



Hon Neil Roberts MP
Member for Nudgee

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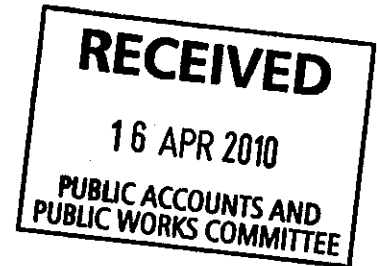
**Queensland
Government**

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**Minister for Police, Corrective Services
and Emergency Services**

15 APR 2010

Mr Wayne Wendt
Chair
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000



Dear Mr Wendt

I write in response to your inquiry into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

I note that the inquiry is part of a further investigation into the findings of the Auditor-General's Report No 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

My department has prepared a single-agency submission which describes the operation of rural fire brigades, their relationship with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and their current funding arrangements. A copy of that submission is attached.

I trust this information is of assistance to your Committee members in conducting the inquiry. Should you require any further information please contact Ms Corinne Mulholland, Senior Policy Advisor, on telephone number (07) 3239 0199.

Yours sincerely

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**Submission to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee by the
Queensland Government.**

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Executive Summary

- In Queensland, the management of rural fire services is a responsibility shared between local communities, local governments and the State Government.
- Volunteer firefighters are the fabric of fire fighting capacity in rural Queensland. Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) are made up of a diverse group of landholders and volunteers who come from all walks of life with a shared belief in the value of community.
- The true measure of the active participation of Queenslanders in rural volunteering is the increasing number of new recruits and active members.
- In June 2008, there were approximately 6500 fully qualified volunteer firefighters and by February 2010 that number had increased by more than 2900 to approximately 9500. There are now around 1500 RFBs with approximately 34,000 volunteers covering non-urban areas, over approximately 93% of Queensland.
- The functions of RFBs are fire prevention, community education and fire fighting.
- The founding principle of RFBs is a commitment to self-help and mutual assistance. RFBs are characterised by strong local loyalties, a high degree of self-sufficiency, and a willingness to help protect neighbours and land from fire.
- Queensland communities have traditionally required a flexible approach to RFBs. To support this, the State Government encourages RFBs to be largely responsible for the day to day running of brigade business while providing a framework within which to operate. This is part of a broader framework for fire response and prevention across Queensland, through the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS), within the Department of Community Safety (DCS).
- Under the Queensland model of fire service delivery, the Commissioner of QFRS has command and control responsibility of both the urban and rural arms and in a major fire event all of the QFRS resources, such as urban fire fighters, aerial support and interstate assistance, may be utilised to assist at the local level. This combined and coordinated approach to fire management is undertaken through the efficient and effective service delivery of QFRS and its rural branch, Rural Operations. Rural Operations works closely with local governments and volunteer fire fighters to achieve a depth, capacity and immediacy to preventing, mitigating and combating rural fires.
- RFBs do not operate under a 'one type fits all' model due to the fire risk profile of areas, the varying landscapes and local environment in which the RFBs operate and the disparate functions that may be required within the local context.

- While volunteer RFBs typically operate outside of urban fire brigade areas, due to population growth and urban sprawl, communities previously serviced by a rural brigade may now require the support of an interface, or i-zone brigade. Conditions in such areas are complex, requiring fire fighters from urban and auxiliary services or volunteer rural brigades to work closely together.
- A high level of cohesiveness between permanent urban and volunteer rural entities is developing, with a view to increasing the overall effectiveness of dealing with significant wildfire events threatening high density areas and to ensure that RFBs are supported in the services that they provide.
- These factors, particularly during protracted bushfires in the summer months, increase the demands made on RFBs and present a challenge to the community and all levels of government in managing demand.
- Strategies adopted by the State to manage the demands made on RFBs include risk profiling, forward planning, equipment monitoring, hazard reduction, and ensuring that QFRS resources are available to rural areas during protracted bushfire events.
- In addition, measures taken to support volunteers include a learning and development framework which provides easy access and flexible learning options to volunteers, and an increased number of trainers in the regional areas.
- To demonstrate the value that is placed on rural volunteers and to pay tribute to the high standard of work performance and conduct of volunteers, a number of awards, certificates and honours are granted each year. 500 awards were made in 2009. Categories include years of service, bravery and acknowledgement of service.
- RFBs are largely responsible for their own financial management, internal management, fund raising and community involvement. Funds predominately sourced from local governments, fundraising and donations are held and managed by individual brigades.
- RFBs are supported by the local governments and the State Government who provide funding, resourcing and equipment.
- Local governments may provide funding from the raising of a rural fire levy or from a proportion of general rates, and may also provide support through the provision of fuel or use of Council infrastructure. Rural Fire Levies collected by local government are currently estimated to provide \$5 million annually to volunteer RFBs.
- State Government provides funding to Rural Operations from specific QFRS output revenue funding and a proportion of the fire levy raised in urban areas. The 2009/2010 State funding allocation for Rural Operations is \$29.6 million. This represents an increase of 66 per cent, from \$17.8 million in 2004-2005.

- In addition, since 1998 the State has contributed significantly through election commitment funding aimed at resourcing, equipping, training and supporting volunteer fire fighters.
- Through State funding, Rural Operations provides equipment, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and communication infrastructure, and funding towards fire trucks and brigade stations.
- In excess of \$1 million has been spent each financial year since 2003 on PPE and the total number of rural vehicles has increased from 876 in 2003 to 947 in 2010.
- A 2006 Enhancement Package for the rural fire service saw funding provided for the largest increase in staff numbers since its inception in 1948, with 23 new full-time positions introduced and additional training provided to volunteers. There is currently a total of 22 Brigade Training and Support Officers providing rural training to volunteers.
- The increase in core and election commitment funding in 2009-2010 will enable the provision of 34 new or replacement fire appliances, additional PPE and greater capacity for on-line training.
- While RFBs seek to maintain responsibility for their own affairs, Rural Operations works closely with brigades to ensure that risk, operational needs, equipment and appliances are accounted for so that appropriate forward planning can take place. Effective forward planning greatly assists in ensuring that RFBs are prepared for fire seasons.
- In addition Rural Operations offers support to RFBs to ensure that RFB monies are spent in an appropriate and accountable manner. RFBs are provided with a Rural Fire Brigade Manual which contains guidelines on financial and audit requirements.
- Beyond the financial support provided by local and State Government, RFBs raise funds to cover their operating expenses and non-state funded capital expenditure. To achieve this RFBs may seek funding from local fundraising drives, grants from charity organisations and sponsorships from industry.
- The role of Fire Warden is also largely carried out by volunteers. There are currently some 2418 fire wardens in Queensland operating in 227 Chief Fire Warden Districts.
- Fire Wardens are generally responsible for managing the use of fire in rural areas, including fire risk reduction, through the issuing of 'Permits to Light Fire' and a prohibition on lighting fires during extreme conditions. Fire Wardens teach members of their communities how to responsibly prepare their properties against the threat of bushfires.
- The greatest constraint for rural volunteers is time; time to participate in fire hazard reduction, community education and fighting the fires themselves. For

volunteer fire fighters, time spent providing volunteer services means time spent away from family and from making a living.

- The tireless efforts that rural fire fighters make in preparation for and prevention of bushfires and their participation in fire fighting activities when bushfires occur is greatly valued by their communities.

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

Context - Queensland's fire risk profile

As the second largest state in Australia, Queensland's geography is challenging in terms of fire mitigation and response. It extends over 1,730,000 square kilometres and includes an arid interior and lush coast regions. The variation in climate is considerable, ranging from low rainfall and hot summers in the inland west, a monsoon season in the north, warm temperate conditions along the coastal strip and low minimum temperatures that can be experienced inland about the southern ranges during winter.

Queensland's fire season normally commences in late winter in the Gulf and Cape York Peninsula and progresses south into central inland and coastal areas to the south east border during spring. The fire season continues through the summer in southern and far south-western Queensland.

The fire season timeframes and risk can vary significantly from year to year depending on fuel loads caused by previous heavy rainfall, long term climate and short term weather conditions (such as the Pacific sea surface temperatures and the Southern Oscillation Index) in each area.

Fire risk can be reduced by mitigation programs that have been undertaken prior to the fire season and the availability of fire fighting resources in an area.

While Queensland, on average, has hundreds of bushfires of various sizes per year, only some are of such a severity to cause damage to property or loss of life, such as is more often faced in the southern States and in southern Western Australia.

The summers in most Queensland regions are typically wet, unlike the southern states which have hot dry summers where increasing temperatures contribute to dangerous fire conditions. Consequentially, the devastation experienced in the Victorian bushfires of 2009 and the Canberra bushfires of 2003 has not been experienced in Queensland.

In order to mitigate its bushfire risk and ensure seasonal preparedness, Queensland has in place a cooperative approach to fire management in partnership with all sections of the community, which includes a range of best practice strategies at both the community and State levels which are detailed in this report.

The functions of Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) are fire prevention activities (including hazard reduction and burn offs), community education and training, and fire fighting. RFBs are the lynchpin in protecting rural communities from the devastation of bushfires in Queensland.

Origins of Rural Fire Brigades

Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) in Queensland have a long and proud history of volunteers coming together to form groups at the local level to protect their families, their neighbours and their communities from the impact of bushfires.

The founding principle of rural brigades is voluntary commitment to self-help and mutual assistance, and Queensland brigades have continued over the years with the dedication of generations of volunteers.

The history of RFBs in Queensland can be traced back to 1948 when the government of the day reformed the Rural Fires Board, abandoned since 1929 as a result of the Great Depression. The Glasshouse Mountains Rural Fire Brigade was officially registered as the first Queensland rural fire brigade on 13 June 1949. The Rural Fire Service (RFS) (the collective of the Rural Fire Brigades) in Queensland was originally established as community-based organisations, and strong community involvement has been a feature of RFBs for the past 60 plus years.

The firefighting fraternity of Queensland has grown from strength to strength since the first fire brigade was formed and today Queensland continues to rely heavily on volunteer firefighters. The volunteers who make up Queensland's RFBs perform a vital role in supporting Queensland communities in active fire fighting and fire prevention.

The State Government, recognising the origins and the philosophy upon which RFBs are based, has continued to treat brigades as community-based organisations and strives to ensure that the relationship each has with the community is maintained.

The Current Rural Fire Management Structure

The current Rural Fire Service has some 1500 rural fire brigades with approximately 34,000 volunteers covering non-urban areas over approximately 93% of the state. The management of fire in rural areas is a responsibility shared between local communities, local governments and State Government.

Collaborative Partnerships

To promote an effective rural fire management structure for Queenslanders, stakeholders work in partnership with one another to support the invaluable work that members of RFBs undertake.

A particular focus of this collaborative approach is maintaining the partnerships that RFBs have with their communities, with their local governments and with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS). This collaborative approach also relies on partnerships between RFBs in different communities, partnerships between local governments and State Government entities, and, finally, between State government departments.

The Role of the local community

RFBs in Queensland stem from a need identified by their respective communities to protect them against the risks of bushfire impacting on them. This embeds RFBs within the community and engenders strong bonds between the community and its RFBs. RFBs are, in essence, 'mates helping mates' and 'neighbours helping neighbours', and this is especially evident in the Primary Producer Category of RFBs (the largest single category, with the bulk of RFS volunteers). Many rural communities are strong fundraisers for their local RFBs. Without the strong community linkage it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the brigades to be sustained.

