated areas.
222. However, the issue of hazard reduction is of significance, particularly in iZone areas where new residents do not understand their responsibilities in relation to their properties.

8.1 Hazard reduction

223. Hazard reduction has been standard practice for many years as part of normal land management regimes by using fire to reduce the risk of uncontrolled wild fire. Fuel reduction burning, or other forms of hazard reduction, is a risk reduction activity. It may take many forms including:
- local fuel reduction initiatives by an individual property owner to reduce grass prior to the fire season; and
 - planned fuel reduction burning in public land estates, such as national parks and reserves, to reduce the fire hazard.²⁰⁹
224. Fuel reduction initiatives are high risk activities. Any fuel reduction activity needs to be well planned, with clear objectives and a detailed risk assessment completed. Notification of intentions need to be clear to adjoining properties, communities and authorities.²¹⁰
225. Evidence provided on fuel reduction burning at the Victorian Bushfires Commission hearings stated that burning reduces the number and intensity of fires igniting and makes it easier to extinguish the fire. Mr Jerry Williams, from the US Forest Service, pointed out there was an irony in not having planned burns of forests and instead having out of control burns that destroyed whole ecosystems.²¹¹
226. It is the responsibility of landholders to reduce the fire risk on their own property. QFRS has tried to stress in their community education programs that 'who owns the fuel owns the fire'. QFRS education programs are about educating communities and making sure they are fire safe, fire ready and fire wise.²¹²

²⁰⁶ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008:2

²⁰⁷ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Audit Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland*, May 2008:1

²⁰⁸ Submission 34:3

²⁰⁹ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 52

²¹⁰ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 52

²¹¹ Submission 35: 6

²¹² Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 11

8.2 Hazard reduction in iZone areas

227. Urban encroachment changes the character of an area. Where previously there may have been a small number of larger properties, these have been subdivided into smaller rural lifestyle blocks (1-50 acres). More properties in an area mean more structures and reduced access to the rear of properties including those properties bordering on bushland. The increased number of properties and new residents place increased demands on the iZone RFBs.
228. New residents who have moved from an urban area into a rural area have a limited understanding of fires and the need to take greater care of their properties in terms of fire prevention.²¹³ They also have a reluctance to use hazard reduction burns to mitigate major wildfires.²¹⁴
229. Some owners are not permanent residents of their properties and often they do not maintain their property for fire, lock up their property and are harder to contact.²¹⁵
230. Public education was a recurring theme raised at the committee's hearings. It was suggested that there could be an annual mail out, possibly with rates notices, to rural residential landholders with a package explaining about the RFS, what role they fill and explain the fire risks and the need for hazard reduction.²¹⁶ It was suggested that this public education process needs to include the requirement to obtain fire permits.²¹⁷

8.3 Committee comments

231. The committee understands the importance of regular burning regimes to assist in the reduction of fuel loads for the overall safety of all properties in an area.
232. The committee considers that there is a need for local governments to develop a communication strategy to inform all residents, particularly in iZone areas, of the need and timetable for fire prevention activities and to make available an education process, together with the iZone RFBs, to assist new residents in understanding and performing their fire prevention responsibilities.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Local Government and Special Minister of State establish with local government a communication strategy to inform all residents about their fire prevention responsibilities.

²¹³ Submission 13:2

²¹⁴ Submission 61:2

²¹⁵ Submission 39:2

²¹⁶ Mr Wienert and Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 19-20

²¹⁷ Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 23

8.4 Accident and rescue activities

233. The committee heard that RFBs are increasingly being called out to accident and rescue activities.
234. The committee was advised provided with an example of an accident involving a road train carrying LPG bottles west of Georgetown in north-west Queensland. The council, SES and RFS were all called to assist including to right the truck and remove the debris.²¹⁸ Etheridge Shire Council advised that they did not recover any funds through the vehicle's insurance.²¹⁹ The committee suggests that the recovery of some funds may be available for accident and rescue activities through motor vehicle activities.
235. Compulsory Third Party (CTP) insurance in Queensland includes a Hospital and Emergency Services Levy. This levy is used to fund a proportion of the cost of public hospital and emergency services where a CTP claim could be made by motor accident victims. Rural fire services are often called to attend to road accidents but do not receive any additional funding from this source.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the QFRS investigate the possibility of insurance recovery when involved in vehicle retrieval activities at accident sites.

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

236. QFRS has identified a number of factors impacting on future capacity. These factors include:
- demographics including an ageing population;
 - sustainability of water as an extinguishing agent used for fire fighting requirements in domestic, industrial/commercial and bush fire settings and as an agent in fixed installations in buildings such as hydrants, sprinklers and foam installations;
 - increasing urban and decreasing rural population; and
 - environmental concerns.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Mr Edmestone, Transcript 23 August 2010: 2

²¹⁹ Mr Edmestone, Transcript 23 August 2010: 8

²²⁰ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 82-83

9.1 Demographic issues

237. QFRS has identified that increasing urban and decreasing rural populations will impact on service provision in the bush and rural areas of Queensland. They have also identified that in some areas there is a small reversal of the population drift due to the 'tree change' phenomenon. This places pressure on some rural communities who may experience an increase in population and a subsequent demand on the community service. However, the age group undertaking this drift are not always optimum for volunteer service.²²¹

9.1.1 Volunteerism

238. Attracting volunteers is a major issue for most volunteer organisations, not just the RFS. The committee heard that people are now less likely to volunteer than they were in the past because of other pressures such as work, family and other such commitments.
239. Volunteering Queensland advised the committee that the volunteering workforce is ageing and getting tired. There is an attrition rate that is not being addressed. The younger generation of volunteers is looking for a lot more flexibility in the voluntary commitment. Younger volunteers are looking for the pragmatic issues of learning new skills and identifying ways of volunteering that might lead them to a chosen career path. They are also looking for a match between their own values and their voluntary commitment.²²²
240. Ripley Valley RFB advised the committee that their experience is that the membership base transitions from local land owners who are primarily concerned about protecting the property in their area to members, who live outside the immediate area, who join because they want to serve in a broader QFRS and help communities wherever required.²²³
241. Boondoola RFB advised the committee that people join brigades because they are community minded and they wish to help their community in the first instance. They have found that young people join but as they grow up they find other interests.²²⁴ Keppel Sands RFB Group advised that the camaraderie that exists in brigades assists both to attract and keep volunteers.²²⁵
242. The committee was advised that QFRS has found that the primary producer brigade volunteer base has remained very stable. Other types of brigades have higher volunteer turnover numbers. The average age of primary producer brigade volunteers is higher. Whilst the average age of volunteers in village and iZone brigades is lower the turnover is higher which impacts on the training load.²²⁶

²²¹ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 82

²²² Mr Hembury, Transcript 3 September 2010: 24

²²³ Submission 2: 4

²²⁴ Mr Veach, Transcript 24 August 2010: 13

²²⁵ Mr Dash, Transcript 24 August 2010: 13

²²⁶ Mr Fisher, Transcript 24 August 2010: 20

243. While traditional volunteering models have the characteristics of declining numbers of volunteer recruits, an ageing volunteer base and a difficulty in recruiting younger volunteers, in recent years new models of volunteering have emerged whose characteristics include a focus on direct community solutions rather than organisational outcomes and structures and less distinction between personal motivation and broader community aspirations of those involved.²²⁷
244. RFBs are experiencing the same issues as other non profit organisations regarding the recruitment and retention of volunteers. People are interested in volunteering where the work is flexible and engaging and there are multiple rewards such as the opportunity to learn new skills while meeting new people and expanding their social and professional networks.²²⁸ Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer but it is always a matter of choice.²²⁹
245. There are three factors that every organisation with volunteers needs to consider and be able to integrate into their organisation that affect a sustainable volunteer workforce:
- A sense of belonging – an organisation needs to ensure that the opportunities offered to volunteers fits in with the volunteer profile and meet the needs of the organisation
 - The Flow effect – the ability of providing a goal or an activity that is both challenging and suited to the skill level of a volunteer to allow the volunteer to experience a sense of satisfaction (flow) in reaching or working towards a meaningful outcome, and
 - Appropriate Infrastructure – the provision of properly documented policy and procedures manuals, appropriate equipment, training and support for volunteers²³⁰
246. RFB volunteers advised the committee that QFRS needs to appreciate the level of skill, dedication and professionalism that the volunteers have. Volunteers choose to be there, they do not have to be there.²³¹ RFBs feel that striving to improve their training, equipment and overall professional standing attracts volunteers. There is a need for RFBs to embrace technology wherever possible to inform and support their volunteers.²³²
247. QFRS has tried to assist RFBs with the recruitment of volunteers. Promotional activities by QFRS include press advertising and media releases and attendance at community forums advertising the availability of volunteer and auxiliary type positions.²³³
248. The committee was advised that in times of disasters, such as the Victorian bush fires, there is a heightened sense and there is a trend for more people to come forward as volunteers. However, recruiting is an ongoing issue.²³⁴
249. To harness a volunteer's passion, interest and motivation is a human resource challenge. RFBs need to market themselves to attract and retain volunteers to support their vision and attract funding as they operate on minimal budgets. Funding received from government providers comes with an expectation that those funds are to be accounted for and managed appropriately to maximise outcomes.²³⁵

