

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	72
Submitted by:	Gregory Lincoln
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

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Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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The terms of reference call upon the committee to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly by 18 September 2025 on:

1. The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;
2. The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers;
3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;
4. The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups;
5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;
6. Opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
7. Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery;
8. First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap; and
9. Any other relevant matters, including academic and other diverse sources, and any relevant reports and reviews at the national level and across other states and territories.

Foreword

Primarily I will be writing about the Rural Fire Service(RFS) in general and Rural Fire Brigades (RFB's) which come under the Queensland Fire Department(QFD), previously named Queensland Fire & Emergency Services(QFES) until July 2024.

I personally see the inquiry trying to understand several things, but primarily it boils down to:-

- Why can't volunteers for Emergency Services be encouraged to join.
- Why can't volunteers for Emergency Services be retained.
- What impact this has on responding to incidents.

The first two aspects come about for many reasons, the most common reason mentioned in the last few years has been the Bluecard implementation by QFD, but this is one of many reasons, in fact the bluecard debacle isn't the biggest issue.

Unfortunately many rural fire personnel don't often look at the big picture, QFD also doesn't look at the big picture, and the general public doesn't have a clue to the dire situation civilians face.

The media typically report on disasters, showing the devastation, talking about loss of life, loss of properties, businesses and damage to infrastructure, unfortunately they don't understand what is happening on the ground post disaster during the clean up phase. The media writes stories about bullying, intimidation & sexual harassment and rightly so, but they avoid the topic of the ability to responding to emergencies & disasters.

Further to this it has become painfully obvious the media won't publish stories about declining volunteer numbers, I contacted Eden Guillespie from ABC, a month later I finally heard back from her, I returned an email never to hear from her again.

A lack of volunteers, especially in the RFS and SES will impact our ability as a state to recover from disasters, the ability to respond to disasters has already had a significant impact in the last 5 years in Queensland, we should be getting better, in actual fact we are not learning from the same mistakes that are made every time.

Don't get me wrong, the clean up phase with disasters, many things are being done correctly, there still needs to be significant improvement.

Since the Brisbane floods in 2011, I have extensively studied disaster response, as a Rural Firefighter, as a 1st Officer, as a Peer Support Officer. Along with sourcing all available media coverage of a disaster event. Being a 1st Officer and having been in charge with managing disasters within my area, I have gained a unique insight. As a software developer for about 30 years I look at things very differently.

No one can disagree that climate change is real; we are going to have more severe natural disasters along with the different types of natural disasters.

Personnel at all levels within the RFS and QFD need to think of the What If's factor, failing to do so civilians will become more frustrated, more civilians dying or be seriously injured.

I strongly believe the current situation can be resolved, it will mean that the Queensland Fire Department needs to understand what is going wrong and address the issues instead of the normal Bureaucracy, Red Tape, along with burying the head in the sand attitude along with their normal lip service.

The state government has also a major part to play, removing councils from the process of disaster management is a significant start, then implementing proper systems to assist communities.

My History in the Queensland Fire Department

Rural Firefighter since 2009

Peer Support Officer with Queensland Fire Department since 2011

Previously 1st Officer of Tamborine Mountain RFB for 7 Years

I joined Dayboro & District RFB in 2009, over the years due to assisting family members my wife and I have moved several times, thus transferred to various brigades over my 15+ years of Rural Fire Service, in order:-

1. Dayboro & District RFB
2. Tamborine Mountain RFB
3. Goomboorian RFB (attempted Transfer)
4. Neerdie RFB (attempted Transfer)
5. Iona RFB
6. Habana RFB
7. Bidwell RFB
8. Sandy Straits RFB (current brigade)

The attempt at transferring to Goomboorian & Neerdie RFBs was unsuccessful due to:-

- The 1st Officer at Goomboorian being very difficult to communicate with as he wouldn't return phone calls.
- Neerdie RFB took over 2 months to submit my paperwork to Area Office, by this time we had to move to Emerald.

I will always remember my time at Tamborine Mountain RFB, the brigade members are amazing people.

When I first transferred, there were about 15 firefighters, after I became 1st Officer, things gradually changed over the next 6-12 months, I adopted a zero tolerance approach to bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment, etc.

My approach was simple, I didn't care if you were gay, straight, transgender, religious, different cultural background or what your gender was, if you wanted to join the brigade and you were 16 or over with a heartbeat there was a role for you in the brigade.

I knew from the beginning that people viewed firefighters as a boys club, this had to change.

Upon leaving the brigade, they had 70 firefighters, 35% of the firefighters were ladies (10% above the state average), there were numerous different people, from England, New Zealand, China, Iran, Aboriginal and many other areas of Europe.

During my time with the brigade the major incidents the brigade attended were EX TC Oswald, EX TC Marcia, Ex TC Debbie and the Sarabah Fires, just to name a few, our brigade went on numerous deployments throughout the state and New South Wales, along with attending bushfires within our area and outside of our area.

In October 2017 I received the Qbank Achievement award for my work with the brigade.

Joining or attempting to transfer brigades has given me a unique insight into the way different brigades are managed, along with the interaction with the local area office their responsiveness to new or transferring members.

Why do people volunteer?

Volunteers fall into 4 distinct groups in no particular order:-

1. Those who have to volunteer to perform their 15hrs per week to meet centrelink requirements.
2. Those that wish to "Give Back", and/or wish to assist their community in times of need.
3. There are also volunteers that are lonely, retired, wish to get out of the house, socialize with other people.
4. Young people who see the possibility of using the Rural Fire Service as a stepping stone to their chosen career path to becoming a fulltime firefighter, Defense Force Firefighter, emergency services or health sector.