The Role of RFBs

RFBs are not State entities, they are groups of people who donate their time and energy to serve and protect their neighbours and people within their own communities from the risk of bushfire.

The volunteers who make up Queensland's RFBs perform a vital role in active fire fighting and fire prevention.

RFBs perform these activities within their own boundary areas and will often assist neighbouring brigade areas in times of need. In addition RFBs will participate in joint fire management exercises with State agencies.

The Role of Local Governments

Local governments actively support their RFBs by providing financial support, equipment and resourcing and 'in kind' support such as fuel and vehicle servicing.

Some local governments raise and collect a rural fire levy (RFL) across the properties serviced by the brigade, based upon the projected budget required by the brigade for the forthcoming financial year. The funds are provided directly from councils to RFBs. Other local governments may direct a proportion of general rate collection to the RFBs within their Council boundaries.

More information on the funding provided by local governments is contained in Chapter 2 of this submission.

The Role of State Government

The State Government recognises the strong community commitment that is at the heart of RFBs.

In addition to providing a fire management framework, the State Government supports RFBs through the provision of base funding from the Consolidated Revenue and election commitment funding which is administered by QFRS. QFRS utilises these funds in addition to funds diverted from the Urban Fire Levy (UFL) to staff Rural Operations and RFS support activities such as training and mapping, and the provision of equipment and appliances.

The State, through both QFRS and the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) provides State coordination of fire fighting capacity, risk management, mitigation and fire fighting expertise for property holders and also on State owned and controlled land. The State is often assisted in these activities by volunteers from local RFBs and by Fire Wardens (who are predominantly volunteers).

The Role of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

The QFRS is the State Government entity which is the primary provider of fire and rescue services throughout Queensland. QFRS provides funding to its rural fire branch, Rural Operations, through allocation of base funding, from Consolidated Revenue and a proportion of funds raised by the UFL. QFRS also provides an operational, financial and governance structure for Rural Operations.

The Role of Rural Operations

The Rural Operations branch of QFRS coordinates and supports the Rural Fire Service, while actively promoting the culture of rural volunteering.

Through Rural Operations, the RFS and its volunteers are supported through a range of mechanisms such as: financial support through the subsidised equipment and appliance system, managing land leases, providing personal protective clothing, communication equipment, training and related material and on the ground support both from an operational and administrative perspective.

The management framework provided by Rural Operations promotes the use of fire as an integrated part of rural land management and rural production systems. It also provides for the use of hazard reduction tools, such as back burning, in order to minimise the negative impacts of fire on rural communities.

As part of preparation for fire seasons, Rural Operations works with and supports the respective RFBs in preparing their local bushfire plans. Pre-season workshops and training exercises are conducted on an annual basis in each region, in accordance with bushfire plans, to foster the flow of communication and information between RFBs and Rural Operations. This also provides both urban and rural crews an opportunity to practice a coordinated response.

Rural Operations also works with RFBs to ensure that volunteer numbers are maintained, that the demand for their services is managed effectively, and that adequate support is provided to volunteers to enable them in turn to provide their vital service to their communities.

Legislative authority for fire management and RFBs

The provision for RFBs to operate within the framework of QFRS was passed into law in 1990. Under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* (FRSA), which governs all fire service delivery activities of QFRS, any group of persons may apply to the Commissioner of QFRS for registration as a rural fire brigade. RFBs are constituted under a set of provisions in Part 7, Division 3 of the FRSA.

In relation to rural landscape fire management, the FRSA provides for two fundamental legislative objectives: to control the lighting of fires and to enable fire fighting forces to deal with fire.

The FRSA enables the Commissioner to designate the area for which the RFB is responsible and the circumstances in which the RFB is in charge of fire fighting and fire prevention

The FRSA enables the Commissioner of QFRS to take prompt action to reduce fire risk such as the construction of firebreaks and other vegetation management such as systematic, controlled burning. The FRSA also empowers the Commissioner to require a person to suspend operations or actions which present a fire risk.

RFB Characteristics

Of the 34 000 RFS volunteers approximately 9,478 of these hold firefighter status, and another 2,000 hold trainee firefighter status. The remaining number provide valuable support to their respective RFBs in the areas of training, fire prevention, and operational support or in management roles such as brigade chairperson, secretary, treasurer and the like.

The number of rural volunteers who hold firefighter status has increased significantly in recent years due to a focus on training by Rural Operations. For example, in June 2008 there were around 6,500 fully qualified volunteer fire fighters and that number has risen today to around 9,478. This increased level of training and knowledge greatly benefits the brigades during fire events.

Rural communities rely heavily on their volunteer fire fighters, who are often fighting the fires that endanger their own lives and those of their families and which threaten their own property.

RFBs are made up of a diverse group of landholders and volunteers who come from all walks of life, including farmers, store owners, trades people, doctors, lawyers, teachers and local and state government employees.

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

The character and method of operation of brigades varies considerably across the State to reflect risk.¹ In sparsely populated rural areas, a brigade may simply consist of a group of property owners joining together for their mutual protection against fire, using resources available on their properties. Closer to urban areas which are more

¹ For a map showing the location and type of rural fire brigades in Queensland refer Attachment Two.

densely populated, brigades are generally characterised by a more formalised operational and administrative structure, and may operate from a centralised fire station with specialised appliances and equipment. More detail on the various types of brigades is provided in the *Categories and locations of RFBs* section and a map showing the location and type of RFBs is at Attachment Two.

The structure of RFBs

The Brigade Constitution is outlined in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual and RFBs are encouraged to adopt the constitution to assist them to regulate the proceedings of their brigade and provide for their internal governance.

Under the constitution, RFBs elect a First Officer and a Second Officer. An RFB may also elect an additional 6 officers - Third to Eighth Officers. The decision to elect positions in addition to the First and Second Officer is optional and will often depend on the number of members in the brigade or the decision of members to have a structured hierarchy of command. An RFB may create any other office-bearer positions the membership considers necessary and these may include a Secretary, Treasurer or Chairperson.

An RFB 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 and those rules must be approved by the Commissioner.

Command and Control (Fighting rural fires)

The structure of fire services in Queensland means that both the QFRS and the Rural Fire Service operate under the one legislative base and one structure headed up by the Commissioner. The Commissioner (QFRS) has command and control responsibility of the urban and rural arms of the organisation. In contrast, other jurisdictions have two separate organisations that provide these firefighting services. For example, in NSW there currently exists the NSW Fire Brigade which provides the urban service and the NSW RFS which provides the wildfire firefighting response. Each of these organisations operate under their own Commissioner and legislative base.

The Queensland model ensures that both urban and rural officers abide by the same Operations Doctrine, Code of Conduct and legislation. This benefits RFBs and the State (and thereby the community) by providing a consistent and united approach to fire fighting activities and enables all of the resources of QFRS to be utilised by Rural Operations in major bushfire events. It also reduces the likelihood of confusion arising in communication and jurisdictional boundaries between various organisations and ensures greater safety for fire fighters, both volunteers and permanent staff.

In practice, this means that during an emergency response incident the first arriving officer assumes the role of the Incident Controller (IC) and announces it via the communications network. Depending on the severity of the fire the role of IC may be transferred to another more senior or experienced officer, given the level of skills and training required.

The IC is responsible to assign specific functional roles within the QFRS Incident Management Team (IMT) and therefore the IMT is managed by the IC.

The chain of command is delegated within a structured hierarchy set out in the QFRS Operations Doctrine “Hierarchy of Command and Control”. The deployment of staff and resources is coordinated via the IMT. The inclusion of local representation, including members of RFBs, on the IMT is encouraged to ensure that local knowledge is available to fight the fires. The QFRS management of the IMT ensures that regional, State and interstate resources can be applied where needed. If the fire activity is escalated beyond the capacity of the local brigades, incident management support may be provided through the QFRS State Operations Co-ordination Centre (SOCC).

Queensland does not typically experience long and widespread fire events requiring a campaign-like response, however, in a major fire event all of the QFRS resources, such as urban fire fighters, aerial support and interstate assistance, may be utilised through the SOCC for a response to major bushfires (see Chapter 4 for details of how the utilisation of QFRS resources manifests and reduces the demands on RFBs).

Categories and locations of RFBs

Rural Operations has recognised that as a result of the local community profile, fire risk, population growth, climate change, geographical differences across the state and community expectations, RFBs cannot operate under a ‘one type fits all’ model.

Therefore it has categorised RFBs to take into account the fire risk profile of the area, the varying landscapes and local environment in which the RFBs operate and the disparate functions which may be required to operate within the local context.

The character and method of operation of each category or type of brigade may vary considerably. In rural areas a brigade may consist of a group of farmers joining together for mutual protection against fire, using resources available on their properties. Closer to urbanised areas, brigades are typically characterised by a more formalised operational and administrative structure and operate from a centralised fire station with specialised appliances and equipment.

The category model assists Rural Operations to streamline the allocation of resources and equipment and in forward planning exercises.

The category model is periodically reviewed to ensure that it adequately reflects the local environment, taking into account issues such as the significant population growth.

Under the category framework there are five brigade types:

- **I-Zone Brigade** – A high-density rural residential brigade, usually with a well-developed commercial centre. The brigade may contain significant areas of bushland but the predominant risk is to life, property and infrastructure.

Activities of the brigade are principally within the operational policy and procedures of the QFRS;

- **Primary Producer Brigade** – This brigade consists of owner/occupiers engaged in primary production who share a responsibility for the management of fire using property based equipment. The brigade operates with limited contact with or support from the QFRS;
- **Rural Brigade** - The brigade area is predominantly rural producing land with possibly some low-density rural residential development. The risk is mainly from bush and grass fires, with a high level of utilisation of property-based equipment for fire management. The brigade area contains little or no government infrastructure and the community centre, if it exists within the brigade area, has less than ten buildings;
- **Village Brigade** - The brigade area has a community centre with more than ten buildings and other government infrastructure (eg.school, council depots, recycling centres, etc). These brigades are often located in remote areas with little or no assistance available from other rural fire, urban or auxiliary brigades; and
- **Specific Service Delivery Brigade** - A brigade that operates with a service delivery model specific to individual community or service requirements. Examples of this type of brigade includes combined auxiliary/rural brigades, mining brigades, island and resort brigades and compressed air breathing apparatus equipped brigades. (Where a brigade is founded to protect a commercial entity and its land and staff, such as a mining brigade, funding for that brigade is provided by the commercial entity).

Table 1 below shows the number of each different type of RFBs and Table 2. shows the number of volunteers which are operating within each brigade type.

Table 1. Type and Number of Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland

Rural Fire Brigade Type	Number of Brigades
i-Zone	163
Primary Producer	641
Rural	480
Village	170
Specific Service Delivery	14
TOTAL	1468

Table 2. Number of volunteers by brigade type

Izone	5934
P Producer	9925
Rural	12511
SSD	449
Village	4877
Other	187
Grand Total	33883

Each type of RFB requires a different resourcing level based on the level of activity and risk.