²²⁷ Volunteering Queensland, *New Models for Community Solutions*, September 2009:1-2

²²⁸ Submission 44:1

²²⁹ Volunteering Australia, www.govolunteer.com.au/volunteer/search.htm, April 2011

²³⁰ Submission 44:2

²³¹ Submission 58:3

²³² Volunteering Queensland, *Working with Project Volunteers*, September 2009:2

²³³ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 10

²³⁴ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 10

²³⁵ Volunteering Queensland, *Working with Project Volunteers*, September 2009:2

250. Negatives advised to the committee included that volunteers believe that they have no input into policy and procedures and have more required of them without adequate consideration for their employment and family commitments. The committee was also advised that there is an unsettling effect on volunteers with the constant movement of QFRS Rural Division staff in some locations. This can be assisted by requiring a reasonable minimum service period from the QFRS staff.²³⁶
251. The issue of how to attract and retain volunteers is one that requires a dedicated examination in its own right. The committee has opted not to consider this issue further in this context.

9.1.2 Volunteer recognition

252. The issue of volunteer recognition encompasses two areas: recognition of RFB members as volunteers by the general public and recognition by QFRS of the value of volunteers.
253. The committee was advised that there is a lack of understanding by the general public that RFB members are volunteers.²³⁷
254. Some residents, particularly within the iZone areas, are unaware that the iZone RFBs are a volunteer service and have an expectation that they will receive the same level of fire protection service as an urban area.
255. The suggestion of incentives for volunteers was brought up in many of the submissions and at the committee's hearings. The general consensus seemed to be that volunteers did not need payment but small incentives such as reduced registration fees, discounts on equipment and other such incentives would assist in offsetting the costs associated with volunteering for RFBs. The committee considers that this is an issue for QFRS to consider.
256. The committee was advised that QFRS needs to be conscious of volunteer burnout. Ripley Valley RFB advised that it is possible to burnout a brigade's reserves of volunteers if they are overstretched and poorly managed. They advised that whilst volunteers are not chasing payment for services, they do require recognition of their efforts, respect for their professionalism and a sense of being supported by the broader parent organisation²³⁸
257. Volunteers may be reimbursed by QFRS when undertaking certain official duties at the request of QFRS Rural Operations. These include a mileage claim when attending or delivering an accredited training activity, where the return travel is greater than 100 kilometres or are approved activities outside the normal rural operations area. A specified form needs to be completed by the volunteer and provided to Rural Operations Area Office together with supporting information for consideration.²³⁹
258. Placing increased demands on volunteers adds to the cost of recruiting, training, supporting and supervising of volunteers and opens up opportunities for innovation in the way volunteers are engaged.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Submission 6:2

²³⁷ Correspondence from Eudlo RFB to PAPWC dated 14 October 2010: 1

²³⁸ Submission 2: 5

²³⁹ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010: Section C6.2: 1

²⁴⁰ Submission 44:2

9.1.3 Employers of volunteers

259. Employers of RFB volunteers contribute significantly to the funding of the RFS by providing the time for volunteers to attend RFB activities and emergencies.
260. It was suggested to the committee that recognition for employers of RFB volunteers might add to this resource. One suggestion was a Recognition Award for Employers of RFB volunteers. It was suggested that consideration needs to be given to formally recognising these employers. Recognition could be in the form of an award, favouring these employers when they provide goods and services to Queensland Government or declaring that under specific circumstances the services of RFB volunteers is essential thus protecting the volunteer's employment.²⁴¹
261. It was suggested that there would be more recruits if there was some form of remuneration for employers releasing volunteers. Currently it is the goodwill of the employer that allows volunteers to attend a fire in working hours.²⁴²
262. Employers of volunteers are exempted from paying Payroll tax on wages paid while the employee is taking part in fire fighting or fire prevention activities (with the exception of annual, recreation, long service and sick leave) as a volunteer member of a RFB under the *Fire and Rescue Act 1990*.²⁴³

9.1.4 Workplace Health and Safety issues

263. QFRS have a legal obligation, as an employer, to ensure the health and safety of its employees. QFRS consider the incident ground to be a workplace, whether it is a burning building, wild fire, vehicle crash or hazardous material spill. Given the context of the working environment, QFRS implements a range of risk management strategies which focus the workplace safer, applying safer practices and creating a safer person.²⁴⁴
264. QFRS indicated that they are committed to achieving the highest possible standards of health and safety and that all risks to fire fighters must be actively identified, assessed and controlled. QFRS provide training, equipment and personal protective equipment to reduce the likelihood of accidents.²⁴⁵

9.1.5 Training flexibility

265. The committee was advised that QFRS has moved down the e-learning path in a significant way and there is quite a lot of information available to the volunteer network. These e-learning activities include CD and/or volunteer portal based self-paced study.²⁴⁶
266. It was suggested that more latitude is needed for First Officers to assess the competency level of new volunteers. There needs to be an appropriate level of training for the role that the volunteer will be performing not a one size fits all.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Submission 57:11

²⁴² Mr Sloper, Transcript 24 August 2010: 13

²⁴³ *Payroll Tax Act 1991*, s14(2) (k) (i)

²⁴⁴ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 50

²⁴⁵ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 50

²⁴⁶ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 13

²⁴⁷ Submission 6:8

267. The committee heard various opinions about on-line training. Many praised the improved capacity of being able to undertake e-learning activities whilst some noted that older volunteers not 'tech savy' and would not appreciate this option.
268. The issue of recognition of prior learning was raised by a number of RFBs. The committee was advised that recognition of prior learning exists throughout QFRS. However, given QFRS's training organisation status, it is a formalised process, whereby people can get their prior skills recognised and gain the qualifications through the organisation.²⁴⁸
269. The committee considers that the issue of recognition of prior learning and experience needs a closer examination by QFRS in order to streamline its processes. Recognition of prior learning will serve a number of purposes including:
- reducing the pressure on training officers and facilities
 - keep volunteers motivated by not having to re-qualify for activities in which they are already highly experienced.
270. The committee encourages QFRS to continue to investigate modes of flexible training for RFB volunteers.

9.1.6 Assistance with reporting requirements

271. The committee heard numerous complaints about the increasing level of administrative requirements being placed on RFBs. Comments included that volunteer officers do not join RFBs to be administrators but to be fire fighters.²⁴⁹
272. The committee heard evidence that some area offices are able to provide some administrative assistance to RFBs. The committee encourages QFRS to continue to provide this assistance wherever possible.

9.1.7 Youth training schools

273. The committee was pleased to hear about the initiative to train rural fire fighters in schools. This program, aimed at years 10, 11 and 12 students, provides education in about fire and its use.²⁵⁰ The committee was advised that a QFRS Certificate II course in community safety fire fighting has been developed.²⁵¹
274. The Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations, advised the committee that in September 2010 Kilcoy State High School had nine students graduate from its trial of the Certificate II program. These graduates signed up with six local brigades. He further advised that they are also working with Agricultural Colleges.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 12

²⁴⁹ Submission 3: 3

²⁵⁰ Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 25

²⁵¹ Mr W Scott, Transcript 24 August 2010: 13

²⁵² Assistant Commissioner Rothwell, Transcript 3 September 2010: 25

9.2 Environmental concerns

275. There is an increasing awareness and accountability for the environment. Environmental protection standards have been made more stringent. This requires greater control of procedures specifically when dealing with issues including smoke management; national and international protocols concerning archaeological, cultural and heritage sites; and clearance of flora and fauna for vehicle movement and clearance of small areas for health and safety requirements.²⁵³
276. The expectation is that climate change will lead to a shift in the climate's natural variability with more extreme weather events.²⁵⁴ The most dangerous fire conditions occur with low relative humidity and high temperature and wind speed after periods of low rainfall.²⁵⁵ Climate change is expected to create a substantial increase in fire weather risk.²⁵⁶

10. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

277. Public accountability is a necessary requirement where public money is involved. There is also an expectation that RFBs will be prudent with the use of public money.

10.1 Record keeping requirements

278. RFBs acknowledge that they need to be accountable for money received whether it be grant funding, levy receipts or donations from the public or sponsors. The major complaint by RFBs was that they are asked for the same information repeatedly because it has either not been received or has been 'lost'.
279. The committee heard numerous complaints about Area Offices being either short staffed or being subject to constantly changing personnel. The committee considers that this has added to the 'red tape' burden for RFBs.
280. The committee considers that there needs to be sufficient administrative staff available within these offices to ensure that front line staff, including fire officers, are able to complete their own tasks without the need to be undertaking tasks that are able to be completed efficiently by clerical staff. Whilst the media and others criticise government for increases in non-front line staff, the committee considers that there needs to be a balance of both front line and back office staff to ensure the most efficient processing of necessary paperwork.