Volunteer Type 1

This type of volunteer has an obligation to fulfill to meet their Centrelink requirements to claim the JobSeeker Payment, the person must be over 60 years of age, and this is a stop gap until the person can claim the Aged Pension.

It appears a very high percentage of these people work in OP shops or community organisations, it would be near impossible for a Rural Firefighter or SES member to volunteer in this fashion.

The person is most likely to have some level of health complications that ultimately they are placed in a position of limbo, as they aren't old enough to get the pension, their health issue doesn't meet the criteria for the Disability Pension.

Volunteer Type 2

This type of volunteer is highly motivated to join an organisation like the Rural Fire Service or SES. Their primary focus is to help their local community. This is a great volunteer to have.

Volunteer Type 3

This type of volunteer can become highly motivated to do more with an organisation like the Rural Fire Service or SES once they see the possibilities. Health issues due to age might be a significant factor with limiting their ability to participate in all available roles.

Volunteer Type 4

This relates purely to volunteering as a Rural Fire Fighter, this type of volunteer is highly motivated and willing to learn anything they can along with responding to as many incidents, to me this is a great volunteer to have, and unfortunately too many brigades turn away this demographic of people due to their age and/or career goal, while I encouraged them to not just join but to help them wherever I can to obtain their chosen career path.

One particular young person joined the Tamborine Mountain Rural Fire Brigade at 16, he is now a Senior Firefighter with QFD based in the south east area of QLD, currently on Vancouver Island Canada on a 12 month exchange program. Our brigade had a good 4-5 years of this young man as a volunteer. This is one of several young people who went on to successful careers.

Structure of Rural Fire Brigades

within the Queensland Fire Department relative to this document.

The Rural Fire Service is a part of the Queensland Fire Department like Fire & Rescue.

The individual Rural Fire Brigades throughout the state make up the Rural Fire Service.

Every RFB in the state comes under an Area Office, there are several Area Offices throughout the state.

The Area Office is staffed with personnel with specific roles, Area Director(AD) who has the rank of Inspector, ,ATSO (Area Training Support Officer) and BTSO (Brigade Training & Support Officer). There are many other roles at the Area Office, for the purposes of this document these 3 roles, particularly the Inspector, I will be focusing on throughout this document.

The immediate superior to a 1st Officer in a Rural Fire Brigade is the Inspector/Area Director (AD).

The structure of a Brigade is in some ways complex, but I have seen it work well. And I have seen it work extremely badly.

There are 4 components of a brigade which are Officers, Firefighters, Support Members and Committee Members.

The 1st Officer is always also a committee member

Brigades have anywhere from 4 to 8 officers, in most cases it usually 4 Officers.

Support Members assist with fund raising events, also assisting with providing meals during periods of operations.

Committee Members are made up of firefighters or Support Members.

Committee Positions are Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, 1st Officer. When I was at Tamborine Mountain I also had 4 extra committee members which I said had to be people from different genders and age groups, this was to ensure all brigade members were represented at Management Meetings.

There are several other roles in the brigade, Communications Officer, Maintenance Officer, First Aid Officer, Training Officer, officially they are not officers as such but purely a title for a person fulfilling a role, the purpose of these people is to simply spread the workload within a brigade.

All officer and committee positions require people to be nominated for the position and the brigade members vote for the person, honestly it is a popularity vote, if someone has the numbers they can end up with any Officer or Committee role they wish. This is where the problems start.

Attracting and Retaining Personnel

When I joined Dayboro & District RFB, there was approximately at that time 44,000 rural fire brigade members, I say members because this not only includes firefighters but also support members, even the support members play an important role during incidents

The following is a list of reasons why the Rural Fire Service can not attract and retain enough members

- Bluecard Debacle
- Bullying, Intimidation and Sexual Harassment of Brigade Members.
- New Members Joining.
- Poor decisions, incompetence, negligence and lack of commonsense.
- Brigade Locations and/or Brigade Merging
- Stay at home parents
- Brigade Meetings vs Training, core skills and advanced training
- Providing catering on the fireground
- Despondent and disillusioned firefighters
- Lack of useful software systems
- Poor communication systems
- Reviews, Inquiries & Royal Commissions
- Volunteers that work or Parenting duties

Yes its quite a list, as you can see the Bluecard debacle is one among many other issues, brigades and firefighters attempt to use this issue as the catalyst for loosing so many personnel, in reality they are not focusing on all of the issues, they are look for something quick & simple to have a go at QFD.

When I originally joined there were 44,000 firefighters, in 2025 there are now about 27,000, this is a loss of 17,000 over a 15 year period, a 38% loss, in all reality we should have 60,000 plus firefighters.

Bluecard Debacle

While at Tamborine Mountain RFB, I wanted all firefighters to have bluecards, my reasoning was that we attended several events every year that involved children, School Colour Runs, Camp Quality, Station Open Days just to name a few, not one brigade member objected to filling out the paperwork.

If anyone couldn't be bothered with getting a bluecard in our brigade, my response would have been, that's fine but they wouldn't be able to attend events with children, but as I said no brigade members objected, remember 70 firefighters applied and obtained their bluecard.

When QFD decided that all brigade members had to have bluecards they basically said if you don't get a bluecard you can't be a part of a brigade, you're out the door.