Primary Producer Brigades

The greatest number of RFBs are those categorised as Primary Producer Brigades (PPB), as illustrated in Attachment Two. Although all brigade types reflect the principles of mutual obligation and community service, PPBs are the traditional reflection of the RFB concept of community members coming together to help their neighbours and protect their land from fire.

The PPB classification and service delivery model is based around an 'arms length' relationship with Rural Operations, in keeping with the infrequent and episodic nature of its activities and recognising the practices and skills gathered over generations of volunteers. The key benefits of the PPB concept include:

- Operations localised and property based
- Training requirements reduced

To assist PPB to maintain the arms length relationship and reduce the administrative burden for those volunteers, Rural Operations provides:

- Increased Rural Operations Area Office administrative support
- A tailored system to manage workplace health and safety issues
- Continued equipment and liability support

Rural Fire Brigade Groups

In some areas of the State, individual RFBs are structured into Rural Fire Brigade Groups (RFBG). An RFBG is usually formed when warranted by the level of brigade activity and where desired by the brigades operating within that area. The formation and membership of an RFBG is not legislated or compulsory, and is determined by RFBs. There are currently 35 RFBGs in Queensland, the purpose of which is to coordinate the activities of various brigades operating in a single local government area.

The key contribution of RFBGs is to reduce the administrative burden on individual brigades and provide coordination of training delivery and educational updates. For example, the RFBG may provide community education by delivering the QFRS *Bushfire Prepared Communities* program to the local community. Administrative support reduces the burden of paperwork. RFBGs may prepare plans for those brigades in receipt of a Rural Fire Levy (each brigade in receipt of an RFL is requested to submit a three year Management Plan, a twelve month Operational Plan and associated budget in line with the local government's budgeting cycle).

RFBGs also serve as a conduit between member brigades, local councils and Rural Operations at the regional level. For example, the RFBG may act as a point of distribution for RFLs from Councils, although the local Council will prescribe the method of distribution and an RFBG may not retain any funds belonging to member brigades.

Similar to other community based committees, RFBGs appoint office bearers in the form of a Group Officer, a Deputy Group Officer, a Training Officer and an Administrative Officer. Neither the RFBG nor its office bearers form a chain of command with member brigades, and office bearers are not supervisors of RFBs.

The RFBG may become operational through the Incident Management System at Level 2 and Level 3 incidents² when the RFBG may be called upon to establish and maintain fixed Incident Management Centres (as directed by Rural Operations) to coordinate the RFBs working alongside urban operations.

A Flexible Approach

Queensland communities have traditionally required a flexible approach to RFBs. RFBs are encouraged to be largely responsible for the day to day running of brigade business, while the State government provides a framework within which to operate. Rural Operations works with brigades and local governments to promote the preservation of the local culture and flavour of each brigade.

Maintaining this flexible approach is aided by the ability of the State to support RFBs during fire events with all of the resources that QFRS has at its disposal, should the scale of the event warrant it.

One example of the flexibility available for communities to best manage their volunteer resources and their ability to respond to emergencies is through the Emergency Services Unit (ESU) model of service delivery. The ESU model is intended to help a community use available, and often scarce, resources to provide for effective and efficient volunteer functions. It does this by enabling one set of volunteers to integrate the volunteer functions of fire fighting, fire prevention, State Emergency Service (SES) and Community First Responders (for the Queensland Ambulance Service) in one unit.

Where ESUs exist, the local governments have provided administrative assistance as it has been identified that administrative tasks are most often the weakness of volunteer groups. There are currently four ESUs located in Talwood, St Pauls, Rolleston and Tambo which rely on strong local community backing and local government support. Other regional councils have expressed interest in the ESU model and DCS plans to introduce more of these groups, with the assistance of local governments.

² From an initial response of local resources, fire incidents are given a scale of operation, from Level 1 through to Level 3. Escalation may be the result of intensifying complexity or conditions, increased application of resources, a predicted protracted incident - or a combination of all factors. As an incident intensifies and more sectors (geographical or functional) are required, the ability to appropriately manage the incident from a Level One Incident Control point may not be possible. QFRS Operations doctrine sets out the triggers and transition arrangements for an incident to escalate from Level 1 to Level 2 and then on to Level 3. Escalation of the level requires a corresponding scaling up of the Incident Management System.

Interstate Comparisons

There are apparent differences between the way rural fire services are managed in Queensland compared with other States. Comparisons at State and operational level along the eastern seaboard are problematic because fire risk profiles, funding approaches, service delivery approaches and organisational structures vary significantly.

Historically, Australia's most intense and deadly bushfires have occurred predominantly in the south and south east of the country. Such events include the 1939 'Black Friday' bushfires that raged across eastern Australia, deadly fires in New South Wales in the 1951–52 and 1957–58 summer seasons, in 1994, in 2001–02 and in 2002–03. In South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria, deadly fire events include the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 and the Black Saturday fires of 2009.

Queensland's model is different to that in Victoria and New South Wales due to factors such as the evolution and historical context of RFBs and the funding sources at both the local and State levels, as well as the State's fire risk profile. These factors have all played a part in creating the Rural Fire Service model that is in existence in Queensland today.

In Queensland, Rural Operations forms part of QFRS and manages the framework for the state's rural brigades to oversee support for rural and semi-rural communities. Funding for Rural Operations is drawn from state government funding, primarily through the Urban Fire Levy. Local councils may collect a rural service levy on behalf of RFBs within their jurisdiction or provide some funding support by an allocation from general rate revenues. Outside of this, RFBs which do not receive funding from local levies may access grants from a variety of organisations and community groups, and actively participate in fundraising.

In Victoria the Country Fire Authority (CFA) is not a Rural Fire Service, as it provides urban and rural services to the whole state, with the exception of inner-metropolitan Melbourne. Of the approximately 59,000 CFA volunteers, 9,000 are situated in urban areas. The largest CFA urban brigade is in Dandenong and has some 25 volunteers. The main source of income, comprising over 75 per cent of total revenue, is contributions from insurance companies. Part of the premiums collected by insurance companies when insuring property against fire is provided to the fire services, prescribed by legislation.

The New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) is a co-coordinating, funding and training body only for the State's volunteer fire fighters, with RFBs attached to local governments and not to the State. The NSWRFS is responsible for fire fighting and prevention over 95 per cent of the State, while the New South Wales Fire Brigade manages fire emergencies in the State's major cities and towns. The NSWRFS has a membership of approximately 70,000 volunteer fire fighters and 752 full time equivalent staff. In 2008-2009 the NSWRFS received \$267,689.00 in funding, of which the State Government's contribution was \$54,118,000. Rural fire districts are based upon local government boundaries and may contain several volunteer brigades. Statutory contributions to the NSWRFS includes funds from insurance companies,

funds from local governments and funds from the Natural Disaster Welfare Relief, as well as income from State Government appropriation. In turn, the NSWRFs makes grants to local governments to assist with brigade funding.

A summary of the funding, staffing levels and responsibility for rural fire services in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Australian Capital Territory and Queensland is at Attachment One.

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

Sources of funding available to RFBs

Beyond the financial support provided by local and State entities (detailed further in this chapter), RFBs must raise funds to cover their operating expenses and non-state funded capital expenditure. The level of funding that is sought and achieved by each RFB is discretionary and varies across communities and across brigades.

Operating expenses incurred by RFBs include power, telecommunications, equipment, appliance and station maintenance, and additional materials and equipment not provided by the State or local government.

Sources of funds available to RFBs for operating expenses and capital expenditure include:

- the RFL collected by some local governments
- contributions from general rates made by some local governments
- in-kind contributions, such as vehicle servicing and fuels provided by local governments
- donations from the community, commercial or government organisations, sometimes received in lieu of payment for the delivery of services by RFBs
- funds raised from a wide range of community fund raising activities
- donations from the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) for the purchase of equipment such as appliances, slip on units and computers
- cash grants from Rural Operations to contribute towards construction or refurbishment of brigade stations to a maximum of \$10,00
- Gambling Community Benefit Fund (GCBF) grants for the purchase of equipment and appliances
- Jupiters Community Benefit Fund grants for the construction of brigade stations
- funds received from commercial sponsorships

An RFB has no legal right to demand a fee for service, including conducting a hazard reduction burn. However it is reasonable for a brigade to suggest that landholders make a donation in return for services provided (other than a fire suppression operation). For example, brigades may negotiate a fee for services provided to government agencies.

Local government funding

The *Local Government Act 1993* (LGA) enables, but does not compel, local governments to raise a levy for their local RFBs. Those local governments who do raise an RFL usually pay funds directly to RFBs.

The amount of the RFL levied against rate payers is determined at the local level, in consultation with ratepayers and RFBs, with guidance and advice on funding being provided by QFRS when requested.

Local governments are not required to provide information to the State Government on whether or not they collect an RFL or how much that is. Therefore, there is no central register of the level of funding provided to RFBs through the raising of an RFL.

Some local governments provide funding support to RFBs by an allocation from general rate revenues. Other local governments may provide in-kind support such as servicing of vehicles, utilisation of council infrastructure or use of land free of charge.

Attachment Four shows the funding that is collected from local governments and provided to their RFBs, either through raising an RFL, assigning a proportion of general rates, or providing in-kind support, for the financial year 2008/09. This information was gathered during a telephone survey conducted by Rural Operations in February 2010.

Approximately \$5.15 million is raised from RFLs, and a further \$195,000 is raised through a proportion of general rates by local governments and provided to local RFBs.

Some RFBs negotiate the funding level with local governments and base the requested level of funding on a projection of the following years needs and expenditure. If requested, Rural Operations will work with RFBs and local governments to establish the level of funding required.

State government funding

The Queensland Government works in partnership with local governments to support their volunteer fire fighters.

The funding for Rural Operations is sourced from specific QFRS Output revenue funding and QFRS urban-services derived revenues. The 2009/2010 allocation for Rural Operations is a record \$29.6 million.³

Rural Operations provides cash grants of up to \$10,000 to RFBs to contribute towards the construction or refurbishment of brigade stations, should the brigade have a station. Rural Operations also supplies equipment and vehicles at a subsidised rate with the brigade providing a percentage of the overall cost and QFRS funding the remaining cost.

³ A significant amount of the budget has been allocated to rural firefighting appliances, trailers and slip on units. It is anticipated that 34 new or replacement vehicles will be purchased for brigades in 2009-2010.