²⁵³ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 83

²⁵⁴ DERM, Office of Climate Change, *Climate Change in Queensland: What the Science is Telling Us*, October 2010: 21

²⁵⁵ DERM, Office of Climate Change, *Climate Change in Queensland: What the Science is Telling Us*, October 2010: 30

²⁵⁶ DERM, Office of Climate Change, *Climate Change in Queensland: What the Science is Telling Us*, October 2010: 67

281. If administrative staff are reduced or removed from these offices, the work will either need to be completed by front line staff or will not get done at all.
282. The committee was pleased to hear about the co-operative arrangements which exist in the central region with regard to assistance provided to RFBs by the area office in completing grant applications and other types of administrative assistance.²⁵⁷ The committee considers that these arrangements not only assist in a practical way but also assist in breaking down communication barriers.

10.2 Code of Conduct

283. It was suggested to the committee that there needs to be a more vigorous Code of Conduct introduced to all branches of the service.²⁵⁸ The committee was advised of examples of where the media has been used by individuals and rural brigades to air personal grievances. This can reflect badly on the service as a whole.

10.3 Grievance process

284. The committee heard numerous examples about the mistrust between some RFBs and QFRS. Whilst this needs to be addressed with tact, patience and transparency of information, the committee considers that there needs to be a formal dispute resolution/grievance process for RFB volunteers put in place. Obviously, the first point of contact should be the relevant Area Director, however, volunteers need to have an option in place that provides an alternative appeal option.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that QFRS implement procedures to provide a clear grievance process which is available to rural fire brigade volunteers.

10.4 Election of Office Holders

285. There was also a range of opinions in regard to office holders. Some believe that brigades should have the ability to choose their officers themselves whether they have the qualifications or not on the basis that the local brigade can recognise leadership ability and experience which does not come from attaining certificates.²⁵⁹ Others believe that senior RFB officers should hold the relevant qualifications.

²⁵⁷ Mr Lewis, Transcript 25 August 2010: 3

²⁵⁸ Submission 2: 9

²⁵⁹ Submission 3: 3

286. One major issue of concern to the committee was with regard to election of office holders. The act (s81) stipulates that any election must be conducted in accordance with the commissioner's direction and has no effect unless approved by the commissioner. The committee was advised that the current practice after an election is that the minutes of the meeting and a form listing the office bearers is sent to QFRS and it is assumed that if the brigade hears nothing back then the election is approved.²⁶⁰
287. This process was confirmed by the Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations, who advised that the power to approve the election is delegated to Area Directors.²⁶¹ The committee considers this process is fraught with the potential that documentation may not be received and therefore RFBs would be operating outside of the act and its inherent protections.
288. The committee considers that in order to comply with the act every RFB should receive written confirmation from QFRS that the election has been approved.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that QFRS implement procedures to ensure that rural fire brigades receive written confirmation of the Commissioner's approval after office bearer elections in compliance with section 81 of the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*.

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

289. Queensland has 240 Chief Fire Wardens and 2,500 Fire Wardens providing fire management. They provide systems and procedures to implement fire control measures before fire suppression is required.²⁶² Burning for land management and agricultural purposes has been a long standing practice across much of Queensland. Local Fire Wardens facilitate this through the 'permit to burn' process. They use their experience and judgement to make important decisions regarding community safety. They are inherently an important part of the community fire practice and QFRS recognises them as an important coordinating element of its capability.²⁶³
290. Fire Wardens are seen as custodians of fire as a tool, determining when it is safe to use and imposing safety conditions on that use. They maintain effective relationships with officers of QFRS Rural Operations.²⁶⁴
291. Fire is a land management tool and Fire Wardens need to know how fire behaves with different vegetation species. Industry uses fire for reasons that not only include hazard reduction but for other specific outcomes, for example sugar and grazing industries, biodiversity of habitat and weed management.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Submission 51: 1

²⁶¹ Assistant Commissioner Rothwell, Transcript 4 October 2010: 6-7

²⁶² DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 52

²⁶³ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 34

²⁶⁴ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 52

²⁶⁵ Submission 5: 2

292. The primary role of Fire Wardens is the issuing of Permits to Light Fire. Fire Wardens work within their local community to assist with identifying potential hazards and educate/provide advice on fire management and hazard reduction techniques. Fire Wardens may also provide advice through Rural Operations Area Offices on potential fire hazards, which the Area Director may then bring to the attention of local Fire Management Groups.²⁶⁶
293. The Speewah Fire Warden advised the committee that ensuring that the First Officer of the local RFB and Firecom are advised when a fire permit is issued saves many unnecessary call outs. He considers that this should be a mandatory requirement.²⁶⁷
294. Whilst the Auditor-General found that Fire Wardens have been at arms length to RFBs, the committee found that the majority of Fire Wardens have a close working relationship with both QFRS and their local RFBs.
295. The committee was advised that whilst Fire Wardens can offer advice to the community on how to manage their risks, it is the individual's responsibility to manage that risk. Authorised fire officers have the power, through delegation from the commissioner, to issue notices to reduce risk.²⁶⁸ The Speewah Fire Warden advised that the suggestion that Fire Wardens be able to identify hazards and commence action to eliminate them would put enormous pressure on Fire Wardens in remote areas.²⁶⁹ The majority of witnesses agreed that this is not an appropriate role for Fire Wardens. The suggestion was made that we should not be making 'policemen' out of volunteers who have to live in that community.²⁷⁰
296. It was suggested that Fire Wardens need to be a senior member of the community who has the trust and the respect of the community.²⁷¹
297. The RFB Manual identifies fire wardens are appointed to their positions either by QFRS Rural Operations or by Governor-in-Council for police officers and public servants. The manual identifies that fire wardens are responsible for managing the pre-fire conditions of hazard reduction through the issuing of Permits to Light Fire.²⁷² However the Fire Warden position is an unpaid volunteer position.
298. The RFB Manual advises that although many fire wardens are intimately involved with brigades, the position of fire warden is not an office bearer position within a brigade. A person can perform the duties of fire warden without being involved in the brigade. It notes that it is essential that the First Officer maintain contact with the fire warden and that close cooperation can only enhance the management of fire in rural areas.²⁷³

²⁶⁶ Correspondence from Mr J McGowan, Director-General, DCS, to PAPWC dated 1 October 2010: 3

²⁶⁷ Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 17

²⁶⁸ Supt Stafford, Transcript 23 August 2010: 9

²⁶⁹ Mr Thomson, Transcript 23 August 2010: 17

²⁷⁰ Mr Dash, Transcript 24 August 2010: 4

²⁷¹ Mr Sloper, Transcript 24 August 2010: 4

²⁷² QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Introduction: 2

²⁷³ QFRS, *Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Rural Operations RFB Manual 2010*, June 2010, Introduction: 2

12. Future model for Rural Fire Service

299. Any discussion about regarding a future model . However any discussion regarding a future model for the RFS cannot be undertaken without consideration of the funding structure.
300. Current legislation stipulates that QFRS has the responsibility to protect persons, property and the environment from fire and hazardous materials emergencies. The government needs to make a decision about how they wish this to be delivered.
301. The government therefore has a legal obligation under the act to deliver fire, rescue, and hazardous materials services to the community of Queensland. Communities expect agencies and government to act in a coordinated manner before, during and after fire events.
302. The committee agrees with both the Auditor-General and the Director-General that it is a policy decision that needs to be made by government about how they wish to deliver fire services throughout Queensland into the future.