Yes a number of personnel left the rural fire services, simply because they had had enough of paperwork.

This situation could easily have been averted and actually improved.

When a person joins a brigade they need to get a police check as a part of the application process, on the application form, there is a section that asks for approval to do this, the application should be changed so that the person approves for a police check and bluecard check, but also they approve for both checks to be done automatically every 2 years, the technology is there. Currently no further police checks are performed after they join and they also have to renew their bluecard, from memory every 2 years.

At present a brigade member could have a conviction recorded after they join a brigade and it never be discovered.

Bullying, Intimidation and Sexual Harassment & Complaint Process

Several times during 2024 there have been media reports of these type of behaviors, the problem in the first place is that it is happening education can play a role in attempting to eradicate this issue.

The main place to start to tackle this is the complaints process; the investigation of any complaint must be performed by an organisation outside of the QFD organisation.

When a firefighter wishes to lodge a formal complaint we have to follow the chain of command, which means the Area Office Inspector or higher depending on the complaint, the issue with this everyone knows everyone as in 2 degrees of separation between perpetrator and the person investigating the complaint.

[REDACTED]

The process of investigation also seems to take many months; most complaints could and should have been completed within a week, along with the appropriate action.

There have been cases where Area Directors(Inspectors) have had complaints lodged against them, in one particular instance in the last 12 months the Inspector went on extended leave and then returned to his role some 3-4 months later with no outcomes, the complaint centered around bullying, intimidation, negligence and incompetence .

Many members have left brigades due to Bullying, Intimidation and Sexual Harassment, but other members have also left in support of the victim, I know in one particular case 2 ladies where being targeted in a brigade and 9 members ended up leaving.

New Members Joining

There are numerous issues with this topic.

When a new Member joins it takes normally 6 weeks for an application to be processed, in these days with technology the application should be processed within 1 week.

When I joined Dayboro & District RFB, I had to attend the monthly meeting for 3 months, then the brigade voted for me to be accepted as a brigade member, then I could fill out an application form, if my application was approved then I was issued with my volunteer number then I was issued with PPE which had to be ordered in. Then I could start my training and assessment process for me to take part in fighting fires

Many brigades still work like this.

Summary of time;

- 3 Months Attending Monthly meetings
- 6 weeks While application was being processed
- 1 month To obtain PPE
- 2 months waiting for a Firefighter minimum skills course to become available and the assessment.

At a minimum it takes 7 months to from the time you first walk in the door until they allowed me on the fireground.

Further to this the brigade held maybe 2 or 3 actual training nights before I had reached the stage of obtaining my PPE.

The brigade I am currently with put in 3 new member applications(late 2023), 3 months later the applications still hadn't been processed, thus these 3 people said they weren't interested in the end, the reason from Area Office was that they had lost the applications a couple of times.

The first thing that needs to be fixed is that applications are lodged online, the current paperwork is archaic.

At Tamborine Mountain RFB, I adopted a simple process, when a person wanted to join the brigade,

- Potential new members were encouraged to arrive at 18.30, with training started at 19.00
- I introduced myself and in 1 minute I outlined that after the quick 10 minute discussion before training started I would explain to them the process of joining and talk about what the brigade expected from personnel.
 - The discussion period was simply to talk about anything to do with the brigade, in some ways it could also be referred to as an informal mini meeting.
- I would then pair up the person with a current firefighter, to ensure the person had a coffee, tea or soft drink, and something to eat if they wished, every training night the local subway donated a huge platter, the purpose also was to introduce the new person to other current members. The role of the firefighter was to stay with the new person until I retrieved them after a discussion, in some cases we had several potential new members attend, thus each person was paired with a different firefighter.
- The whole point of the above process was to show the new member, you're welcome here and not left sitting in the corner.
- After the discussion period when training started I then took potential new member(s) out to the shed where the fire appliances were located.
 - I showed the vehicles and explained their role (10 mins)
 - I showed the facility (5 mins)
 - Explained the structure of the brigade, officers & committee etc (5 mins)
 - Spoke about our zero policy approach to issues like Sexual Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, I went on to explain we as a brigade don't tolerate judging people on their gender, sexual orientation religious or political beliefs, to resolve any issues you had 2 options change yourself 180 degrees or resign from the brigade. I actually had one lady say to me she had applied to the local SES the first thing out of the Group Leaders mouth was "I hope your not a [REDACTED] princess", I was just stunned and didn't know what to say in response.
 - All personnel were encouraged to do any courses they wished, this included obtaining a truck license and chainsaw certification or if they wished, simply just to do the firefighter minimum skills as a basic course.

- I then explain about filling out the application form, the police check and bluecard requirements.
- As the brigade trained every week they were encourage to attend as often as they could.
- All up the above process took about 30 minutes, I then said if you want you can fill out the application form straight away. I may have had over the 7 years only a couple of people not fill out an application form. The first delay/obstacle I removed from this process was the requirement for the brigade to vote on accepting them, this eradicates 3 months of delay.
- The same night the application form was filled out along with a scanned copy of their license, they application forms were scanned and emailed and then put in the mail that night, our brigade always kept a scanned copy of all applications, in case they were lost at Area Office.
- Every 2 weeks the Secretary followed up with Area Office in regards to the current progress of the application.
- As per the rules of the Rural Fire Service no new member can obtain PPE or attend training until their application is processed and they are issued their volunteer number.
- On the next attendance which was usually the following week we would start their training process, yep I had to break the rules but it was effective, it kept the new member engaged.
- I also further broke the rules and issued their PPE, once again it kept the member engaged and it made it safe for them during the training process.
 - The brigade secretary ensured we had a stock of PPE in our storage room.
- I ensured that the brigade had a primary focus on using core skills, eg using pumps, hoses etc, thus a significant amount of time was devoted to 2 areas prior to receiving their volunteer number, Core Skills and Passing Firefighter Minimum Skills once again it kept the member engaged.
- Once the person had obtained their volunteer number they were legally covered by Workcover, thus I can allow them to take part in mainly Hazard Reduction burns, but if there was a bushfire incident that was a very low risk, I felt they had a good level of competency and there were with very capable crew members I would allow them to go out, once again it kept the member engaged.