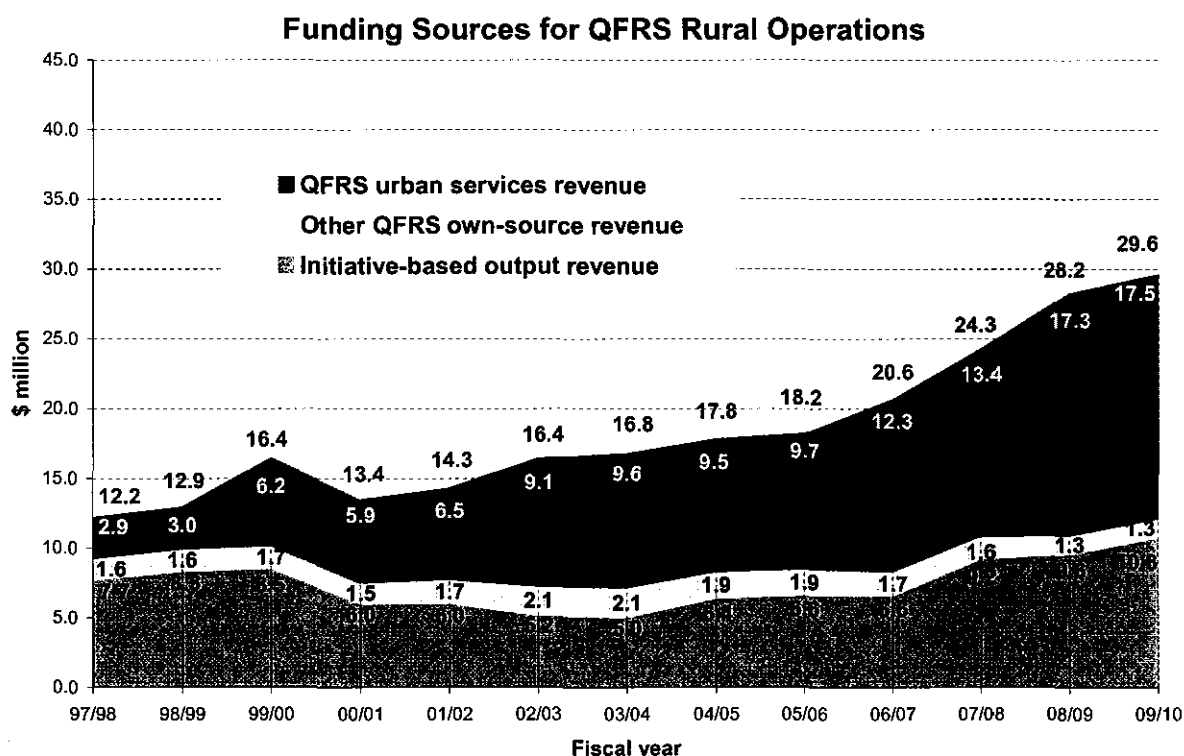
In addition, Rural Operations provides operational equipment to volunteers and RFBs, including radio communication equipment; firefighting equipment (hoses, drip torches, rake hoes and beaters, at subsidised rates); and essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as helmets, overalls, goggles, gloves and boots.

Firefighting support is provided via air operations, Geographic Information Systems and mapping resources.

RFB office bearers (secretaries and treasurers) are supported in appropriate management of brigade resources through the provision of manuals and operating guidelines, including financial management support.

Volunteers are supported through the provision of Workplace Health and Safety resources and support, training tools and support to deliver training, including flexible learning options (such as e-learning), and the provision of Community Education resources. The Volunteer Portal provides direct online access to relevant information and communication resources.

The graph below shows the changing profile of Rural Operations funding between 1997-1998 and the current financial year. The largest single source of funding for Rural Operations has come from the urban services revenue collected by QFRS.⁴



Note. The funding levels shown in the graph do not include local government grants or levies.

⁴ About 68 percent of QFRS funding is provided by urban fire levies, collected on behalf of the State government through Local Government rates.

Election Commitment funding

The Queensland State Government provides election commitment funding for rural fire services. Detail of relevant election commitment funding since 1998 is as follows:

2009 : Support Our Heroes

\$7.34 million to be invested over four years for the Rural Fire Service (RFS), as part of the Support Our Heroes election commitment package of \$12.98 million (2009-10 to 2012-13) to support existing volunteers, attract new volunteers and prepare communities for natural disasters. Funding for this initiative is from the Climate Change Fund.

The focus of funding includes:

- additional equipment and resources for the RFS to provide for 14 new heavy fire appliances
- increased volunteerism through guaranteed leave for active volunteer service for public servant volunteers at natural disasters
- further training for volunteers to support communities in the event of a fire or natural disaster
- new or replacement rural appliances
- the provision of fire reflective curtains in rural vehicles and the replacement of petrol driven pumps with diesel driven pumps across most of the rural fleet

An outcome of this funding package was that in the 2009-2010 financial year \$4.5 million was allocated for the construction of rural fire fighting appliances and fire fighting trailers. This is anticipated to provide 34 new or replacement appliances. This includes the first six of 14 specialised appliances that have a minimum 3,000 litre water carrying capacity and are fitted with essential communications and fire fighting equipment

2009 : Community Educators

Under the Bushfire Community Training Package, a \$4.6 million (over five years) budget funded by the State Government, a number of temporary full-time staff positions have been created which will support the development of a Volunteer Community Educator (VCE) network.

2006 : Safeguarding Cyclone Communities

Funding provided to the RFS, as part of the \$52 million Safeguarding Cyclone Communities election commitment package (2006-07 to 2010-11), to further boost the capacity of the volunteer emergency service workforce to prepare and respond to emergencies and disasters. The funding focuses on training, equipment and strengthening existing radio communications infrastructure to improve preparedness and response capability, including:

- \$2.149 million for the Volunteer Information Management System (VIMS)⁵ (including the Operational Management System for the Rural Fire Service)

⁵ Now \$183,000 annual recurrent funding

- \$3.1 million over five years for Rural Fire Casual Trainers⁶
- \$3.9 million over five years for on-line training materials⁷
- \$2.54 million for Rural Fire Protective clothing⁸
- \$2.70 million for Communications Equipment⁹

Investing in the future of Bundaberg and the Surrounding Region

The Investing in the future of Bundaberg and the Surrounding Region 2006 election commitment provided an upgrade to the Miriam Vale Fire Station, which included co-location with the QFRS urban station.

2004 : Building a Safer Queensland: Supporting Emergency Services Volunteers

The 2004 Building a Safer Queensland election commitment provided \$2 million for enhanced training for RFS volunteers.

2001 : The Beattie Plan for the Tablelands

The Beattie Plan for the Tablelands 2001 election commitment provided two light attack rural fire appliances for the Walsh River and Wondecla Rural Fire Brigades.

1998 : Focus on Frontline Services

RFS funding was increased by \$1 million to consolidate the RFS Budget and provide for:

- The upgrade of Rural Fire Brigade equipment; and
- enhanced training systems.

Enhancement Package

In 2006, an Enhancement Package for Rural Operations was implemented. This package saw the largest increase in staff numbers since the Rural Fire Service was established in 1948, with 23 new full-time equivalent positions introduced.

Specific outcomes of the package included:

- additional Rural Operations staff to provide support to RFBs
- additional training provided to volunteers
- increased community capacity, resilience and ownership of mitigation and response
- a more coordinated delivery of operations in rural environments
- a defined regional operational reporting structure at large scale bushfire incidents
- a more regionalised focus for planning associated with bushfire management and volunteer support

⁶ Now \$700,000 annual recurrent funding

⁷ Now \$850,000 annual recurrent funding

⁸ Now \$560,000 annual recurrent funding

⁹ Now \$300,000 annual recurrent funding

The result has been more Rural Operations staff in regions with a greater operational capacity and a clearer alignment with QFRS urban. This has enabled a combined and coordinated response to major bushfire events.

Sponsorships

Volunteering also attracts sponsorship support from private industry. For example, a partnership has been established between QFRS and Reliance Petroleum. In 2008, Reliance Petroleum sponsored the purchase of 20 slip-on units (a vital piece of fire fighting equipment in rural areas) to a total value of \$100,000.¹⁰

In 2009, Reliance Petroleum made a further commitment to provide an additional 20 slip on units (again to a total value of \$100,000).

Additionally, a partnership has recently been established between QFRS and Energex for 2010, whereby Energex has sponsored equipment for emergency services volunteers to the value of \$75,000. Equipment from this sponsorship will include items such as portable dams and defibrillators. Applications for this equipment can be made by brigades from March 2010.

Operating Budgets for RFBs

Operating budgets for RFBs vary widely due to the range and types currently operating in the State.¹¹ However, a typical, well-equipped Village or i-Zone brigade will require an operating budget of \$20,000 – \$120,000 annually. PPBs may operate for as little as a few hundred dollars annually. The operating costs of all RFB types might double or triple in an extreme bushfire season, such as that experienced in 2009.

In some areas, such as the Bundaberg-Burnett region, an integrated service delivery model is utilised where services are expanded to encompass areas serviced jointly by urban and rural brigades. In these areas the practice is for the local governments not to levy an RFL for brigades, but for direct funding support to be provided to volunteer RFBs from QFRS.

The levels of community based fundraising by RFBs varies widely; some raise no additional funding and rely solely on the RFL funds while others may fundraise to a large extent, in addition to the funds received through the RFL.

This variance in individual brigade's approach to raising funds is usually dependent on the level of fire activity in the area and is reflected in the varying levels of equipment, vehicle and station maintenance undertaken and recruitment, training and preparedness achieved.

¹⁰ Slip on units were provided to brigades at Upper Pilton, Toowoomba; Durong, Maryborough; Barratts Lagoon, Alice Palmer and Mitchell Palmer, Cairns; Toobanna, Townsville; Cannoona, Rockhampton; Hurdle Gully, Bundaberg; Edie, Emerald; Nottingham, Charters Towers; Munburra, Mackay; and Tingarra, Miles/Roma.

¹¹ The variance in operating budgets of RFBs can be determined by a range of issues, such as the type and membership of the RFB, the level of interest, enthusiasm and time able to be given by members to community fundraising events, the amount of funds raised, the perceived risk of bushfires and how affluent a community is.

RFB stations

There are approximately 458 brigade station structures (as at 27 January 2010) allocated to RFBs across the State. The State currently makes a maximum grant of up to \$10,000 towards the cost of constructing, extending or upgrading RFB stations (sheds) with the RFB typically making up the remainder. Construction costs for a typical station from which a Village or i-Zone RFB will operate are in the order of \$120,000 to \$150,000. The balance of the cost is borne by the RFB from the RFL, local fund raising, GCBF grants and other sources.

In March 2007, Noel Arnold and Associates were commissioned by Rural Operations to conduct a review and an audit of workplace health and safety (WHS) in RFB facilities. The review made 47 recommendations under 5 key issues relating to WHS systems, training, workers compensation, reporting by volunteers regarding WHS issues and WHS associated with high risk activities. The remedial action identified established a benchmark for continuous improvement of WHS for volunteers. Rural Operations and RFBs are working together to address all the recommendations, including the development of asbestos management plans in rural brigade stations, where required, and systems for the testing and maintenance of essential safety equipment (such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits).

Equipment

Equipment, training, insurance, property lease fees (in some cases), support and coordination are provided to RFBs by Rural Operations.

Significant assistance is provided by the State (through QFRS) to upgrade the general levels of RFB vehicles and equipment, establish minimum operational and training standards for RFBs and expand the scope of training of volunteer fire fighters.

The safety of volunteers is of paramount importance. As part of a risk management approach, improvements have been achieved by upgrading the general levels of RFB appliances, vehicles and equipment.

RFBs make a 20 per cent contribution towards the total cost of rural appliances in RFBs and up to 50 per cent contribution towards the cost of other operational equipment.

Rural Operations provides personal protective clothing and radio equipment at no cost to the brigades.

The most common rural appliances are single or crew cab medium sized appliances with four wheel drive capability. In total, the rural fleet consists of 943 appliances. This is comprised of:

- 34 heavy appliances with a capacity of 2000 to 5000 litres water storage
- 586 medium appliances with a capacity of 1000 to 2000 litres
- 323 light appliances with a capacity of 600 litres

Table 3 below shows the number of appliances currently provided to brigades, indicated in local government areas.