12.1 Public expectation

303. There is a community expectation that if a fire occurs on their land then someone will attend to that fire. They do not consider that if they haven't paid a rural fire levy they may not be eligible for assistance. The committee considers that the government is expected to provide a minimum level of service for fire management throughout Queensland. However, that service does not come without a cost.
304. The committee heard numerous examples of this expectation. The Lefthand Branch RFB advised the committee that their experience is that the public believe that because they pay a fire levy this entitles them to a total service which absolves them from any measure of responsibility in protecting their properties.²⁷⁴

12.2 Support

305. The committee has considered that both sides of QFRS – urban and rural – need to support each other. QFRS management have acknowledged that the service needs RFBs to support urban brigades with their equipment. They have smaller vehicles and are able to access some of the areas the urban service cannot. Even though it might be an urban fire district, rural brigades are needed in support. The committee was advised that this also works in reverse as RFBs also need urban brigade support with their larger appliances for structure fires, road crash rescue and hazmat.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Correspondence from Lefthand Branch RFB to PAPWC, dated 8 October 2010: 1

²⁷⁵ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 6

306. The committee was advised that in the Northern Region urban and rural fire services support each other. When a RFB is called in to support on a fire ground, they are fed and looked after with welfare type issues and they refuel RFB vehicles at the completion of the operation. They try to ensure that they are not out of pocket due to any expenses they have.²⁷⁶ The committee heard evidence that this support is not always forthcoming in all operational areas.
307. However, the committee considers that issues may have arisen due to funding constraints.
308. The committee considered various models for the future of the RFS. It also undertook an analysis of the other major rural fire services in Australia. A brief summary of these comparative services is contained in Appendix 7. The QFRS Commissioner advised the committee that every other state in Australia fully provides fleet, buildings, equipment and brigades. In Queensland the onus is on the community.²⁷⁷
309. The committee's analysis of interstate comparisons revealed that in both NSW and Victoria there are separate rural and urban fire services. The QFRS Commissioner confirmed that these fire services are competitive rather than collaborative.²⁷⁸
310. The committee is aware that there are many within the RFS who wish to return to the time where the RFS was a separate entity from QFRS. The committee does not agree with this premise. The committee considers that a separate RFS would not only duplicate bureaucratic structures but it would also increase the difficulties between the urban and rural services. The committee considers that there actually needs to be a closer relationship with urban services in many areas.
311. The committee was advised that it is through a coordinated and holistic management approach by QFRS, including true respect of all QFRS team members, that the RFS can become the partner within QFRS that it should be.²⁷⁹ The committee agrees whole heartedly with this comment.
312. The committee considers that there should be greater integration of iZone brigades with urban services with a move towards single stations, from which both rural and urban fire fighters operate, as the goal. The committee was provided with the example of Emergency Service Units (ESU) established in the western parts of the state where the RFS, SES and QAS all operate from the same building.²⁸⁰
313. The committee understands that the suggestion that there be a move towards single stations will cause some angst amongst RFB volunteers as many have diligently built up their stations and brigades over many years. However, the committee considers that rather than co-existence of two services there must be genuine integration of the skills of both rural and urban fire fighters to achieve the best outcomes. Both sets of skills are vital in iZone areas. The skills requirements should never be considered to be inferior simply because they are provided by volunteers. Genuine integration will ensure that both urban and rural fire fighters understand and value the skills of the other.

²⁷⁶ Assistant Commissioner Weston, Transcript 23 August 2010: 6

²⁷⁷ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 19

²⁷⁸ Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 24

²⁷⁹ Submission 1: 1

²⁸⁰ Mr Lewis, Transcript 25 August 2010: 2

12.3 Leadership

314. Whilst the QFRS structure contains the Rural Operations Division, headed by an Assistant Commissioner, the focus of that division is on operational issues. The committee was advised that within QFRS the administrative structure differs from the operational structure.²⁸¹
315. The committee considers that the QFRS structure should be altered to include a RFS division, headed by an Assistant Commissioner, with Rural Operations to be included under that division. The focus of this RFS division would be a holistic one with the aim of integrating and strengthening the relationship between the urban and rural fire services. The Assistant Commissioner, RFS would also work closely with Regional Assistant Commissioners to ensure operational control is not compromised.
316. The committee envisages that the role of the RFS Assistant Commissioner would encompass greater consultation with RFB volunteers so they feel they have a voice QFRS. The committee also expects that the person appointed to this position would have substantial rural fire experience.
317. The committee also considers that it would be advantageous for at least some Area Office staff to have some experience in rural fire management. This would assist both with breaking down the cultural barriers with rural fire volunteers and with staff understanding of RFB requirements.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that QFRS should establish a Rural Fire Service division within QFRS with the aim of integrating and strengthening the relationship between the urban and rural fire services.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that QFRS establish the position of Assistant Commissioner, Rural Fire Service to lead the proposed Rural Fire Service division within QFRS.

12.4 Proposed funding model

318. The QFRS Commissioner advised the committee that many of the Auditor-General's findings come from inadequate funding. The systems and process and the impact on RFBs having to provide the money themselves to run and maintain vehicles is the fundamental root of the problem. He considers that this places a tremendous onus on RFBs to fund this.²⁸² The committee agrees with the Commissioner's sentiments.

²⁸¹ Assistant Commissioner Gallant, Transcript 24 August 2010: 32

²⁸² Commissioner Johnson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 19

319. The committee found that great discrepancies exist in the existing funding structure where some brigades are funded adequately whilst other brigades receive little to no funding. It also heard of examples where fire levies have not been increased for many years.
320. The committee considers it is time to change the funding model. The committee is mindful that changing the funding model may result in some people feeling that paying their levy may absolve them from the need for further activity. However, it feels that volunteers need to be attracted in other ways. RFB volunteers are vital in ensuring communities are safe from fire threats.
321. Whilst the committee appreciates that RFBs enjoy the degree of independence available to them under the existing system, the committee heard many examples of RFBs who are struggling to raise sufficient funds to operate effectively. RFB volunteers should be doing the job they have volunteered for rather than spending significant amounts of time trying to raise funds to operate.
322. The committee considers that the current funding model is inequitable and given the expectation of service, all landholders situated in iZone, village and urban brigade areas should pay a fire levy. The committee considers that funds from fire levies should be pooled for both urban and rural brigades and the funding used to adequately resource all brigades.
323. The issue of funding to remote RFBs is a vexed one for the committee. It did consider recommending a fire levy be charged to all land holders in the state. However, the committee does not wish to impose a levy on property owners who do not receive a service, or cover that service themselves. It is, however, concerned that remote communities have limited opportunities to garner funding. The committee considers that it may still be necessary for cross subsidisation, from QFRS funding, of primary producer and rural brigades to continue to occur. These funds will assist RFBs to have some operational funds for the performance of their responsibilities.
324. Under this model the state would be divided so that those brigade areas classified as Primary Producer and Rural would still have the option to self fund or receive levy funding from local councils as per the existing system. If Primary Producer and Rural brigades elect to receive public funds then would be required to become incorporated associations. However, volunteer liability protections would need to be retained.
325. All brigades, urban and rural, would still have the ability to raise funds from other sources in order to supplement equipment and other resources. Any funds raised by individual RFBs would remain with that brigade.
326. Under this model there would be increased reciprocal accountability requirements, however, the committee believes that there will be more funds available in order to assist all brigades with these requirements.
327. The committee also considers that there may be a need for QFRS to re-examine its zoning systems to ensure entire zoned coverage of the state.
328. With respect to the mode of operation of the proposed fire levy, the committee suggests that the Urban Fire Levy Scheme could be extended to include those rural properties identified above.

329. A formula for dispersal of funds will need to be developed to ensure a fair distribution of the funds raised. However, the committee considers that these funds should in the first instance cover brigade operating expenses.
330. The committee heard support for a model where brigades operate to a predetermined, preapproved budget that covers all realistic needs and then brigades would fund their own wants.²⁸³
331. The committee acknowledges that there needs to be cognisance of the fact that RFBs have put in substantial effort to raise the funds to purchase existing equipment and that contributes to the feeling of ownership of the brigade and the community.
332. The committee is aware that there is concern amongst RFBs about centralisation and then redistribution of funding back to brigades. The committee was advised that this would seriously affect the volunteer forces and community attitudes towards rural brigades.²⁸⁴ However, the committee is convinced that the current situation cannot continue as the current system is highly inequitable.
333. One suggestion with regard to the distribution of funds was the idea of a local area finance committee which operates in the Toowoomba region. Every RFB in the Toowoomba Regional Council area submitted their one year and three year budgets and operational plans and the committee examined the needs of each brigade and allocated the funding according to need.²⁸⁵ There was support for this type of arrangement from other brigades who were cautious about 'Brisbane-centric' decision making.²⁸⁶ The brigades also cautioned against a one size fits all concept and championed the local area model.²⁸⁷

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the for Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services implement system of fire levies for landholders situated in urban, iZone and village brigade areas.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends 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.

²⁸³ Mr Ganzemuller, Transcript 3 September 2010: 2

²⁸⁴ Mr Sloper, Transcript 24 August 2010: 17

²⁸⁵ Mr Finlayson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 4

²⁸⁶ Mr Murdoch, Transcript 3 September 2010: 8

²⁸⁷ Mr Finlayson, Transcript 3 September 2010: 8

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the for Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services ensure that the formula for distribution of funding as recommended above allows rural fire brigades to control any donation or sponsorship funding raised by individual brigades.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Copy of Inquiry Discussion Paper



Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Discussion Paper

November 2009

Aim of this paper

This paper provides information on the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee, the issues it will consider during its inquiry and guidelines for making submissions. People and organisations making submissions may comment on any matter they consider relevant to the inquiry terms of reference.