In Summary

I could have in some cases have a new member out on the fireground under strict supervision within 6 weeks, once they obtained their volunteer number, yes I broke the rules yes I was lucky no one was injured but in all reality it is the only way to keep volunteers engaged, how many people would have I lost due to the slow QFD process.

Another issued raised by other brigades and particularly 1st Officers is allowing young people to join, remember a 16yo can join and fight bushfires, their reasoning was that they were using the Rural Fire Service as a stepping stone to join Queensland Fire & Rescue either as an Auxiliary or Permanent, or the Defense Force, I saw this from a different perspective, in that if I had 2 years minimum out of that young person that was a bonus, the earliest they could join Auxillaries or Permanents was 18.

Thus during my talk to potential new recruits, I said to them if they were interested in a career as a firefighter, I would not only support it but encourage them. Our facility was a joint station which means there were Auxiliary Firefighters they had a separate shed for their fire appliance(2), but we shared the same meeting room and kitchen they had separate office to our office.

The Auxiliaries was a potential next step for some people, in fact at one stage approx 6 Rural Firefighters were also Auxiliaries, these people gave up 2 nights a week to train with the Rural and Auxiliary brigades as they trained separately.

At present a young man who joined our brigade when he turned 16, is now a permanent firefighter who is on an exchange program as a firefighter on Vancouver Island, another young lady is still serving in the Australian Airforce as a firefighter, now for 10 years. He has the rank of Senior firefighter and has been Acting Station Officer.

Some people, ladies particularly can become apprehensive about driving trucks, especially under lights and sirens or using chainsaws, but with the right amount of encouragement if they wish to and the right training

they usually succeed. I had one lady say to me she would love to drive a truck, but she felt she was too short she was at the most 5ft, once I showed her a way to remove the charging plug and adjust the seat to suit her I couldn't hold her back.

Age & Health is the enemy of a firefighter with remaining on the fireground or attending incidents, but there are always things to be done during an incident in a role of support, these members are also encouraged to attend training nights to keep up with brigade news.

Meetings, every brigade must have an AGM once a year, every 2nd year it is a voting AGM, also brigades are encouraged to have monthly meetings, I changed this to 1 general meeting a year which was about 6 months before an AGM, firefighters particularly aren't interested in meetings, this was simply shown by the attendance out of 70 firefighters maybe 15 would turn up for a general meeting, the only meeting where the attendance was higher was for the AGM particularly the voting AGM,

The bottom line is you need to keep people engaged no matter if they are a new member or a longer serving member or a Support Member.

Meetings don't keep people engaged, training and attending incidents keeps people engaged.

Poor decisions, incompetence, negligence and lack of commonsense

Unfortunately this section mainly relates to Area Directors(Inspectors) & in some cases other staff within an Area Office either the BTSO or ATSO.

This issue has a direct impact on volunteer numbers, for 2 distinct reasons, it makes firefighters feel unsafe and the frustration of incompetence and negligence of Area Office

Example 1

Approx September 2023 there was a house fire at [REDACTED] a Fire & Rescue Brigade attended the house fire, with [REDACTED] RFB also attending to transport water from the RFB tank behind the [REDACTED] Community Hall, the tank holds approx 22,000L, keep in mind the bushfire season starts at least as early July thus the area is rather dry.

It took 10 days, yes that's right ten days for the inspector to have the tank refilled, they were attempting to get Tinana brigade to fill the tank using their tanker, and this is where the frustration with this type of management starts.

What the Inspector didn't understand was that the tank should have been filled that night, the Inspector doesn't understand the What If factor, What If another house caught fire, What If a bushfire started.

Instead the Inspector was maybe trying to save money by having volunteers fill the tank, some facts of this very poor decision.

- It would have taken 5 trips by the tanker to fill the poly tank behind the [REDACTED] Hall.
- The truck would have to travel about 19.7Ks which is a 39.4K round trip per load this would have meant 5 trips. As the [REDACTED] tanker has a capacity of about 5000L.
- The nearest water hydrant is in [REDACTED]
- This would have taken probably 8 hours to perform when you consider not just travel time but also loading and unloading time.
- A bulk liquid tanker should have been called upon that night when the fire started, to fill the tank, even most domestic water carriers carry 12,000L

If the Inspector was quizzed over his decision to use the [REDACTED] tanker he would have justified his decision by saying it save money.

He would have further justified his decision by saying that if there was another fire in the area, water could be sourced from peoples tanks, this is where the obvious goes out the window, local residents would have been low on water in their tanks, trying to get water out of domestic tanks is difficult, and of course what about the resident with no water in their tank.

He would have also possibly said that there are 22,000L RFB Tanks at [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED] is 17mins 22.3 Ks from [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] is 10 mins 12Ks from [REDACTED]

Keep in mind that these times might not seem very long, but you need to add more time to load the truck, and the fire is getting bigger.

