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Mr Mark Furner MP
Chair
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House, George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Furner

Thank you for your correspondence received on 21 May 2015 regarding the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee (the Committee) consideration of Queensland Audit Office (QAO) Report No. 10 2014-15, *Bushfire prevention and preparedness* (the Report).

The Public Safety Portfolio has considered the questions raised in your correspondence and has provided responses in *Attachment 1* to this letter.

Should you require further assistance or advice, please contact Russell Neuendorf, Executive Director, Operational Service Improvement and Performance Directorate, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (telephone 3635 3021; email Russell.Neuendorf@qfes.qld.gov.au) or Samantha Thompson, Director, Policy, Public Safety Business Agency (telephone 3364 6507; email Samantha.Thompson@psba.qld.gov.au).

We trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Katarina Carroll APM
Commissioner
Queensland Fire and Emergency
Services

Kelvin Anderson PSM
Chief Executive Officer
Public Safety Business Agency

Attachment 1

Responses to Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee questions relating to the Queensland Audit Office Report No. 10 2014-15, *Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness*

1. What progress has been made with the establishment of Area Fire Management Groups? (recommendation 1.1)

Area Fire Management Groups (AFMGs) have been established in all Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) areas across Queensland, with most covering the boundaries of local government areas. Governance arrangements for AFMGs have been finalised as part of the establishment process, including updated Terms of Reference, Business Rule documentation and Area Fire Management Plan (AFMPs) templates for the preparation of Plans by each AFMG by the end of 2015.

Extensive consultation was undertaken by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) in establishing AFMGs, including with Local and District Disaster Management Groups, the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the State Inter-departmental Committee (SIDC) on Bushfires. The SIDC has representation from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Department of Transport and Main Roads, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and HQ Plantations (Queensland's largest plantation company).

2. What improvements have been made to the reporting and evaluation of hazard reduction burns? (recommendation 1.2)

While QFES and AFMGs play a role in encouraging, supporting and coordinating bushfire mitigation activity, the management of fuel loads remains the responsibility of landholders.

Nonetheless, QFES has improved the reporting and evaluation of hazard reduction burns through changes to 'Operation Cool-burn' reporting processes to ensure data is recorded on the time and location of a mitigation burn. These processes also record other mitigation measures such as the removal of potential bushfire hazards (e.g. slashing, creation of fire breaks) and Community Education programs undertaken.

In addition, a new reporting mechanism has been established for AFMGs to record planned hazard reduction and other bushfire mitigation activities as part of the preparation and reporting of AFMPs. The Public Safety Business Agency's (PSBA) redi-portal mapping tool has been provided to selected AFMGs on a trial basis to assist with the identification of high risk bushfire prone locations. This information will assist AFMGs to allocate resources and perform risk reduction activities in these areas. It is proposed that the mapping tool will be provided to all AFMGs for use in planning for the 2016 bushfire season.

Furthermore, QFES is considering the establishment of a central entity to coordinate activities for bushfire mitigation on a state-wide basis. The entity would have oversight of AFMGs, Bushfire Safety Officers (BSO) and Fire Wardens, and work closely with the SIDC and Regional Interdepartmental Committees on Bushfires. QFES also plans to create three (3) additional BSO positions by the end of 2015 to support the bushfire mitigation agenda.

3. What steps have been taken to improve the coordination of bushfire arson matters? (recommendation 1.4)

QFES is currently undertaking a number of actions to improve the coordination of bushfire arson matters and appropriate referral of bushfire arson cases to the Queensland Police Service (QPS).

Initial planning for a Reducing Unlawful Fires project between QFES and QPS is currently being undertaken with the aim of promoting enhanced information sharing and interagency procedures as well as the introduction of a technical intelligence-sharing solution based on an Arson Trend Analysis System.

Significant consultation between QFES and QPS has also taken place regarding options for closer working relationships during the investigation of fire incidents, and discussions with the Department of Justice and Attorney-General have been undertaken on whether existing legislation in relation to arson offences is sufficient.

Terms of Reference for the SIDC have recently been updated to stipulate that it is responsible for providing direction on effective strategies for the prevention of bushfire arson.