The closing date for submissions is Friday, 19th March 2010. Please refer to the back page of this paper for guidelines on making a submission and the committee's contact details.

The Public Accounts and Public Works Committee

The committee's legislated role as defined in the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* is:

- (a) the assessment of the integrity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government financial management by —
 - (i) examining government financial documents; and
 - (ii) considering the annual and other reports of the auditor-general;
- (b) works (**public works**) undertaken by an entity that is a constructing authority for the works if the committee decides to consider the works;
- (c) any major GOC works if the committee decides to consider the works.¹

Inquiry terms of reference

The committee has resolved to conduct an inquiry into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

Inquiry Background

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.

The Public Accounts Committee of the 52nd Parliament had previously agreed to further investigate the issues identified in the report.

The Public Accounts and Public Works Committee of 53rd Parliament has resolved to continue with this inquiry.

Role of Rural Fire Brigades

Under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* it is the responsibility of the government to protect persons, property and the environment from fire emergencies. To meet this responsibility the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) operates two distinct models of service delivery – the paid staff urban 'red truck' service covering major cities and towns and the volunteer rural fire 'yellow truck' service model covering rural areas and minor townships and villages.

These rural fire services are responsible for protecting approximately 17% of the population and 93% of the land area in Queensland. The service consist of 1,525 Rural Fire Brigades, involving approximately 35,000 volunteers.

The role and degree of activity of Rural Fire Brigades varies across Queensland. In some rural areas, the brigade may consist of a group of property owners using their own resources for protection of their own mutual property. In areas closer to urban areas, the brigades have a more formal operational and administrative structure with specialised equipment.

Rural Fire Brigades provide assistance to communities through:

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

Some Rural Fire Brigades also undertake a broader range of other duties, for example, attendance at motor vehicle crashes, structural, grass and bushfires, shipboard fires, chemical incidents, height and confined spaces rescues, and helping the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS).

¹ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* (Qld) s 95

Issues for consideration

The audit raised a number of areas that represent significant risks to the rural fire service as it currently operates.

Brigade Funding

The Auditor-General stated that there is a lack of adequate systems in place to capture, analyse and report the level of brigade funding. Brigade resource levels and needs cannot be effectively assessed due to the lack of systematic communication with members, therefore some brigade resourcing needs (including essential safety equipment) were unknown to QFRS. Further the audit found that there is a lack of appropriate systems for QFRS to monitor the condition and safety of rural fire brigade equipment.

Direct funding for rural fire brigades is provided through either one, or a combination of the following:

- a rural fire levy collected from ratepayers by the rural fire brigade's respective local government and paid directly to the brigade;
- specific purpose grant funding provided by QFRS from QFRS' government appropriation. This is primarily related to assisting brigades with fire station buildings;
- grants provided by third party organisations such as corporate supporters in the brigade area or via the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland;
- fundraising activities undertaken by or on behalf of individual brigades
- volunteer donations by individuals to a local brigade.

The QFRS also provides other resources to Rural Fire Brigades, such as:

- personal protective equipment — provided to volunteers directly at no cost to the brigade
- subsidised fire appliances — QFRS provide 80 per cent of the cost of a Rural Fire Brigade appliance
- subsidised fire fighting equipment as deemed appropriate for use by Rural Fire Brigades.

QFRS has a duty of care for Rural Fire Brigade volunteers and provides workers' compensation coverage, insurance for private equipment and ongoing training.

The Local Government Act permits a local government to collect and remit a levy to a Rural Fire Brigade operating within its local government areas. QFRS have provided guidelines to local government on the collection and disbursement of a rural fire levy, however, the decision over whether to raise a levy and the amount raised remains with the local government.

Not all brigades receive a Rural Fire Levy. The dispersal of levies collected also differs between councils. At the time of the audit, local governments collected a levy for a total of 392 Rural Fire Brigades (25%). The levy amount is decided by local government in consultation with ratepayers, Rural Fire Brigades and the QFRS. Instead of raising a separate rural fire levy, some local governments choose to support its local brigades with funds from general rates.

Resource allocation and communication

The audit found that QFRS does not have a robust and systematic process to identify the nature and level of brigade activity to enable the allocation of resources based on the level of risk and need. The audit found that some brigade resourcing needs, including for essential safety equipment, were unknown to QFRS.

The audit also found that there is a lack of an appropriate system to monitor the condition and safety of rural fire brigade equipment. Under the Act QFRS maintains ownership of brigade equipment and therefore needs to have adequate systems to ensure that the equipment is maintained to a safe standard and any directions over the use of the equipment and restrictions on modifications are complied with.

The Auditor-General found that there is no systematic process for ensuring individual brigade issues are understood and considered by QFRS. He also found that no guidance has been provided as to what brigades should include in management and operational plans and compliance with this requirement is inconsistent. Brigades manage local issues such as hazard reduction, equipment, recruitment and training, in an informal and ad hoc basis and QFRS have limited systems to capture this information.

Forward planning and risk management processes

Rural Fire Brigades face increasing demands due to climate change, increasing rural/urban interfaces, ageing volunteer workforce and difficulties recruiting new volunteers.

The Auditor-General found that currently, there is a lack of comprehensive forward planning processes for the management of rural fires, and that the planning process did not include sufficient detail to recognise the risks and opportunities faced by the Rural Operations division and to develop robust strategies and measurable targets. The audit found that agency strategic planning is undertaken by QFRS with minimal reference to the specific risks and needs of the rural service delivery model.

Accountability mechanisms

All Rural Fire Brigades are accountable to QFRS. Under the *Fire and Resecure Services Act 1990*, Rural Fire Brigades are part of QFRS and not individual entities in their own right. However, the current financial and accountability requirements in effect, treat the brigades as separate entities to QFRS. 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 Director-General, Department of Emergency Services, advised, in his response to the Auditor-General's report, that QFRS treats brigades as community based organisations and strives to ensure that the relationship with the community is maintained in recognition of the strong community involvement that has been the feature of Rural Fire Brigades for the past 60 years. He advised that Rural Fire Brigades are community self-help organisations with brigades expected to assist with funding their own operations, purchases and expenses.

Relationship with Fire Wardens

The Auditor-General advised that during the audit the departmental officers indicated that the role of the Fire Wardens was being reviewed. Initial advice to audit was that while the Fire Wardens are an important part of rural fire management, they operated at arm's length to QFRS Rural Operations. The lack of integration of the Fire Warden network with QFRS Rural Operations was reinforced during the audit with no substantive references being made to the links between Rural Fire Brigade and Fire Warden operations. The Auditor-General further 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.

The Director-General noted the role of the 'Permit to Light Fire System' and the 2650 volunteer Fire Wardens in mitigating the impacts of bushfire. He 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.

Issues to consider:

The main considerations for the committee are:

- Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?
- Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?
- What effect is urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?
- How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?
- Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?
- What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?
- Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

Wayne Wendt MP
Chair

Guidelines for making a submission

By asking for public submissions, the committee provides an opportunity for interested groups, private citizens and others to contribute to an important review and evaluation process. Submissions can add greatly to the knowledge the committee has about the issue. Often the public is aware of specific issues and impacts of which the committee is unaware. Public participation is an important and necessary ingredient in the committee's investigations and is an opportunity for the public to see, and take part in, the operation of parliament.

While there is no prescribed form for written submissions to a committee, it is helpful to structure your submission using the inquiry terms of reference. The best submissions are to the point, supported by evidence and use plain English.

The committee will only consider written submissions. Typed or printed text is preferable, though legible hand-written submissions are acceptable.

All submissions **must** include:

- (i) the name,
- (ii) a postal address and
- (iii) a daytime contact telephone number of the person who makes the submission.

Number the pages and, if the submission is over twenty pages long, provide a brief summary at the front and include a table of contents.

Once the committee receives a submission it becomes the property of the committee and must not be published without the committee's permission. The committee may table submissions in the parliament or otherwise publish them.

Confidential submissions

The committee will not consider anonymous submissions though it may direct that a submission be treated confidentially. The Public Accounts and Public Works Committee attempts to run its inquiries in the most open way possible. However, if you believe that your submission (or part of it) should not be made public clearly write 'CONFIDENTIAL' on each page, and, in a brief covering letter explain why your submission should be treated confidentially.