Table 3. Number of Appliances by Brigade Area

Area	Trailers	Slip-On Units	Light Appliances	Medium Appliances	Heavy Appliances
Barcaldine	27	192	2	6	0
Bundaberg	43	233	16	36	3
Caboolture	6	17	24	41	5
Cairns Peninsula	24	135	15	32	0
Caloundra	13	32	47	61	4
Charters Towers	11	140	3	5	0
Cloncurry	22	153	1	13	0
Emerald	10	193	2	11	0
Innisfail	7	100	6	21	0
Ipswich	44	69	72	100	11
Mackay	14	169	5	40	1
Maryborough	37	90	37	59	5
Miles	19	174	5	11	1
Rockhampton	83	187	34	44	2
Roma	11	235	0	13	0
Toowoomba	81	184	26	64	1
Townsville	9	58	13	25	2
	461	2361	308	582	35

In excess of \$1 million has been spent each financial year since 2003 on providing volunteers with Personal Protective Equipment (such as fire fighting boots, respirators and heat-resistant helmets), at no cost to the volunteers.

Rural Operations also provides radio equipment free of charge to all RFBs. The State maintains the portable radios and other communication-related infrastructure at no cost to the RFBs. Total expenditure in the 2008/09 financial year for communication equipment provided to RFBs was \$790,317 (Operating Expenditure - \$571,192 plus Capital - \$219,125).

In total the QFRS provides 2361 slip-on units and 461 trailers which are located with rural volunteers around the state.

All equipment provided to RFBs by the State or which is 'subsidised' by the State remains the property of the State. Supply of equipment is managed and administered by the QFRS Logistics Services in Brisbane to ensure an equitable distribution.

Table 4 below shows the number of appliances¹² assigned to each brigade type.

Table 4. Appliances by brigade type

	Appliance - Heavy	Appliance - Light	Appliance - Medium	Grand Total
Izone	20	137	218	375
P Producer	0	1	3	4
Rural	4	99	176	279
SSD	6	10	11	27
Village	4	55	174	233
Rural Fire Brigade Group	1	6	0	7
Grand Total	35	308	582	925

Slip on units are provided to RFBs for location on members' properties. A slip on unit is a skid mounted fire fighting unit that slips easily onto the tray of a utility or truck with its own holding capacity of up to 540 litres of water or foam for fire suppression. From Table 5 below it can be seen that the Primary Producer Brigade types have the largest number of slip on units.

Table 5. Number of slip-on units by brigade type

Izone	112
P Producer	1391
Rural	685
SSD	14
Village	155
Rural Fire Brigade Group	4
Grand Total	2361

Brigades are required to have annual safety inspections of appliances conducted by qualified technicians and a copy of the resulting safety certificate provided to the nearest Area office of Rural Operations for monitoring and record keeping purposes.

In 2003 there were 147 rural appliances over 20 years of age. Since then, the Government has funded a program which has succeeded in reducing the proportion of older rural appliances in the RFB fleet and today only 10 appliances remain over 20 years old. In the same period an additional 574 rural appliances, 120 RFB fire fighting trailers and some 1,400 RFB slip-on units have been provided. With respect to replacement of appliances, while it is usual for them to be retired at 20 years, many are replaced well before this time depending on the usage rate or the ability to transfer them to other brigades.

As part of election commitment funding a program has begun to progressively retrofit rural appliances with fire reflective curtains over the next four years. Implementation of the program is planned over four stages with Stage 1 to occur between January and June 2010. Stage 1 will see fire curtains installed in appliances less than 3 years old, with subsequent stages to occur over 3 years. Implementation of the entire program will be complete by June 2013. These curtains will protect brigade members should they be trapped in their vehicles during a fire.

¹² An appliance is usually a single or crew cab four wheel drive truck or utility with water or foam storage capacity for fire suppression.

In addition, petrol driven pumps fixed to existing appliances are being replaced with diesel driven pumps, and 14 specialised appliances with a minimum 3000 litre water carrying capacity are to be progressively purchased over the same period.

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

What is an i-Zone Area

Volunteer RFBs typically operate outside of urban fire brigade areas. However, due to population growth and urban sprawl, communities previously serviced by a rural brigade may now require the support of an interface, or i-Zone brigade.

'i-Zone' is the term used to describe the 'Interface Zone'; a mix of undeveloped (and therefore vegetated) land and the spread of human habitation. i-Zones are situated where residential areas are encroaching into adjacent bushland areas, due to the increase in the number of high-density rural residential properties and the addition of well-developed commercial centres in some.

Conditions in such areas are complex, requiring fire fighters from urban and auxiliary¹³ services or volunteer rural brigades to work closely together.

Managing Risks in the i-Zone

Measures taken by the State Government to manage fire risk in i-Zone areas include the identification and mapping of all i-Zone areas in Queensland, local area plans for response, and the recruitment of ten i-Zone training officers to specialise in training volunteers and working with communities situated in i-Zone areas.

Additionally, topographical atlases, mapping resources, electronic and forms-based incident management systems (based on the nationally accepted Australian Inter-agency Incident Management System (AIIMS)) have been developed specifically for response in i-Zone areas. Training in the AIIMS system is provided to Rural Volunteer First and Second Officers.

Major exercises are undertaken at least annually to practice incident management and bushfire response in i-Zone areas so that the relationship between RFBs and QFRS Incident Management Teams is well understood.

In addition, QFRS utilises both VHF and UHF radios. The network of standalone VHF repeaters allows for a command channel that does not interfere with the normal Firecom radio channels. The VHF network is effective in bushfire situations, whereas the UHF network is effective around buildings.

¹³ Auxiliary fire fighters are paid, part time fire fighters.

A key benefit of having two distinct networks is that the UHF radios allow QFRS to communicate with PPBs which use their own private vehicles and only have CB radios.

A combined and co-ordinated approach

QFRS understands the importance of a combined and coordinated response to emergency incidents. It recognises the effect that urban encroachment has on RFBs and has taken a number of specific steps to respond to, manage and suppress major natural disasters (including bushfires) in i-Zone areas.

QFRS consistently strives for a high level of cohesiveness between permanent urban and volunteer rural entities, with a view to increasing the overall effectiveness of dealing with significant wildfire events threatening high density areas, and to ensure that RFBs are supported in the services that they provide.

In areas outside the Brisbane region, between 7 and 23 per cent of all incidents attended by urban crews are outside designated urban districts.

Because of the increased population density, and therefore a greater potential for loss of life, some i-Zone areas require stations to be staffed by auxiliaries as well as volunteer members of the local RFB. Examples of these combined service delivery stations are at Jimboomba, Elliott Heads and Agnes Waters.

For example, at Elliott Heads in the Bundaberg-Burnett region, an integrated service delivery model has been necessary where services have expanded to encompass areas serviced jointly by urban and rural brigades. With urban development patterns, the existing rural services could no longer effectively service their communities and so a mixed model of service delivery was developed to address the needs of the area.

Where this occurs, RFBs may remain in situ and provide fire fighting capacity in the bush areas, while urban crews provide fire fighting capacity for structural fires. Both rural and urban crews will work collaboratively when the need arises.

Similar mixed service delivery demands associated with population growth are arising in the western corridor-Toowoomba region, in the Gold and Sunshine Coast hinterlands and other coastal fringe developing areas, and forward planning is in place to address the emerging needs.

In these areas, the practice is for the State to raise an urban fire levy for the township areas and for the local governments to provide direct funding support to volunteer RFBs.

Some i-Zone areas serviced by RFBs are 'backed up' by permanent urban station resources. The Samford area is an example of an i-Zone where the RFB is fully supported by two 24 hour, 7 day, permanently staffed urban stations at Eatons Hill and Arana Hills.

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

The State Government recognises that there is an increasing demand for RFB services associated with a number of factors.

The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) reports that climate change and drought are expected to have an extensive impact on the emergency response sector, especially as these factors lead to changes in the frequency and duration of bushfires and impact on water availability for fire fighting. This is borne out by the increasing number of incidents outside urban boundaries in recent years that have required a more frequent response by some brigades.

Population growth in Queensland and the resultant urban sprawl has meant that additional training in the containment of structural fires is required by some rural brigade members and has highlighted the need for the future construction of combined urban-rural stations where previously there has been only a rural station. This also means that some brigades have a changing risk profile.

This increased demand comes in the face of a general decline in the number of hours given by volunteers due to competing business and family obligations. Volunteers cite concerns about the possible negative impacts of climate change on the frequency and severity of large fires which would inevitably require greater demands on their time.

All of these factors have a large impact, particularly during protracted bushfires in the summer months, increasing the demands made on RFBs and presenting a challenge to the community and all levels of government to manage the demand.

Strategies adopted by the State to manage the demands made on RFBs include:

- Risk profiling of brigades categories in light of emerging issues such as local landscape, infrastructure, community profile, population growth and volunteer numbers
- Data collection on RFB activities such as resourcing levels (information on funding levels achieved by RFBs is encouraged but not systematically achieved)
- Forward planning processes to address the risk profiles and promote adequate resourcing and equipment provided to brigades
- Equipment monitoring (asset maintenance and management)
- A Volunteer Management Strategy
- A Volunteer Learning and Development Framework to ensure accessible and contemporary training for volunteers
- Strategies for retention of volunteers
- State-wide coordination of fire management through the work of the Queensland Interdepartmental Committee on Bushfires
- Support to Fire Management Groups established at the local level
- Aerial support for fire spotting and rapid response
- National partnership agreements for aerial resource sharing
- Interstate agreements for the deployment of fire fighting resources

- Hazard reduction and burn off to reduce the risk of fire
- Community Education

Risk profiles of RFBs

Rural Operations has profiled and consequently created a new set of RFB categories that identifies the risks faced across each type of brigade to assist with managing the demands placed on them. A Rural Operations Risk Register has been developed, along with a Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business plans which include strategies that identify and address key risk areas.

Quarterly Performance Reviews and Area/Regional Reporting processes are key regional area priorities that have been implemented to ensure information about risk, level of activity and brigade numbers inform effective decision making. Brigades are requested to provide these reports to their Area Offices to assist with risk identification and forward planning (although RFBs are strongly encouraged to provide these reports, participation in these reporting processes cannot be forced upon RFBs).

Data collection on RFB activities

The Quarterly Performance Reports and Area/Regional Reporting processes are aimed at capturing a range of data in relation to the level of activity of RFBs, including:

- the brigades in receipt of an RFL
- the number of members and brigade membership type
- member training qualifications
- allocation of protective clothing
- the number and type of incidents attended by brigades
- appliances and other equipment allocation
- whether or not the RFB has a twelve month operational plan details
- three year Activity plan details

Rural Operations are actively working with RFBs to encourage participation in this reporting process. The information captured determines the number of State funded vehicles and other equipment required and indicates the required allocation of resources based on the level of risk and need. The level of RFB activity revealed by this data dictates the level of training required and so training targets can be set and monitored for each RFB.

In addition, ongoing and regular consultation occurs between the RFBAQ, RFBs and Rural Operations by way of correspondence, consultative forums and regular meetings at regional levels to ensure that risks and issues are identified and communicated effectively, and that forward planning exercises reflect current information.