The simple fact that a fire increases in size as time progresses eludes many Area Office staff, I know I'm being very critical but this shows the level of frustration for brigades.

Example 2

In about mid 2023 I attended a meeting at Area Office that was chaired by the Acting Inspector; the topic was about the planned building of a new Rural Facility to be built near the show grounds.

3 Brigades were to be given the option of relocating to the brigade, I raised 2 main objections:

1. Brigades would be cut off from their vehicles during severe weather events
 - a. His response was that this was the role of SES to respond to these incidents
 - b. That was his first mistake, Rural Fire Brigades do respond to what has been traditional SES roles.
2. North of the road that goes from [REDACTED] is a huge area of QPWS reserve, not to mention huge areas of pine trees on HQ Plantation land
 - a. His response was that, this is the role for Queensland Parks & Wildlife to put a fire out.
 - b. This is his second mistake, in his role he should know how long it would take QPWS to respond.
 - c. For QPWS to respond it would be a minimum of 2 hours if they were able to.

Example 3

I had a Regional Manager and Area Director turn up to have a discussion at [REDACTED] RFB, it was just after EX TC Debbie, we worked closely with the 2 local police officers that were on duty, we were actually under police direction from 13.00 until about 22.00. In fact our first task at the request of the police was to direct traffic as required, while the council cleared a couple of small landslides.

The Regional Manager said in future we were to not work under police direction.

He also stated:-

- we upset the local police by being out on the road
- If we were returning to the station and saw a tree over the road we were to either drive around the tree or seek an alternate route.
- We are not authorized to direct traffic, if directed by police to do so.

These are just a couple of things he said, but they were the stupidest of things to be said or were outright lies.

Our brigade wrote a formal complaint, the Chief Superintendant (at that time) responded by wanting to only address the issues with myself and the chairman not all of those present.

I actually would have asked one of the police officers to attend. The RFBAQ ignored our request for assistance with the issues, because the Regional Manager was a mate of the president.

Thus we didn't pursue the matter.

But I told all brigade members present at the meeting we would ignore any directives he stated at the meeting, my reasons were:-

- His directives were in direct conflict with the Public Safety Act.
- If a crew drove past a down tree on the road and a member of the public was injured, I would have personally felt responsible for the injury or possible death, but also due to the attitude of my fellow brigade members they would have felt the same as myself.

I did email the most senior police officer on duty the night of the EX TC Debbie, he stated the community would not have coped without us all working together, he further stated that the Regional Manager didn't speak to anyone at the station, not would have anyone from the station made a complaint. He was extremely angry at the conduct of the Regional Manager, personally I think the Regional Manager would not have wanted to be pulled over by the local police.

So in summary, the frustration by particularly Brigade Officers which the other firefighters find out about has a detrimental direct impact with retention of members. "Why do I bother" is a common statement by personal.

Brigade Locations and/or Brigade Merging

My nearest & current brigade I'm a member of is [REDACTED] which is 18mins 23.3Ks from my place, I was for a very short time a member of [REDACTED] RFB that is 20mins 26Ks, while it is only 2 mins further I decided to transfer to [REDACTED] RFB that was 2 minutes closer, while it might seem 2 mins is irrelevant, as you read on it was going to be a problem and not just from a time perspective.

QFD had decided to move the [REDACTED] brigade from its current location to the new facility to be built next to the [REDACTED] Showgrounds, which would have meant an extra 20mins 16k trip for me, but what Area Office had not considered was how many firefighters would be cut off from responding.

To compound the issue there was also 2 other brigades they stated at the time [REDACTED] brigades would have the option to move into the facility. The key words used by the Acting Inspector constantly during the meeting was "Opt Out"

Now to explain a little about the facility, we were shown the architects drawings up on the projector screen, there was significant detail in the plan that was proposed I could see this was well on the way to being built in fact I discovered QFD owned the land at this point in time.

Further to this there were 9 double bays for firefighting appliances, what this means is 18 fire trucks could be parked in the shed, between [REDACTED] brigades there is about 9 appliances at an absolute maximum, the question to myself was so what about the other 9 bays, obviously there were other brigades that were going to be relocating, later I was to learn that [REDACTED] brigades were also going to be moved.

I also noted that only [REDACTED] brigades were present, this was interesting as the Acting Inspector said that all 3 brigades if they opted in would still remain as individual brigades, with their own committee and officers. [REDACTED] has the highest number of members that's why they weren't present.

As I said to my other brigade members after the meeting, they didn't have the option to opt out, this had been decided by QFD months ago possibly as long as 2 years ago, I pointed out obvious facts which they hadn't considered. Further to this, while initially the 5 brigades would have stayed individual, personnel from area office either would have force or talked brigade members to adopt a 1 brigade situation, thus [REDACTED] would have the numbers to vote with keeping their committee and officers.

Once again there would have been several firefighters leave the Rural Fire Service, if this merging of brigades occurred.

The other significant issue is personnel being able to respond to their station, remember that no matter what QFD say rural firefighters get responded to all types of incidents as SES can't cope and will never cope with the demand, for me that means I can get cut off due to flood waters from my station, not just in 1 place but about 5 or 6, 3 of these locations are within 5 ks of where we live.

Realistically there should be brigades located in [REDACTED], but now we have QFD pushing for the 5 brigades to be merged into the TAFE complex instead of building a new facility, the TAFE complex is not far from the showground location.