Further information

Please send your submission to:

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

Submissions close: Friday 19th March 2010

Extensions to the closing date may be given. If you need more time to make a submission, or for further information about the inquiry, please contact the committee secretariat on:

Phone: 07 3406 7576
Email: papwc@parliament.qld.gov.au
Fax: 07 3406 7500

This paper and other Public Accounts and Public Works Committee publications are available on the Internet via the Queensland Parliament's home page at:

<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/committees>

Committee Members

- Mr Wayne Wendt MP (Chair), Member for Ipswich West
- Mr Ian Rickuss MP (Deputy Chair), Member for Lockyer
- Mr Michael Crandon MP, Member for Coomera
- Ms Di Farmer MP, Member for Bulimba
- Mr Ray Hopper MP, Member for Condamine
- Ms Mary-Anne O'Neill MP, Member for Kallangur
- Mrs Christine Smith MP, Member for Burleigh

Secretariat

- Ms Deborah Jeffrey, Research Director
- Mrs Helen Bogiatzis, Principal Research Officer
- Mrs Marilyn Freeman, Executive Assistant

Appendix 2 – Submissions Received

Submission No.	Organisation
1	Redbank Creek RFB
2	Ripley Valley RFB
3	Tallebudgera Valley RFB
4	Marburg District RFB
5	Mr B Cifuentes
6	Mr D Greenhalgh
7	Tomewin RFB
8	Quingilli & Behana Gorge RFB
9	Mt Alford RFB
10	Mr Marc Wall
11	Crossdale RFB
12	Nebo RFB
13	Lefthand Branch RFB
14	Mr J Robertson
15	Qld Fire and Rescue – Senior Officers Union of Employees
16	Ms V Avcin
17	Hinchinbrook Shire Council
18	Mr T Longman
19	Townsville City Council
20	Woodlea RFB
21	Maryvale RFB
22	Mr G Hoyes
23	Qld Audit Office
24	Ms S Osborne
25	Durong RFB
26	Turkey Beach RFB
27	Mr M Fraser
28	Nogo River RFB
29	Etheridge Shire Council
30	Canegrowers Mulgrave
31	Barcaldine Regional Council
32	Bondoola RFB
33	Cooberrie RFB
34	Adelaide Park RFB
35	Tanby RFB
36	Fitzroy RFB Group
37	Mr J Thomson
38	Calioran RFB
39	Croftby/Carney's Creek RFB
40	Redland City Council
41	Wasp Creek RFB
42	Keppel Group RFB
43	Samford RFB
44	Volunteering Queensland
45	Mr P Cauchi
46	Department of Community Safety
47	Julatten RFB
48	Rural Fires Association Queensland Inc
49	Aratula RFB
50	Canegrowers Babinda
51	Mr G McNicol
52	Eudlo RFB
53	Habana & Districts Progress Association Inc
54	Mr M Flanigan
55	Mr K Paulsen

Submission No.	Organisation
56	Rural Fire Brigades Association Qld Inc
57	Mr T Marks
58	Mr L Bateman
59	Southern Downs Regional Council
60	Canegrowers
61	Tablelands Regional Council
62	Gold Coast City Council
63	Mr B Finlayson

Appendix 3 – Map of Queensland – Identifying Submission Locations



Appendix 4 – Witnesses at Hearings

Monday 23 August 2010 – Cairns

Name	Title	Organisation
Mr Leslie EDMISTONE	Chief Executive Officer	Etheridge Shire Council
Mr Robert MILLER	Acting Senior Ranger Cairns/Mareeba Subdistrict	Department of Environment and Resource Management
Mr Brett STALLBAUM	Operations Manager Qld Parks & Wildlife	Department of Environment and Resource Management
Mr Adrian STAFFORD	Acting Superintendent Acting Regional Manager Rural Operations	Qld Fire and Rescue Service
Mr Wayne WESTON	Assistant Commissioner	Qld Fire and Rescue Service
Mr Mark HADLEY	Second Officer	Julatten RFB
Mr Paul ROSSI	First Officer	Behana Gorge and Quingilli RFB
Dr Michael SAUSMAN	Fifth Officer	Julatten RFB
Mr John THOMSON	RFBAQ Representative, (Clohesy Group Officer Speewah Fire Warden)	RFBs Association of Qld
Mr Graham WIENERT	Director	Canegrowers Cairns Region

Tuesday 24 August 2010 – Rockhampton

Name	Title	Organisation
Mr Jamie MULHOLLAND	First Officer	Adelaide Park RFB
Mr Bruce SLOPER	Chair	Adelaide Park RFB
Mr Peter COOK	Secretary	Bondoola RFB
Mr Douglas VEACH	First Officer	Bondoola RFB
Mr Brian LUND	Secretary/Third Officer	Calioran RFB
Mrs Janet SCOTT	Secretary/Treasurer	Cooberrie RFB
Mr Waine SCOTT	First Officer	Cooberrie RFB
Mr Neale DUNPHY	Group Administrator	Fitzroy RFB Group
Mr George FLINTHAM	Deputy Group Officer	Fitzroy RFB Group
Mr Darrell KELLY	Group Officer	Fitzroy RFB Group
Mr Gary DASH	Group Leader	Keppel Sands RFB Group
Mr Michael SCOTT	Private capacity	

Wednesday 25 August 2010 – Emerald

Name	Title	Organisation
Mr Michael FLANIGAN	Private capacity	
Mr Larry LEWIS	Inspector, Area Director Rural Operations	Qld Fire & Rescue Service, Department of Community Safety
Mayor Cedric MARSHALL	President	Central Qld Local Government Association
Mr Dick IRWIN	Chief Executive Officer	RFBs Association Qld
Mr Maxwell ROGERS	State President	RFBs Association Qld