RFBs are requested to submit an incident report after attendance at an incident so that information can be collected about the causes, performance and activity that took place. The information from these reports is used to draw a picture of how a brigade is performing and highlight any gaps in service delivery, for example caused by a shortage of available members to respond or a malfunction in equipment. This fosters

a continuous improvement approach. A review has been conducted of the Brigade Incident Reporting System, taking into account feedback received from brigade members regarding the nature of the system, the form itself and the lodgement process. The review indicated that a more user friendly form and an option to lodge the form on-line would reduce bureaucracy and the administrative burden on brigades. Therefore, an amended form and an on-line process for lodgement are shortly to be implemented.

All of the information collected assists in forward planning for the State's response to rural fire. Additionally, the collection of the data enables systematic communication between brigades and Rural Operations.

Forward planning processes for the management of rural fires

Forward planning processes encompass hazard reduction and resource identification for fire management predominantly at the local level, with oversight from regional and State levels.

In preparation for forthcoming bushfire seasons, and to ensure that demands on RFBs are able to be measured, the State conducts a range of exercises at the regional level to test systems, processes and planning in order to ensure operational readiness. The focus of the 2009 exercises was to ensure that appropriate and adequate incident information was provided to communities during operations and incidents

To enable forward planning and address demand management issues, the State established the Wildfire Mitigation Initiative in 2008. The initiative aims for a unified approach to wildfire risk mitigation and planning. The key drivers are to prepare communities, reduce the risk and impact of wildfires, and inform fire fighting operations.

The key deliverables of the Wildfire Mitigation Initiative encompass the activities of all community members in rural areas and include:

- Community participation in *Bushfire Prepared Communities* programs
- Identification and education about landowners' and occupiers' (both public and private) fire management responsibilities
- Community's preparedness for wildfire
- Strategic fuel management (hazard reduction and burn off)
- Education about activation levels for Wildfire Alert, including the verification of availability of RFB crews and the cessation of permits

The outcome of this initiative is minimisation of risk of fire to the public and fire fighters by reducing the potential impact of wildfires, and to provide for effective community and inter-agency cooperation and coordination of wildfire mitigation management.

Implementation of the Wildfire Mitigation initiative is incorporated into the Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business plans to enable appropriate risk management and forward planning by the State.

Equipment (asset maintenance and management)

RFBs monitor the condition and safety of their buildings and equipment and report this information through the planning framework provided for by Rural Operations.

Additionally, RFBs are required to ensure annual safety inspections for appliances are conducted by qualified technicians, and provide a copy of the resulting safety certificate to the nearest Area Office of Rural Operations.

A Volunteer Management Strategy

To assist with management of its emergency services volunteers, and meet the demands placed on them, DCS developed a Volunteer Management Strategy which consists of 53 initiatives to assist with recruitment, support, training, management, retention and resourcing.

Key initiatives within the Volunteer Management Strategy for volunteer fire fighters include:

- development of new membership roles for the RFS
- enhanced leadership for volunteers
- e-Learning initiatives to promote flexible learning options
- review and implementation of exit interviews for volunteers
- whole-of-Department volunteer survey including RFS volunteers
- review of grants and subsidy programs for volunteers
- investigating the feasibility of a volunteer passport that will allow qualifications and skills to be recognised throughout Australia

The Volunteer Learning and Development Framework

Rural Operations provides a Volunteer Learning and Development Framework (VLDF) to assist RFBs to align the roles of members with the programs available under the VLDF. Suggested training targets are set against the resources assigned to each brigade. The level of training indicated within the framework correlates with the number of members in the brigade and the inherent risk levels in the local area.

The availability of volunteers to engage in training events is dependent on the time that volunteers have available. This contributes to limitations in closing the training gap. Therefore, flexible learning methodologies have been introduced to assist the volunteers.

Additionally, a range of different media are available for training delivery, including face to face training, workbooks, podcasts, access to Volunteer Conference presentations via DVD, and First Officer training via a Management Program and online courses. The flexible approach to the provision of training programs aims to encourage and support self-directed learning and reduce the demand on volunteer time.

Training provided to volunteers

Fire is a powerful and unpredictable force so it is essential that volunteer fire fighters maintain a high level of preparedness in order to ensure safe, effective and efficient work practices and suppression methods to fight fires.

To facilitate this, additional Brigade Training and Support Officers have been engaged, bringing the total number across the State to 22, and volunteer training targets have been established. Brigade First Officers are also provided with management training. Additionally, a system to capture the level of training being delivered has been implemented, allowing Rural Operations to program training where it is needed.

Rural Operations recognises that training rural volunteers is one of the most significant issues facing the organisation, relating directly to the effective management of demands on RFBs.

The safety of volunteers is of the utmost importance and seen as a joint responsibility between Rural Operations and the volunteer. Rural Operations ensures that each volunteer receives relevant and ongoing training and the volunteer ensures that the training that is offered is undertaken on a regular basis.

Higher turn-over rates and shorter periods of participation of rural fire fighters are currently being experienced. Contributing factors include work and family needs, moving away from the area, dissatisfaction with the role of volunteer, age and health. As a result, basic training is provided to a larger group of people, and ongoing refresher training is required for volunteers who may move in and out of active volunteer service over a number of years.

In some areas, brigade members may assist in activities other than fire fighting and prevention, such as Road Crash Rescue and swift water rescue. Additional training for these activities is provided. Further, training in workplace health and safety is provided on an ongoing basis.

Significant progress has been made in recent years to increase the number of trained rural volunteer fire fighters and support the maintenance of their skills and competency levels. Improvements include:

- upgraded volunteer training programs
- on-line training materials
- enhanced Volunteer Portal to provide greater accessibility.

In particular, a focus on training over the past two years has seen the number of rural volunteers who hold firefighter status increase from 6,500 in June 2008 to 9,478 in February 2010, an increase of around 2900 in less than 2 years.

The Volunteer Portal provides volunteers with information on training, operational doctrine, equipment information and upcoming event details. It is also a resource that volunteers can use to network with each other.

Also available on the Volunteer Portal is the 'Map Shop'. Through the Map Shop, volunteers can access administrative and operational maps to support planning and response. These maps provide cadastral information for issuing permits to light fire as well as topographic information and aerial imagery.

In addition, Rural Operations has set training targets. This is reported on by regions/areas through the Quarterly Performance Report. This allows Rural Operations to identify any training gaps and focus training on the area of greatest risk/need.

Community Educators

In addition to base funding and election commitment funding, a Bushfire Community Training Package (the Package) has recently been funded by State Government to create a number of temporary full-time staff positions within Rural Operations to support the development of a network of Volunteer Community Education Officers (VCEs).

The budget allocation for the Package is \$4.6 million over five years. The outcome sought is better prepared communities in light of the expected increase in bushfires as a result of higher temperatures and drier conditions associated with climate change. The Package is a practical way to improve community awareness of bushfire risk and thereby will assist communities to adapt to climate variability due to climate change.

The role of VCEs is to increase bushfire preparedness and awareness within communities of the changing nature of bushfire risk in Queensland.

As part of the Package, Mitigation Education Officers (MEO) will be engaged in 2010 to support and develop the network of VCEs and provide bushfire education to Queensland communities.

The function of VCEs and MEOs is coordinated by Rural Operations. MEOs will be based around the State with one position in each of the areas of Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Maryborough, Toowoomba and Beenleigh.

Community Education

The *Bushfire Prepared Communities* education program is delivered by Rural Operations staff and volunteers at community forums and by the distribution of brochures. The program raises awareness within the community about how to keep properties safe from fire and how to reduce the risk of fire.

Geographic Information System (GIS) and Mapping:

The Total Operational Mapping (TOM) system has been developed by the GIS Unit, within QFRS, to deliver a wide range of information including near live incidents, boundaries, roads, i-Zone and bushfire risk. Whole of Government imagery, property boundaries, vegetation, traffic cameras and other information are also displayed in the system, and are combined with Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) radar, cyclone tracks, river gauges and other general weather information. Some local government data is available as well. The system also allows for mapping from Aircraft to provide near live situational awareness and intelligence for planning and operation purposes during incidents.

Rural Operations are currently scoping the potential for the information from TOM to be accessible through the Volunteer Portal.

The GIS Unit also provides a repository for brigades to send locally collected information such as fire breaks, water points and access tracks to be added to customised mapping products for brigades and fire wardens. The process for delivering and updating information collected by brigades is constantly being improved.

Advice and training products on how to use GIS devices and other mapping products such as 'Ozi-Explorer', commonly used by rural fire brigades, is provided and RFB access to information meets data licensing requirements.

The Queensland Interdepartmental Committee on Bushfires

As a result of recommendations from a bushfire audit in 1994¹⁴, the Queensland Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) on Bushfires was established. The Assistant Commissioner of Rural Operations is the Chair of the IDC and membership includes DERM (including Queensland Parks and Wildlife and Forestry Plantations Queensland); the Department of Transport and Main Roads; Queensland Police Service (QPS); QR Limited; the Local Government Association of Queensland; Brisbane City Council and the Bureau of Meteorology.

The key purpose of the IDC is to provide a forum for the coordination of government policy and procedures relating to rural fire management in order to achieve a consistent and comprehensive approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities.

A specific outcome of the work of the IDC is the numerous training exercises that occur each year. For example, a joint Australasian Inter-service Incident Management Training occurs with stakeholders to ensure that State agencies can work effectively together, drawing upon the resources of each, during a major incident. In addition, the IDC has instigated interagency training exercises incorporating real-life hazard reduction activities.

The IDC is supported by several IDC sub-committees that address the specific issues of training, communications, environmental issues and operations.

¹⁴ A Bushfire Audit, examined Queensland's preparedness for major bushfires that occurred in Queensland and New South Wales in 1994.

The IDC is also supported by Regional IDCs that carry out practical implementation of the IDC initiatives at the regional level. The Regional IDCs also act as a conduit for information transfer between the State IDC and Fire Management Groups established at the local level.

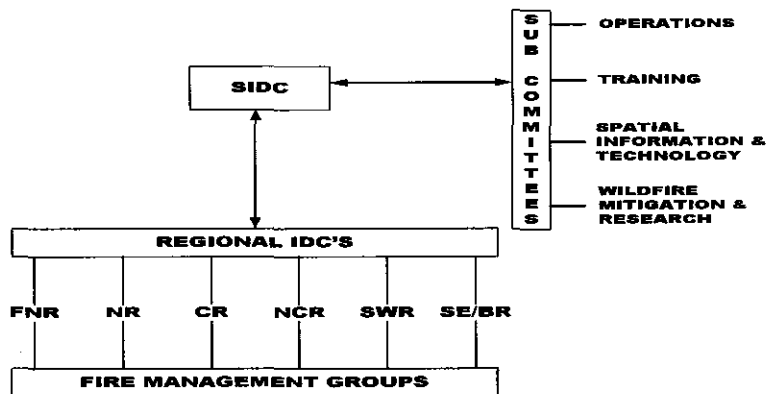
Fire Management Groups

Historically, a number of groups at the local level in various areas of Queensland have come together to consider, identify and address local fire management issues. To incorporate these groups into the IDC framework and provide for a systematic flow of information, these groups have collectively been named Fire Management Groups (FMG). The FMGs ensure a cooperative approach between the community, RFBs, local governments and the State, so that bushfire management is coordinated at the local level.