When I spoke to the Area Director about starting brigades in [REDACTED], I was told that it wasn't needed, there hadn't been the fire activity to justify the new brigades, nor is the population in the communities, remember this Area Director thinks we won't be responding to other types of incidents and wants to predict Mother Nature. Unfortunately he also doesn't understand that the time it takes to start putting out the fire from the time you get the call the fire has grown considerably, these are basic facts & concepts.

November 2023 there was a fire about 7Ks west at [REDACTED] I was at our station for the AGM, myself and one other responded in the truck got to the fire scene, 30 mins later other crews turned up from [REDACTED], the fire had grown from 50m x 50m to 300m x 150m in 30 mins luckily there wasn't much wind. If there were brigades in [REDACTED] I can guarantee that the fire would not have grown to such a size.

If a brigade was located in [REDACTED] I can easily recruit 5 members, this is just people I know, with a population of about 326 people in [REDACTED] getting 10+ people won't be hard.

The current attitude of my neighbors, is why should I join a brigade 20Ks away, and I agree with them, you need the resources, trucks & equipment in your community to assist and protect your community.

Further to this I sent an email to John Barounis State Member for Maryborough to get his position on merging of brigades as this was the previous Labor leader policy, to date 29/01/2025 I have had no response from a month ago, so it looks as if the stupidity continues.

Brigade Meetings vs Training, core kills and advanced training

It's rather disturbing that many brigades spend more time on having monthly meetings than performing training, this needs to change, rural firefighters in general are bored with meetings, sure they have a purpose but there is a far better way to conduct brigade business.

- Brigades only need to have 2 meetings per year A General Meeting and an AGM.
- The Committee can have a Management meeting every 1 or 2 months if they wish
- Any outcomes from the Management Meeting can be brought to the attention of the firefighters before training starts.
- Training must occur with every brigade at least fortnightly; ensuring basic core skills are regularly practiced.

It's simple firefighters are generally not interested in meetings.

If personnel come to the opinion that a brigade spends more time on meetings than training or little to no training then they will leave.

Some of the training provided by QFD is actually a waste of time and used as a filler to pad out the course eg for firefighter minimum skills people have to complete a worker's compensation form, I wonder if it is put in to scare people from continuing their training.

Advanced Training is seriously lacking, while I was 1st Officer I never had the opportunity to do the Brigade Officer or 1st Officer course, courses are constantly postponed or cancelled even if they are offered in the first place.

Providing catering at an incident

This must be addressed and quickly.

Many times over the years as 1st Officer I have received a request for a crew to assist at a fire out of our area and to report to the incident control at 18.00, now most people work until 17.00, this gives them 1 hour to get home, change, get to the fire station and arrive at the staging area for the incident, where of course there is no food to be found.

And/or half way through a night shift there is still no food, so let's assume the firefighter ate at midday, they won't get any food until they leave the incident which will be a minimum of 18 hours.

Several years ago the [REDACTED] rural fire brigade converted a catering vehicle to attend incidents in the southeast region, so firefighters would get fed, this idea came about by Mr Corey Bock my Inspector(Area Director) at the time, but when we got a new Regional Manager and new Area Director it was the Regional Manager who decided in his wisdom to do away with the catering vehicle, stupidity at its finest.

The volunteered that used the vehicle Caroline Rasmussen prepared food that was most welcome with fire crews, she was widely know in the southeast region, her employer went above and beyond at the time to release her from work.

Despondent and Disillusioned Firefighters (Low Morale)

The effects of the previous pages can be seen very quickly to the average reader, it really comes down to 2 phrases "Why Bother", my personal feeling is "I'm too Old for this [REDACTED]"

1st Officers are the next in the chain of command under the Area Directors, I can accept that structure will never change in fact it has to stay like that, but personnel as Area Directors need training, their negligence, incompetence and outright stupid things they say is having an enormous impact on retaining rural firefighters, our numbers need to grow significantly over the next 12 months.

When a 1st Officer has low morale, they share their burden with other officers, thus the brigade as a whole learn of anything out of area office.

Don't get me wrong, some Area Directors are brilliant and set the bar that other Area Directors need to aspire to.

The under lying thought by Area Office staff for years has been that brigades will always attract new members, thus replacing any that leave, but the facts are there, we are down 17,000 members (38%) over 15 years.

The review by KPMG has impacted the moral of rural fire personnel greatly, which has brought about major changes for brigades this will see more personnel leave over the next 12 months, I suspect at least 1000 personnel will leave, several have left already.

Lack of useful Software Systems

The Queensland Fire Department loves their portal system which is meant to solve all problems for rural fire fighters, it actually doesn't work that well, more to the point volunteers refuse to use it, I am one of them.

Only one system has proven effective for QFD, that is the E-Log system used by all Peer Support Officers and Counsellors throughout the state, this system started being used in 2011 and still continues today.

QFD had the opportunity to use a software system designed for Volunteer Community Educators and also for Incident Control, but refused to adopt either of them. Particularly the Incident Control system has the ability to monitor firefighters shifts, this needs to be address as some firefighters are not being relieved after 12 hours some are doing 18-20 hours.

Poor Communication Systems

Being able to notify firefighters of an incident, is a time critical factor, particularly when there is a bushfire, while QFD has tried to roll out the new system, it still hasn't arrived, my current brigade can't even get notifications via SMS.