4. What contribution has QFES made to the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC) on bushfire research? (recommendation 1.4)

QFES provides a financial contribution and in-kind support to the BNHCRC. Through the former Standing Council of Police and Emergency Management (SCPEM) Queensland has agreed to financially contribute to the BNHCRC over an eight-year period. The financial contribution in 2014-15 is \$206 400. The extent of QFES in-kind support depends on the level of engagement with individual projects, but was valued at \$15 661 in 2013-14.

QFES is represented on the BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum and the Research Adoption Working Group. QFES staff also regularly attend BNHCRC meetings and research seminars to capture relevant research outcomes for the organisation and to provide guidance and input into BNHCRC research projects.

QFES staff are closely involved with individual research projects by being a nominated end user and providing project oversight functions. Some examples of these projects are the Bushfire Monitoring & Prediction Research Cluster; the Prescribed Burning & Catchment Management Research Cluster; the Scenario Analysis Research Cluster; and the Next Generation Fire Modelling Research Cluster. QFES is also currently negotiating with the BNHCRC to have a more active involvement in relevant projects by having the research undertaken in Queensland.

5. What measures is QFES taking to ensure relevant information is provided to Local Disaster Management Groups? (recommendation 1.5)

AFMGs have been established to coordinate and plan bushfire mitigation activities and will be actively involved in Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMGs) to ensure relevant information and support regarding bushfire risk is provided.

It is further proposed that once AFMPs are finalised, they will become a sub-plan of Local Disaster Management Plans (LDMPs). AFMPs will identify bushfire hazards and risks to the local community and through LDMPs will be linked to the District and State disaster management structure as part of the established hierarchy within the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements.

The PSBA redi-portal mapping tool will also be provided to LDMG representatives which will allow them to better allocate resources and perform risk reduction activities in their areas.

6. What evaluation mechanisms for educational material are being developed and applied? (recommendation 2.1)

Evaluation mechanisms for bushfire educational materials have been finalised by QFES and are currently being applied, including the collection of written feedback following training that is delivered to community groups and individuals. This training is mostly delivered by volunteers on behalf of QFES and volunteers are being encouraged to promote the use of the evaluation tools by trainees. Alternative solutions are also being considered, including smartphone applications to capture feedback more efficiently and effectively.

In addition, a survey has been developed and is being disseminated to those people who download QFES school-based programs such as bushfire education materials and who indicate a willingness to be contacted for feedback. The results of these surveys indicate overall satisfaction with the Bushfire Education program but there is scope for improvement in some aspects that QFES will consider as part of the development of updated program materials.

7. What are the outcomes of QFES's examination of bushfire warnings and alerts? (recommendation 2.2)

QFES's examination of bushfire warnings and alerts is dependent on the outcomes of the National Review of Warnings and Information which examined standard warning and alert systems across Australia.

The National Review of Warnings and Information Final Report was endorsed by the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) in May 2015 and advances a national approach to the provision of warnings and information during emergencies, including enhanced consistency of warning frameworks across jurisdictions.

In response to the Final Report's recommendations, a dedicated, multi-hazard national working group will be formed to address the report's findings and oversee implementation of the recommendations. QFES representatives will form part of this national working group and provide Queensland input to the process.

8. How many new Public Information Officers have been trained?
(recommendation 2.2)

An additional 30 Public Information Officers (PIOs) have been trained by QFES since 1 July 2014. The training provides PIOs with a comprehensive overview of the PIO position, including roles and responsibilities, and outlines the way public information can be disseminated, the different threat levels, the warning matrix, the different advice notices, and how to request messages, warnings and community information.

9. Outline QFES's evaluation strategy to review the effectiveness of implemented recommendations (Report, page 14).

A draft evaluation strategy has been developed to examine the effectiveness of the implemented recommendations but it is not yet finalised.

The draft strategy includes a risk-based approach and outlines potential measurement criteria to gauge the success of the implemented actions/solutions. It also outlines the potential use of a number of different evaluation and analytical techniques to assist in measuring effectiveness, such as quantitative data collection and analysis, interviews with relevant staff and officers, stakeholder consultation and commentary, and evaluation against established best-practice.

10. Outline QFES's contribution to national work on the fire danger rating system.

QFES has contributed to the National Fire Danger Rating System through participation on the National Working Group Project Board and the Science Technical Working Group. QFES has provided expert input throughout the activities of both entities and also through a number of consultation phases undertaken as part of the various project elements.