An FMG may undertake activities such as joint fire management planning, prescribed burning and hazard reduction, community education and risk mitigation.

FMGs are traditionally chaired either by a local landowner or RFB volunteer, Rural Operations Officer or a representative of government agencies. FMGs work closely with the Regional IDCs to ensure that local fire management is consistent with regional priorities.

The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the State IDC, the Regional IDCs, IDC sub groups and the FMGs.



Legend: FNR (Far North Region); NR (Northern Region); CR (Central Region); NCR (North Coast Region), SWR (South West Region); SE (South East Region) and BR (Brisbane Region).

The Black Saturday Bushfires - Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Inquiry: Queensland Interdepartmental Committee

In addition to the Queensland Bushfires IDC, a further IDC has been set up in relation to the findings of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The role of this IDC is to guide and oversee the development and implementation of Queensland's response to recommendations arising from the Commission.

Membership includes the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Treasury, the Department of Communities, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, DERM, QPS and Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

The IDC will assess the applicability of the Commission's recommendations to Queensland, particularly with respect to warnings, information, relocation, the stay or go policy, risk and refuge, emergency calls and the Commonwealth response to major emergencies, and provide advice in the development of Whole of Government policy to address implications for Queensland

Aerial Operations

Queensland does not typically experience long and widespread fire events requiring a campaign-like response, however, in a major fire event all of the QFRS resources may be utilised for a response to bushfires.

QFRS engages aerial resources to support ground crews by detecting the nature and extent of bushfires earlier, allowing a quicker response to fires and earlier containment of fires. The flow-on effect of this is less environmental damage, reduced risk to neighbouring areas and reduced drain on full time and volunteer resources.

The QFRS procures the services of three water bombing Helitack helicopters for each bushfire season. These aircraft are based at Archerfield airport during the fire season and are available to assist and support ground crews for the rapid response to wildfire within Queensland. The Helitack helicopters are fitted with external 900 litre tanks for water bombing but are also capable of carrying out surveillance and reconnaissance flights to support ground operations.

Throughout Queensland, there is a system of "call when needed" contracted aircraft of various types for air observation or water bombing. This provides a state-wide register enabling air operations capability and the timely deployment of aerial resources to incidents through aerial surveillance, reconnaissance and water bombing capability. This register operates for the duration of the fire season and currently includes 26 commercial operators (17 rotary winged and 9 fixed winged contractors) with 45 rotary aircraft and 25 fixed winged aircraft.

Aerial support was provided during bushfire activity in September and October 2009 which saw fires burning across 17 regional council boundaries from Barcaldine in the West, Townsville in the North and the Gold Coast in the South.

Without that aerial support land and property losses would have been much higher. For example, it is estimated that aerial response saved between 30 and 50 homes in the Mt Archer fires that threatened eastern Rockhampton in September 2009.

The QFRS has 64 staff (32 urban and 32 rural) trained in aerial operations across the State who undertake pre-season exercises in each region.

State Partnership agreements for aerial support

Queensland is a member of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), which is responsible for the national coordination of resources and sharing of aerial firefighting equipment between Australian states and territories. Should an agency require additional air support, there is provision for the movement of these resources interstate as required.

Interstate agreements for fire fighters

An interstate cooperative arrangement exists between fire services in Australia to deploy additional fire fighting resources when called upon. For example, over 100 New South Wales fire personnel were deployed to assist in response and investigation during the Mt Archer fires.

Measures such as aerial response and the interstate agreements with other fire services are further examples of the collaborative approach that the State government takes to fighting fires and sharing resources to better manage the drain on funding sources. This in turn reduces the impact and duration on volunteer resources and enables volunteers to get back to their day to day lives more rapidly.

Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre

The Queensland Government, through QFRS, has been an active partner of the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) since its inception in 2003.

The Bushfire CRC was established by fire and land management agencies and research partners in Australia and New Zealand. Its objective is a better understanding of the social, economic and environmental aspects of bushfires. This coordinated, multi-disciplinary research program has delivered practical benefits to the fire and land management industry and the wider economy and society.

Key research programs that the Bushfire CRC has embarked on relate to: 'Safe Prevention, Preparation and Suppression'; 'Fire in the Landscape'; 'Community Self-Sufficiency for Fire Safety'; 'Protection of People and Property'. In addition, the Bushfire CRC has also undertaken research into the issues of smoke management, fire fighter health, safety and fitness and education and training.

The outcome of the research is increased knowledge for Queensland's Rural Fire Service as well as the Queensland community. To this end, the QFRS has been an active partner of the Bushfire CRC over the last seven years and provides funding and in-kind support.

The Bushfire CRC is currently conducting research into matters arising as a result of Victoria's devastating bushfires and the subsequent Royal Commission Inquiry.

Hazard reduction and burn off

The approach to fire hazard reduction is a collaborative one for the community and local and state governments. The Permit to Burn system is authorised under the FRSA and has been established to aid landholders, communities and industry to use fire as a land management tool.

Burn off at the local level

Individual landholders are responsible for fire hazard reduction on their own properties. To prevent and limit the onset of wildfires, QFRS maintains control over the lighting of fires. A well established pre-fire regime is a cost effective and efficient method of fire control and suppression.

Landowners wanting to conduct hazard reduction by way of burning an area greater than two square metres must obtain a Permit to Light Fire from their local Fire Warden (More information on Fire Wardens and their role is contained in Chapter 6 of this submission).

Permits to Light Fires

The authority for a Permit to Light Fire is provided for under section 65 of the FRSA. A Permit determines the conditions under which a fire can be lit. Fire Wardens and Chief Fire Wardens have the authority under the FRSA to impose additional restrictions or cancel permits to ensure the safe use of fire in Queensland.

Local Government's role

Most rural or regional shire councils have a counter-disaster role to play, including a limited fire management responsibility. These councils rely primarily on their RFBs for wildfire suppression.

Several larger metropolitan councils (such as Brisbane City Council which is responsible for 22,000 hectares of urban bushland) are the owners or trustees of urban bushland) and have a significant fire management responsibility.

Urban bushland frequently has high levels of recreational and unauthorised use and presents an extreme urban interface risk, and so those relevant councils have developed a limited fire management capacity of their own to carry out prescribed burning and assist in wildfire response. Partnership arrangements exist with QFRS for assistance in this regard.

Most local governments in Queensland have by-laws in relation to individuals reducing hazards on their own land. Local laws may regulate fires that are consistent with the provisions of the FRSA pursuant to section 31 of the LGA¹⁵. Councils may regulate the banning or lighting of fires on land under their control (eg roads, parks etc).

A local law may not regulate fires authorised under a permit or notice issued by the Commissioner, fire officer or fire warden.

¹⁵ Edition 4 of the *Local Law Digest*

Management of Fire Hazards on State Government Land

The State Government, through the land management of DERM, is responsible for fire management of approximately 1.3 million hectares of land across Queensland. The operational delivery of fire management within these lands is shared between:

- The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) – 10.25 million hectares of parks and forests
- Forest Plantations Queensland (FPQ) – 2.25 million hectares of forest available for commercial timber harvesting
- State Land Asset Management Business Unit – 1 million hectares of Unallocated State land (USL)

Holders of certain categories of lease or permit over parcels of land within the above holdings also have fire management responsibilities and the State works with these entities in that regard.

The State works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the fire management of many areas of State controlled land. The State also works with landholders and local communities on adjoining lands. These working partnerships with various sectors of the community aids in developing and maintaining cooperative arrangements with stakeholders, and assists in resolving issues associated with hazard reduction, fire lines and wildfire suppression.

An interagency protocol exists between QFRS and DERM to clarify and guide cooperative fire management arrangements between the State agencies and ensure a consistent approach to the business needs of State and community expectations about fire risk management.

DERM has a comprehensive Fire Management System which guides its fire program and provides processes and standards to assist planning and operational delivery.

The planned use of fire is one of the major management tools used by the State to protect life and property in national parks, conservation parks, resource reserves and forest reserves and USL.

To provide a response capability to wildfires and carry out its planned burn off programs the DERM has approximately 700 fire-trained staff and about 165 light attack and 30 medium attack fire appliances. Major investment has also been made by DERM into improving its VHF radio network which is its primary means of emergency communication during fire operations.

A review of the DERM fire training program for staff was conducted in April 2009 and a comprehensive schedule of basic, advanced and specialist fire crew, fire leader, fire planning and incident management training has been put in place. All staff are required to be fully trained and meet a range of minimum requirements before they can attend a fire.

Partnership between RFBs and the State

RFBs assist State government entities (when called upon) to conduct small or large scale hazard reduction within the brigade boundaries.

Examples of hazard reduction burns that RFBs and QFRS conducted together in 2009 include the following:

- Beerburrum - State Plantation Forest land
- Bushland Beach – Unallocated State Land
- Gumlow – Unallocated State Land
- Rollingstone – National Parks land
- Cape Upstart – Unallocated State Land
- Townsville Town Cannon – local government and National Parks land
- Mona Mona – National Parks land
- Roadsides between Kuranda and Mareeba – Department of Transport and Main Roads land
- Gordonvale – land owned by the State Government, local government, and private landholders
- Cape York Aerial Programme

This kind of collaborative activity provides an opportunity to practice communication exercises on the fire ground. Services provided in this way may attract a donation or fee for service, negotiated by the RFB.

5. Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

The Government is committed to its rural fire volunteers, recognises the importance of volunteers within the wider community, and values the time and energy that volunteers donate to serving their communities.

Local Government Funds

RFL monies are collected from property owners in some local government areas to support the activities of rural fire brigades based on brigade risk and need. Funds, (other than RFL, cash and in-kind contributions by local governments) which are raised or donated by local communities, do not 'belong' to the State and therefore are not consolidated within the department's financial statements. RFLs made to RFBs by local governments are donated under the LGA and therefore accountability rests with the local government from which these contributions are made.

State Government Funds

Under the FRSA the QFRS Commissioner has limited control over the affairs of RFBs and this control is exercised primarily for operational management and the rules under which RFBs operate. Under the same legislation, the Chief Executive of DCS is responsible for the efficiency of RFBs and may provide training and other assistance

to them. Beyond that obligation the Government does not have any rights or control over the financial resources of brigades obtained through locally raised levies or donations. However, Rural Operations requests certain information to be provided so that effective planning, resourcing, training and risk management can be undertaken in preparation for each fire season.

There are no provisions in the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* or any regulations that make RFBs accountable to State government for the use of the revenues which are raised by them or by their local governments. Neither are RFBs subject to requirements under the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*.

Since there is no legislative basis to force brigades to account for the grants or funding support they receive, Government does not enforce accountability. However, the State acknowledges that brigades have a duty of care to members and the management of brigade revenues, as part of their responsibility to the community that they serve.

Responsibility for RFB affairs

RFBs are largely responsible for their own affairs in terms of financial management, internal management, fund raising and community involvement. Funds that are predominately sourced from fundraising and donations are held and managed by individual brigades.

There are no provisions in the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* or any regulations that make RFBs accountable to State government for the use of the revenues which are raised by them or by their local governments, nor are RFBs subject to requirements under the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*.