Previously when I was at [REDACTED] Brigade I received SMS messages from the Regional Operations Centre to supply crews for fires out of our area, this text was received by many 1st Officers in the south east region, the number to text our crew availability to was a sales rep in Western Australia. This incompetence by a Regional Manager is beyond belief.

Other times we had received SMS messages from unknown phone numbers to send crews, this is most disturbing as it could be a fake message that could compromise a crew.

Reviews, Inquiries & Royal Commissions

Several state governments over the last 15 years have called for Reviews, Inquiries & Royal Commissions, the reports always provide recommendations to various government departments, including the rural fire service, some of these recommendations are actually purely related to the rural fire service.

It has been noted by many firefighters that mostly recommendations that benefit the rural fire service hierarchy are adopted, rarely are firefighters listened to, even myself I have written several submissions over the years, never to receive a request to testify, I will be greatly surprised if I am requested to appear for this inquiry.

KPMG review

The latest being the KPMG review a document that many rural firefighters feel that QFD hierarchy told KPMG what must be contained in the document at a minimum, the recommendations contained in the document greatly benefit QFD and not the rural fire brigades or firefighters.

Further to this 145 extra personnel have been or in the process of being employed at the QFD headquarters, another 145 people to make bad decisions, another 145 people to create more redtape, while firefighter numbers are reducing every day.

Over the last 15 years these reviews have cost millions of dollars, at times requiring a change of uniform procedures, structure for personnel and stationary, again millions of dollars are wasted with no proper operational outcomes, one again brigades and firefighters are frustrated.

Volunteers that work or Parenting duties

This is a major issue even larger than the Bluecard debacle.

Ever since rural fire brigades were formed this has been an ongoing issue, I have a couple of solutions but there needs further discussion surrounding this issue.

Currently volunteers take holidays, sick days or leave without pay, the 3rd option usually happens when they have used up all of the holidays and sick days, you may find the odd employer who is willing to pay an employee while they are fighting fires or responding to incidents. Very few workplaces have a scheme setup to assist employees that are rural fire fighters.

Self employed people are usually far more flexible, but the underlying issue is that they have clients that are expecting a service, which can ultimately lead to losing work.

Both employee and the self employed situations can ultimately lead to loss of income as in paying bills and putting food on the table, there have been many cases over the years where employees have lost their jobs due to taking time off, for the self employed this equates to losing their business.

Myself as a self employed software developer, when I took a day off I simply couldn't invoice a client. The only way to make it up was to work after my fireground shift and/or on the weekend.

There needs to be a provision for volunteers in the industrial relations act to protect employees from being dismissed and/or being forced to use their holidays or sick days, but a volunteer simply needs to obtain an income from QFD.

At [REDACTED] RFB as mentioned before 35% of our brigade were ladies, probably 10 of these ladies had children, when assigning firefighters to crews I had to be careful with putting some ladies together due to child minding requirements.

The other untapped resource is stay at home parents, older people can assist with ensuring the children are taken care of with clothing, feeding, making lunches, taking them to school and picking them up from school, they need to take over the role of the parent while the parent is on the fireground as usually fireground shifts vary from 10-12 hours.

When I was at [REDACTED] several of the ladies organized a parents only recruitment day, all of the parents attending were ladies but the underlying problem was childcare, the brigade approached suitable brigade support members to perform this role unfortunately none of them were in a position to assist, the other option we considered was paying people to perform the childcare, even though we were a very financial brigade this would have depleted our bank account quickly

Impact of Low Rural Fire Volunteer Personnel

The Impact:-

- Unable to respond effectively to bushfires.
- Unable to respond effectively to natural disasters, particularly post event.
- Fire-fighting appliances are removed from brigades
- Fire-fighting trucks are substituted for smaller vehicles
- Brigades are merged with nearby brigades

The first 2 issues raised are of serious concern, if firefighting crews aren't fighting the fire within the first 30-45 minutes the fire will grow exponentially, to the point it will take days if not weeks to contain the fire, this is a basic fact of firefighting.

What also needs to be understood is the ramifications to civilians, when civilians aren't able to recover from a natural disaster or see firefighting crews fighting a fire their frustration grows, often lashing out at the very people responding, it will get to the point Rural Firefighters will think twice with assisting after severe weather events. The lashing out at firefighting crews has increased over the last few years, laws need to be the same for emergency services personnel as for police.

Not being able to respond to bushfires in a timely effective manner is serious issue, realistically we will see a greater number of:-

- Loss of homes, businesses & infrastructure
- Greater number of injuries
- Greater number of deaths not just humans but also wildlife and livestock.

This is already started happening throughout the state and things need to change.

The Los Angeles fires of January 2025 are a warning to Queensland that this will happen here; it is only a matter of time. Although it should be noted high winds, dry conditions, building homes so close to each other with huge amounts of vegetation (trees, bushes & Bamboo) used for screening purposes greatly aided the fire to have such an impact.

I have written numerous pages about Attracting and Retaining Personnel, detailing why we are losing personnel, the following are some of the basics to get things fixed immediately.

- We need a minimum of 60,000 firefighters,
- We need more brigades.
- We need more equipment of the right type.
- Proper training for Inspectors(Area Directors) and Superintendents (Regional Managers).
- Independent complaints process that must resolve issues, within 7 days.
- Provide catering, better communication, better software systems.

As you have learnt the bluecard debacle is just a drop in the bucket, unfortunately brigade personnel haven't taken the time to understand or see all the issues properly, brigade personnel focus on the blue card debacle as a way of getting back at QFD to try and embarrass them, but honestly QFD don't care, as it has taken the focus off all the other issues.