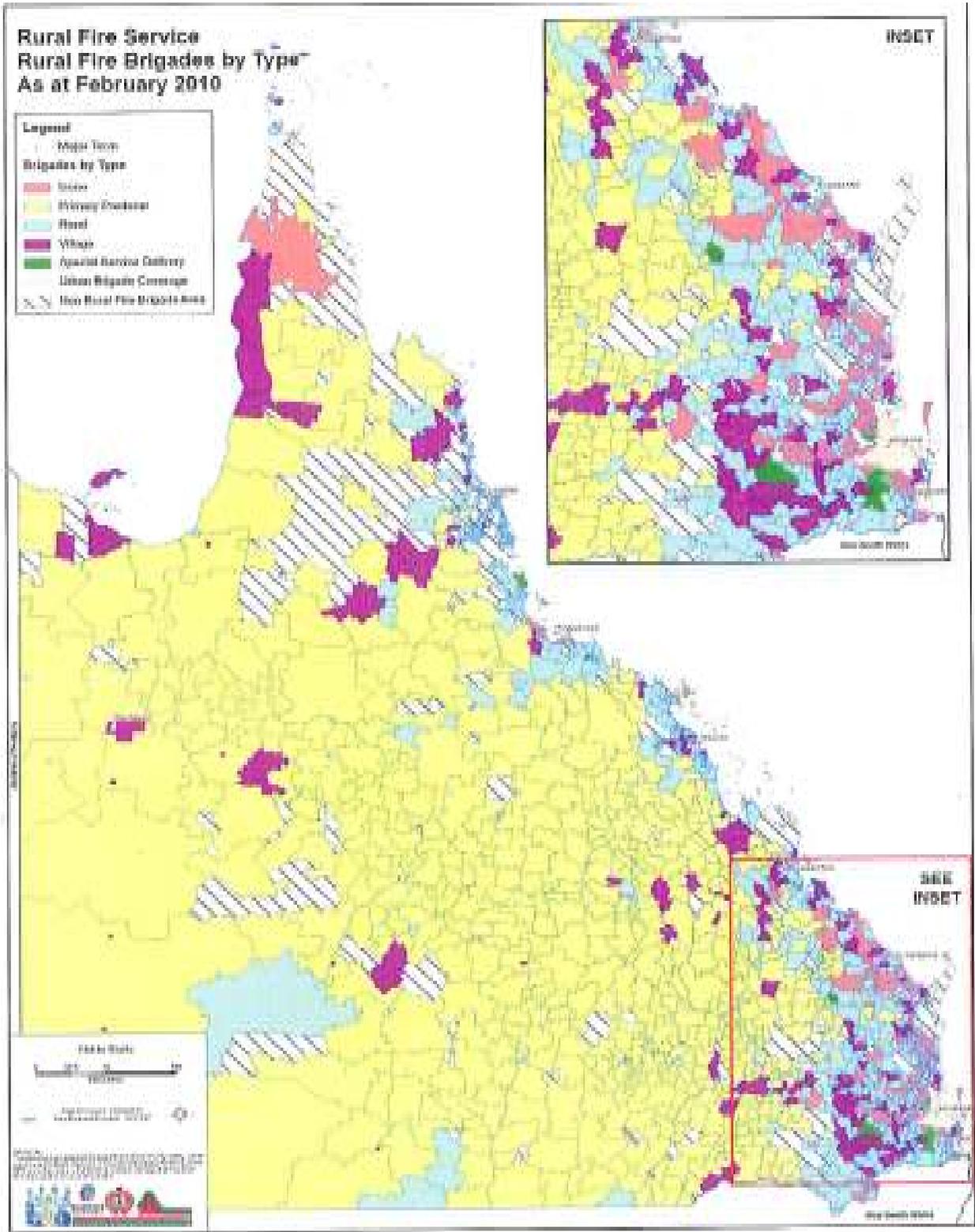
Friday 3 September 2010 – Brisbane

Name	Title	Organisation
Mr Paul TIFFANY	First Officer and Chairman	Aratula RFB
Mr Hamish MURDOCH	Officer	Eudlo RFB
Mr Steven STREET	1st Officer	Eudlo RFB
Mrs Lesley VARDANEGA	Secretary	Habana and Districts Progress Association
Mr James O'KEEFFE	3rd Officer	Left Hand Branch RFB
Mr Graham McNICOL	1st Officer	Marburg District RFB
Ms Barbara SNELLING	Secretary	Mount Alford RFB
Mr George GANZENMULLER	1st Officer	Ripley Valley RFB
Mr Matthew MULRONEY	2nd Officer	Ripley Valley RFB
Mr Bruce FINLAYSON	Group Officer	Rosalie Jondaryan RFB
Mr Anthony MARKS	2nd Officer	Samford RFB
Mr Jon JESSEN	1st Officer	Tallebudgera Valley RFB
Mrs Vicki AVCIN		Private Capacity
Mr John ROBERTSON		Private Capacity
Mr John COTTER	President	AgForce Qld
Mr Robert JOHNSON	Government Liaison Officer	AgForce Qld
Mr Gregory TROST	Manager Industrial Relations and Grower Services	Canegrowers
Mr Clive COOK	Senior Director Conservation Strategy and Planning	Department of Environment and Resource Management
Mr Glen POTTER	Director Organisational Services	Gold Coast City Council
Mr Glenn POOLE	Auditor-General	Qld Audit Office
Mr Peter HOLLIER	Regional Manager Rural Operations North Coast	Qld Fire and Rescue Service
Commissioner Lee JOHNSON	Commissioner	Qld Fire and Rescue Service
Assistant Commissioner Steve ROTHWELL	Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations	Qld Fire and Rescue Service
Mr Michael HYDE	General Manager Customer Services	Redland City Council
Mr Dick IRWIN	Chief Executive Officer	RFBs Association of Qld
Mr Robert BURKE	Member	Rural Fires Association of Qld
Mr Perry HEMBURY	Acting Chief Executive Officer	Volunteering Qld Inc.

Monday 4 October 2010 – In-Camera Hearing – Brisbane

Name	Title	Organisation
Mr Glenn POOLE	Auditor-General	Queensland Audit Office
Ms Terry CAMPBELL	Assistant Auditor-General PMS Audits	Queensland Audit Office
Mr Richard HEINRITZ	Audit Manager	Queensland Audit Office
Ms Kate COOTE	Acting Executive Officer to the Auditor-General	Queensland Audit Office
Mr Jim MCGOWAN	Director-General	Department of Community Safety
Commissioner Lee JOHNSON	Commissioner, QFRS	Department of Community Safety
Assistant Commissioner Steve ROTHWELL	Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations, QFRS	Department of Community Safety
Ms Kylie WARLOW	Acting Director, Legal Services Unit, Strategic Policy Division	Department of Community Safety

Appendix 5 – Rural Fire Brigade by type as at February 2010



Appendix 6 – Others sources of funding

Funding from the Community

Art Unions, Bingo and Raffles

The *Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act 1999* regulates art unions, bingos and raffles. There are 4 categories of games with Category 1, Category 2 and Category 3 being conducted by non-profit associations and Category 4 being normally conducted by businesses.²⁸⁸

A RFB is eligible to conduct Category 1 and Category 2 games as they are an unincorporated association formed for community purposes. No licence or permit is needed where the gross proceeds collected do not exceed the statutory amount and the appropriate records are kept.²⁸⁹

The Gross Proceeds for each game are as follows:²⁹⁰

	<u>Category 1</u>	<u>Category 2</u>
Bingo & Other Games	Gross Proceeds Up to \$2,000	Gross Proceeds \$2,001 to \$20,000
Lucky Envelopes	Not in this Category	Gross Proceeds Up to \$5,000
Promotional Game	Not in this Category	Not in this Category

Examples of eligible games include meat tray and other small raffles, Melbourne Cup sweeps and chocolate wheels.

Donations

Donations over \$2.00 to RFB may be eligible for Tax Deductibility pending the incorporation of recent Commonwealth taxation changes by the QFRS.

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has been reviewing the status of RFB's as Deductible Gift Recipients to determine whether a tax deductible donation to a RFB can be claimed by a donor.

On 22 November 2010 the *Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No. 4) Bill* passed both houses of the Commonwealth Parliament and received royal assent on 7 December 2010. The amending bill has widened the accessibility of tax deductible donations to all entities providing volunteer based emergency services, including volunteer fire brigades. It has also extended the Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status to all state and territory government bodies that coordinate volunteer fire brigades and State Emergency Services.²⁹¹

Donations to these DGR public funds need to be used for emergency service activities to retain the deductibility for the donor. The ATO requires that adequate accounting and other records are maintained.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation, www.olgr.qld.gov.au/gamingLicencing/competition/index.shtml, May 2011

²⁸⁹ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.6*, June 2010:1

²⁹⁰ *Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act 1999*, Section 14 and 15

²⁹¹ *Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No4) Bill 2010* (Cwlth) Explanatory Memorandum: Para 8.2 p 97

²⁹² *Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No4) Bill 2010* (Cwlth) Explanatory Memorandum: Para 8.34 p104, Para 8.46 p107

These DGR public funds can be established by:²⁹³

- government entities with statutory responsibility for coordinating volunteer fire brigades or
- not-for-profit or government entities that principally provide volunteer based emergency services that are regulated by a state or territory law

To work in practice a centralised fund model may be established whereby for example, the individual RFBs and QFRS enter into an agreement about the collection, receipting accounting and reporting of gift deductible donations collected by local brigades.²⁹⁴

Sponsorship

A RFB can obtain sponsorship with a relevant business. The RFB will negotiate the specific details of what will be the return to the business for their sponsorship. An example is, a monetary donation may allow a sponsor to exclusive signage at an Open Day/Training event or stickers on brigade vehicles. The sponsorship arrangements are to be approved by the Rural Operations Area Director prior to the sponsorship commencement.²⁹⁵

Funding from Services Rendered

A RFB can not legally demand a fee, but may suggest a donation, from a private landowner for services other than fire suppression, eg hazard reduction burns. Usually a private landowner is happy to make a donation.²⁹⁶

For public landholders (Government Agencies) a fee for service can be charged for services provided by a RFB. An agreement can be reached prior to the service being performed and an official invoice is to be sent to the Public landholder for payment.²⁹⁷

Funding from Grants

There are a number of organisations who provide grants to RFBs. Some have been established by the Queensland government while others are external to government.

Queensland Government Grants

The following funds were established by the Queensland government to provide funding to community groups. Grants provided are considered supplemental funding and are not intended to replace existing funding sources.

²⁹³ *Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No4) Bill 2010* (Cwlth) Explanatory Memorandum: Para 8.12 p100

²⁹⁴ *Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No4) Bill 2010* (Cwlth) Explanatory Memorandum: Para 8.47 Example 8.5 p107

²⁹⁵ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.9*, June 2010:1

²⁹⁶ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.5*, June 2010:1

²⁹⁷ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.5*, June 2010:1

The Gambling Community Benefit Fund is a state wide fund established in 1994 that distributes funds on a quarterly basis.²⁹⁸ RFBs throughout the state are eligible to apply by forwarding their applications via QFRS Rural Operations. The RFB can only have one application current at any time. Once the application is approved by the Area Director Rural Operations it is forwarded to the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations for approval and to act as sponsor. The application will receive a maximum of four considerations then lapse. Successful RFBs can reapply for funding usually after 12 months have expired.²⁹⁹

The Jupiter's Casino Community Benefit Fund was established in 1987 and has a limited area from which applications can be accepted for one-off grants up to \$150,000.³⁰⁰ There are four funding rounds per year, where an application may be considered. An application will only be considered once by the Fund. The application process involves the RFB completing the electronic application and emailing it to the Area Director Rural Operations for review and assessment. If the application is supported, a letter signed by the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations is generated followed by QFRS Rural Operations submitting the electronic copy to the Fund.³⁰¹

RFB Association Queensland (RFBAQ) Grant

The RFB Association Queensland Inc is a representative body for the RFB volunteers. They attend RFB or Group meeting and provide government and other organisations with advice on matters of policy, training, equipment, finance and vehicle safety.³⁰²

RFBAQ provides grants to RFB's primarily for equipment and training but will consider grants for other areas including Volunteer Support. Individual applications primarily are to range between \$500 (including GST) to \$7,500. Subject to availability in funding rounds, consideration may be given to a grant greater than \$7,500. Grant funds provided are only to be used for their approved purpose.³⁰³

Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Grant

QFRS provide grants up to \$10,000 for the construction, modification or refurbishment of a RFB fire station. To obtain the grant the RFB completes the application form and sends it to the Area Director Rural Operations for their consideration. The RFB is responsible for the construction; however QFRS must give permission for any changes to the fire station.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁸ Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation, www.olgr.qld.gov.au/grants/gcbf/index.shtml, April 2011

²⁹⁹ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.7.1*, June 2010:1-2

³⁰⁰ Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation, www.olgr.qld.gov.au/grants/jccbf/index.shtml, April 2011

³⁰¹ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.7.2*, June 2010:1-2

³⁰² RFB Association Queensland, www.rfbaq.org/about-rfbaq.aspx, May 2011

³⁰³ RFB Association Queensland, www.rfbaq.org/rfbaq-grants.aspx, May 2011

³⁰⁴ Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Rural Operations, *RFB Manual 2010- Version 1.2 – Conducting Business D3.7.4*, June 2010:1

Appendix 7 – Comparison with Other Jurisdictions

NSW

The New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) is the lead agency for bushfire management and mitigation in New South Wales (NSW). The NSW RFS administers the *Rural Fires Act 1997* (RFA) which establishes a single rural fire service. The RFA is supported by the *Rural Fire Regulation 2008*. Under the RFA, the management and operational responsibilities of the NSW RFS are:

- protection of life and property for all fire-related incidents within all rural fire districts in the State;
- safety and welfare of all volunteers;
- provision of effective training and resources to RFBs; and
- provision of emergency service organisations.³⁰⁵

The NSW RFS operates with 2,094 brigades and approximately 70,000 volunteers. The NSW RFS is managed by a Commissioner. NSW is divided into four regions which are each staffed by a Regional Manager, district staff, and volunteers. Fire Control Officers (FCC) at the district or local government level are appointed to manage the day-to-day affairs of brigades.³⁰⁶

The NSW RFS also undertakes broader duties in supporting other agencies in emergency situations such as transport accidents, flood and storm and search and rescue situations.³⁰⁷

The NSW RFS is funded by the New South Wales government; community sponsors; fundraising activities undertaken by brigades; and donations.³⁰⁸

Victoria

Victoria has country and metropolitan fire and emergency service. The Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) provide state-wide fire and related emergency coordination. The primary operational arrangement between the two agencies is the Joint Operation Activities Memorandum of Understanding entered into in July 2006.

The CFA is constituted under the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (CFA Act). Some of the duties and responsibilities placed upon the CFA derive from other statutes including: the *Building Act 1993*; *Liquor Control Act 1987*; *Caravans Parks and Mobile Dwelling Regulations 1993*; *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*; and *Dangerous Goods and Handling Regulations 1989*.

The CFA operates with over 1,200 brigades and 59,000 volunteers who provide services throughout regional Victoria (except state forests and parks) and outer metropolitan Melbourne. CFA has a state headquarters and eight region headquarters across Victoria and within these Regions there are 20 CFA Districts.

³⁰⁵ NSW Government, Rural Fire Service http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=1129 [31 May 2011]

³⁰⁶ NSW Government, Rural Fire Service http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=1129 [31 May 2011]

³⁰⁷ NSW Government, Rural Fire Service http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=1129 [31 May 2011]

³⁰⁸ NSW Government, Rural Fire Service http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=1129 [31 May 2011]

The CFA Authority constituted under the CFA Act is responsible for the CFA's overall performance and compliance with legislation. The Chief Executive Officer appointed by the Authority is responsible for implementing policies and general business administration. The State Control Centre based in Melbourne coordinates resource allocation for the management of incidents across the state.

The Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the single body which represents all CFA Volunteers. The VFBV brings together the Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association and the Victorian RFBs Association which are both established under the Act. The VFBV Board and the CFA Board meet for strategic consultation on matters impacting on volunteers.

The CFA receives funding of annual estimated expenditure through the Victorian State Government, insurance complaints (through fire service levies on insurance premiums) and from other companies. The CFA also receives income from the sales of goods and services to external bodies such as the provision of external training services, fire protection fees, and alarm monitoring. Other CFA income includes Commonwealth Government Grants and public donations.³⁰⁹

South Australia

The South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) is a volunteer based fire and emergency service in regional and semi-metropolitan South Australia. The South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) is the primary provider of structural fire fighting services to South Australia.

The CFS consists of approximately 15,000 volunteers and 110 staff. The CFS divides South Australia into six regions. The legislation governing the CFS is the South Australia *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005*. Other legislation governing some of the operations of the CFS include: *Emergency Management Act 2004*; *Fire and Emergency Services Regulations*; *Native Vegetation Act and Regulations*; and EPA Guidelines for Burning.

The CFS is managed by the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM), the Chief Executive Officer of SAFECOM and the Chief Officer.

The South Australia *Emergency Services Funding Act 1998* imposes a levy for the provision of emergency services; to establish the Community Emergency Services Fund (the 'Emergency Services Levy'); and for other purposes. The Emergency Services Levy funding provides for the training, equipment and administration resources required to maintain the operation of the CFS and other emergency services across South Australia.

Western Australia

The Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) facilitates the development and maintenance of emergency management arrangements for Western Australia and provides advice and support on emergency management issues to stakeholders at all levels of government.³¹⁰

On 1 January 1999, FESA was formally established as a statutory government authority to replace both the Fire Brigades Board and the Bush Fires Board. The establishment of FESA resulted from recommendations from a taskforce set up by the Western Australian government in June 1997 to look at ways of improving planning and coordination across Western Australia's emergency services.

³⁰⁹ Victorian Country Fire Authority. <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about/whatwedo.htm> [1 June 2011]

³¹⁰ FESA. <http://internet.fesa.wa.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx> [1 June 2011]

The FESA is established under the *Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia Act 1998*. Other acts facilitating the operation of FESA include: *Fire Brigades Act 1942*; *Bush Fires Act 1954*; *Emergency Services Levy Act 2002*; and *Emergency Management Act 2005*.

FESA operates with 30,000 volunteers and 900 career fire fighters. FESA supports a number of services including: Bush Fire Service; Fire and Rescue Service; Volunteer Fire Service; and Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service. Local Governments have responsibilities under the *Bush Fires Act 1954* in relation to bush fire prevention, control and extinguishment as well as the operation of volunteer bush fire brigades.

FESA's funding sources include the Emergency Services Levy (ESL), State Government funding, and other revenue and Commonwealth Government grants.

The ESL funds the majority Western Australia's fire and emergency services, including all career fire stations, volunteer fire brigades, State Emergency Service units and the multi-purpose volunteer emergency service units. It has been noted that since ESL funding was introduced in 2003/04, Western Australia's fire and emergency services have improved dramatically, in particular, to regional areas. Previously there were over nine systems in place to fund emergency services.³¹¹

Funding to state emergency services units and local government bush fire brigades is conducted through an ESL funded grants program. Operating grants are paid to local governments in equal, quarterly instalments. Funding to the career Fire and Rescue Service, volunteer Fire and Rescue Service and Volunteer Emergency Service Units are provided through FESA's financial procedures.

Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre

The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) is made up of all the fire and land management agencies in Australia and New Zealand, CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Attorney General's Department and several other fire related organisations.³¹² QFRS is a member and actively supports research for operational benefit.³¹³

The centre is conducting research into the social, environmental and economic impacts of bushfires. The research programs contain a wide range of projects. They involve members of fire and land management organisations, universities, Australian Federal Government agencies, and New Zealand forest research agencies.³¹⁴

The CRC's mission is to enhance the management of the bushfire risk to the community in an economically and ecologically sustainable manner. It includes the following objectives:

- To develop an internationally renowned centre of excellence to lead bushfire research in Australia;
- To provide a research framework that will improve the effectiveness of bushfire management agencies;
- To increase the self-sufficiency of communities in managing the risks from bushfires.³¹⁵

³¹¹ FESA http://www.fesa.wa.gov.au/internet/upload/375571069/docs/before_ESL_intro.pdf [1 June 2011]

³¹² <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/about>

³¹³ DES, *Foundations of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service*, 2008: 35

³¹⁴ <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/about>

³¹⁵ <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/about>

The CRCs are funded through an Australian Government program to bring together researchers from universities, CSIRO and other government organisations, and private industry or public sector agencies in long-term collaborative arrangements that support research and development and education activities to achieve real outcomes of national economic and social significance.³¹⁶

The program emphasises the importance of developing collaborative arrangements between researchers and between researchers and research users in the private and public sector in order to maximise the capture of the benefits of publicly funded research through an enhanced process of commercialisation or utilisation by the users of that research.³¹⁷

The aim of these collaborative links is increase the efficiency and cost effectiveness of research and research training and make better use of research resources through sharing of major facilities and equipment.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/about>

³¹⁷ <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/about>

³¹⁸ <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/about>