Facebook Posts

The following 2 posts I put up in a Facebook Group, a group were past and current firefighters can talk about QFD related issues.

I haven't altered/edited the text, but I have formatted the text when copied and pasted from Facebook.

March 9th 2024

How do we sometimes become victims of QFES?

My short answer is this from a RFS perspective of 1 example,

When the AD or RM says to you, we have received a couple of complaints about an issue or situation.

Our first reaction is what now! once the AD or RM advises of the content of the complaint then you set about addressing the issue or situation.

It took me less than 3 months to realise that I was actually being lied to, but I finally realised it when I called their bluff and asked who made the complaints, of course they won't tell you due to QFES policy, so I asked for their Superior to ring me and advise me of the issues.

This often stopped them in their tracks, but if it didn't and they wanted to proceed with a discussion, I responded with either get your superior to ring me or show me the complaints.

If their superior did ring me then I once again forced it up the line to their superior, as I said to them I needed to be sure that there was a written complaint and not a made up story.

I wasn't a popular 1st Officer as you can imagine.

This simple tactic starts the process of undermining a person to the point that we tend to always believe what we are being told by a superior of course when they stand in front of you with [REDACTED] on their shirt this does intimidate some people.

March 31st 2024

There are 3 Brigades that are

- 3 – 11Ks from an inland rural town (pop about 20-25k), 1 North, 1 South and 1 East
- Between them they have I guess about 10 appliances (at least 1 Tanker) maximum between them,
- The furthest brigade has about 50 members, the other 2 brigades have less than 15 members each
- 1 of these brigades will become moved further away from the coast, where I am.
- Heading towards the coast from this town there is Bush, National Park and a Pine Plantation
- The pine plantation company do have their own firefighting resources, how good they are I don't know, what we do know as firefighters, is that pine trees burn extremely well.
- The nearest brigade to this town is 35Ks away on the coast with 2 appliances, neither are Tankers.
- 2 rural communities in this area have no brigade
- The AD proposed that a new station be built north of the town CBD(6Ks) 5Ks from the current 3rd northern brigade.

I attended a meeting mid to late last year, at the meeting, there was an Acting AD conducting the meeting with an RM present, they showed the plans for the new building, the plans for the new location included the new area office location along with brigade shared training/meeting room etc.

But the area for appliances is 9 Bays wide, nope not a bay short if your doing the math's with the 10 appliances I mentioned above, because these bays are double the length, thus 18 appliances is the actual capacity, in fact the bays were long enough to accommodate 3 x 41's in a single bay.

It was also obvious this had been in the planning for some time due to the incredible detail in the plan and what was being said by the Acting AD and RM, as in the land had been designated for RFSQ use

etc, we all know the wheels of QFES turn slowly, this had not been going on for a year like the brigades were told, more like 2 even 3 years before they spoke to brigades.

The said during the meeting that

- All 3 brigades could opt out if they wished

1 Brigade had been flooded out 3 times in 2 years, this brigade had been offered suitable land(donated), Area Office ignored the multiple communication(s), in fact they lied and said they had never receive such communication.

The lease for the land and shed for another brigade was going to expire in 2 years and the owner was not renewing

- The 3 brigades would remain independent of each other, separate Committee, Officers, Appliances and Equipment.

So what's really going on:-

- The communities towards the coast(east), will be even more vulnerable due to response backup time, that's even if they can attend the scene as they could be cut off by fire.
- There is at least 1 more brigade that will be relocated to the new station, due to the available capacity of the bays, any idiot can understand this, and they obviously don't wish to name the brigade.
- Blind Freddy can see the 3 brigades will become one brigade, its not going to work otherwise, the fighting and brigade members will start the day they move in, the AD and RM are counting on this so as to control all members, thus many members from the 2 smaller brigades will resign.
- The northern brigade is obviously being manipulated by AO and have fallen into line, thus their 50 members would become top dog.
- The AD is busy building a kingdom not a fire station.
- The AD is not capable of seeing the vulnerable position he is putting surrounding communities in, this is simple incompetence, if the public understand what is going on they might be a tad upset.
- The brigades don't have an opt out ability like they were offered, it's going to happen weather they like it or not, incredible pressure will be put on the brigade as a whole and brigade members to comply.
- So what should happen:-
- The 2 brigades with lease and flooding issues should have new stations built, near where they are now.
- 1 of these brigades has been offered suitable land(donated).
- The 2 communities with no brigades should have brigades established within their townships.
- Before you ask can the brigades get the members, the short answer is yes I know 10 people in my community that would join in a flash.

At the meeting I pointed out all the national park land, between the town and the coast, I was told this was QPWS area, any rural firefighter knows that it could be up to 5 hours before they respond, I believe their fire appliances are located on or near the Sunshine Coast(min 2 hours to be on scene). AD's should think before they open their mouths. AD's need to be taught fire behavior and rate of spread.

The next thing I raised was severe weather events, I was told this is the role of SES, once again we have the same AD talking before engaging brain, SES have about 5000 members state wide, RFB have about 26000 state wide, you do the math's, every severe weather event in the last 15 years RFB personnel have been out there working alongside SES crews, in some cases no SES crews available, but they task rural crews.

In my small community we have a local SES, with 5 members 2 are located in my community, when the next severe weather event happens, our community will be cut off by 4 flooding locations, these locations most likely will take days for the water to subside, 1 in particular will be far longer, along with numerous trees down over roads, power lines taken out also by wind or trees.