Since there is no legislative basis to compel brigades to account for the grants or funding support they receive, Government does not enforce accountability. However, brigades have a duty of care in relation to the management of brigade revenues, as part of their responsibility to the community that they serve.

Report to Parliament No.3 for 2008, Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland, Auditor-General of Queensland

An Auditor-General's report (the Report) on rural fire management, tabled in Parliament on 15 May 2008, considered whether suitable systems were operating to ensure the efficient and effective management of rural fires, including whether RFBs were adequately resourced.

The Report raised concerns about the status of RFBs and their relationship with QFRS, stating that RFBs appear to be managed as separate entities with their own financial accounts operating independently of QFRS whereas the legislation provides for RFBs to be part of the QFRS structure, with QFRS responsible for the liabilities of those brigades.

Rural Operations established a Steering Committee to review all of the recommendations contained in the Report and has implemented a number of improvements, including some of the systems and processes outlined in this submission.

With respect to Recommendations 7, 8 and 9, DCS advised the Queensland Audit Office (QAO) in April 2009 that while the department acknowledges that it plays a governance role for RFBs with respect to matters such as training, equipment, policies and procedures, there is no legislative head of power or obligation that requires an RFB to be accountable to the department for its individual financial affairs.

While the Chief Executive of DCS is responsible for the efficiency of RFBs (Section 85 of the FRSA), beyond this obligation neither the department nor QFRS appears to have any rights or control over the financial resources of RFBs.

Funds, other than rural fire levies and cash or in-kind contributions by local governments which are predominantly obtained via local fundraising activities and donations, are not considered material and therefore are not consolidated with the department's financial statements. The QFRS does provide support and guidance to RFBs on appropriate management of those funds in order to ensure that sound governance principles are adhered to.

With respect to rural fire levies and cash or in-kind contributions made by local governments to RFBs, it is considered by the department that accountability for these contributions, which are raised by the local government under the *Local Government Act 1993*, rests entirely with the local government that raises the rates or levies from which these contributions are made. There is case law that supports the proposition that this money is subject to a statutory trust for the purpose that it was collected and the 'trustee' of this trust is the Council (*Bathurst City Council v PWC Properties (1998) 195 CLR566*).

The QFRS has introduced Local Area Finance Committees (LAFCs) to complement Council's role by providing a framework for the administration of the levies collected, however, by law this cannot remove the accountability for the levy raised as this stays with the council. (see page 44 for more about LAFCs)

The QFRS acknowledges that it plays a support role in providing information and working with local governments to ensure that RFB monies are spent in an appropriate and accountable manner in the provision of fire services to the local community.

Accordingly, the support provided to brigades to manage their funding, including reporting and accounting processes has been enhanced through the Rural Fire Brigade Manual and through the administrative support provided by LAFCs

The Rural Fire Brigade Manual is a support tool that contains guidelines on financial and audit requirements and templates for operational and management plans. These guidelines are provided to assist RFBs in their financial management and provide a framework for maintenance, reporting and planning. For example, guidelines are provided for brigades that receive an RFL to prepare a copy of their three year management and one year operational plans.

Rural Operations assists each RFB to prepare an annual budget. This helps brigades to know what funds are needed to meet not only operational requirements, but also capital requirements.

Brigades are requested to submit reports of incidents attended and injuries sustained by members (through the Brigade Incident Reporting System), and obtain annual safety certificates for appliances. The focus of the reporting process is on operational and incident management so that RFBs are aware of the risks in their local area and can plan accordingly.

Minimum training requirements are set for brigade members. Additionally role descriptors are currently being developed by Rural Operations for the use of chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers which outline the duties and responsibilities of each role and also specify highly desirable requirements of candidates. Consultation on the role descriptors is expected to be conducted with the RFBAQ prior to release.

DCS is of the view that the measures taken to support RFBs, as outlined above, address recommendations 7, 8 and 9 in the Report and has requested that the QAO reconsider its position and provide advice accordingly. To date no advice has been received.

A summary of the recommendations contained in the Report, and the corresponding actions undertaken by QFRS is at Attachment Three.

Local Area Finance Committees

LAFCs have been established at the local level in some communities to assist RFBs to enhance their accountability measures and governance. They are also aimed at assisting local councils, who may have as many as 60 RFBs within their boundaries, to effectively administer separate levy rates for each RFB. While LAFCs are a complement to the role of council's, by law they do not remove the accountability for the levy raised from the council.

LAFCs are comprised of representatives of RFBs, local councils and QFRS. The objective of an LAFC is to reduce the administrative burden on volunteers, so that they can concentrate on bushfire-related activities. For example, LAFCs may assist RFBs to prepare an annual budget with the aim of ensuring a guaranteed level of funding for brigades to meet not only operational requirements but capital requirements.

LAFCs may also submit a proposal on behalf of the RFB to the local council for a rural fire levy to be charged to rateable properties for that year. Once the levy has been applied and collected by Councils, the levy funds will be distributed by the LAFCs to the brigades in line with their budget.

By examining operational and financial issues facing a group of brigades in a particular local government area, LAFCs can facilitate the collection and distribution of the levies based on the actual operational and financial needs of the brigades.

Some RFBs have expressed concern about establishing an LAFC. Those RFBs who have raised concerns have cited the potential for an increased administrative workload, onerous reporting requirements and the potential for funding provided by local governments to be reduced.

However, the establishment of LAFCs by RFBs in local government areas is voluntary and where LAFCs currently exist there has been a reduction in the administrative workload for brigades. This is because LAFCs undertake negotiations and discussions with local governments on behalf of member RFBs, negating the need for individual RFBs to singularly approach local governments. The assistance that is provided by LAFCs to their member RFBs in budgeting and planning has resulted in a more appropriate and equitable distribution of funding (primarily determined by the annual budgets submitted by individual brigades).

Consultation is being conducted by QFRS with brigades who do not have LAFCs and may wish to establish such committees in their local areas.

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

Section 75 of the FRSA empowers the Commissioner to appoint such number of Chief Fire Wardens and Fire Wardens as the Commissioner thinks necessary or expedient for the purposes of the FRSA.

There are currently 2418 Fire Wardens in Queensland operating in 227 Chief Fire Warden Districts. Although public service officers, fire officers and police officers may undertake the role, Chief Fire Wardens and Fire Wardens are predominantly volunteers.

The Role of Fire Wardens

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 of climate change, population growth and changing societal values regarding smoke and environmental burning will mean that the skills of Fire Wardens will remain vital.

Fire Wardens are generally responsible for managing the use of fire in rural areas for a range of management outcomes, including hazard and fire risk reduction, through the issuing of 'Permits to Light Fire' and a prohibition on lighting fires during extreme conditions.

Landowners wanting to conduct hazard reduction by way of burning an area greater than two square metres must obtain a Permit to Light Fire from their local Fire Warden. All 'Permits to Light Fire' determine the conditions under which a fire can be lit. Approximately 15,000 Permits to Light Fire are issued by Fire Wardens to Queensland landholders each year.

Fire Wardens teach members of their communities how to responsibly prepare their properties against the threat of bushfires. In addition they engage with communities to ensure that property owners participate in responsible burning to reduce the threat of fire in their local areas.

Powers of a Fire Warden

Under Section 76 of the FRSA, the powers of a Chief Fire Warden or Fire Warden are the same as those of an authorised fire officer subject to any limitation imposed by the Commissioner, and the Commissioner may also direct a chief fire warden or a fire warden to discharge functions in addition to those imposed by the FRSA.

Fire Wardens must comply with certain codes of practice and directions by the Commissioner.

Fire Wardens and Chief Fire Wardens have the authority to impose additional fire restrictions on the local community or cancel permits, to ensure the safe use of fire.

2006 Review of the Fire Warden's Role

A review of the Fire Warden role and the Permit to Light Fire system was undertaken in 2006 by Rural Operations, which included a survey conducted by the Volunteerism Project Team of the Bushfire CRC.

The objective of the review was to ensure that Rural Operations has the capacity to lead best practice in the proactive use of fire and to assess whether the role of Fire Wardens remained contemporary.

The survey results indicated that Fire Wardens tend to be long serving (54% more than 10 years) and revealed that a future challenge for Rural Operations is to ensure that teaching and transfer of knowledge occurs between older or retiring fire wardens

to new recruits. Fire Wardens reported participation in an average of some 13 hours per month on their volunteer duties, primarily in prevention activities.

Recommendations from the Review

The review highlighted a number of areas for improvement to strengthen the Fire Warden role including:

- Appointment of Rural Operations Area Directors as Chief Fire Wardens to ensure consistent availability and expertise
- The creation of a Permit to Light Fire zoning system to effectively manage the State's diverse geographic spread and variations in the need to use fire as a hazard reduction
- Declared fire season zones to allow for improved management of both Permits to Light Fire and the incidence of unauthorised fire
- Change to Commissioner's notifications in order to remove certain exemptions to Permit to Light fires (for example, the burning of a beast and the burning of sawmill waste), to control the lighting of fire during the declared fire season, and provide a coordinated restriction on the issue of Permits thereby reducing the need to implement a fire ban during the declared fire season
- Ensure that legislative change required as a result of implementation is effected

An implementation plan, adopting all of the recommendations, is currently being scoped and staged implementation of improvements will begin in 2010.

In addition, feasibility studies are being conducted for the creation of a centralised system for issue of permits. The aim of a centralised system would be to enable more effective management in the areas of reporting, data collection and auditing of issued permits. A centralised system will also facilitate dissemination of fire ban information and enhanced capacity to restrict permits during fire bans.

7. Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?

While there have been many innovations and changes to the operation of rural fire services in the past 150 years, the willingness of Queenslanders to help each other through tough times, even if it means putting their own lives on the line, remains unchanged. This section outlines some further key work being done to ensure the rural fire service in Queensland continues to thrive to protect rural communities from the threat of bushfire, and some of the challenges involved in doing so.

Rural and Remote Communities

Rural and remote communities typically have a low population dispersed over broader land areas compared to the higher population densities of cities and urban towns. The greatest challenge to emergency services delivery by volunteers in rural and remote communities is building capacity for required functions with fewer volunteers within small communities.

The dwindling populations of some rural and remote communities in Queensland have resulted in some communities finding it difficult to source enough members to operate multiple volunteer emergency services (such as SES, Rural Fire Service and Community First Responders for ambulance services), thereby exposing the risk of collapse of one or more of the local groups. The ESU model has proved particularly beneficial in remote communities.

All of these factors have a large impact, particularly during protracted bushfires in the summer months, and present a challenge to QFRS in addressing the increasing demands on the State's fire services.

Significant activity has been undertaken by various organisations in Australia, including DCS, in recent years to strengthen the capacity of the volunteer pool and to raise awareness of the value that the community places in their volunteers.

Constraints on volunteers' time

The greatest constraint for rural volunteers is time; time to participate in fire hazard reduction, community education and fighting the fires themselves. In PPBs in particular, time provided in volunteer services means time away from family, making a living and tending properties.

Additionally, the amount of time given by volunteers is declining and volunteers are not always available for extended periods of time. For example, employees may be released by their companies to attend fire fighting volunteer duties for a day or two, but are expected to return to work thereafter. Similarly, self-employed people may not have the capacity to be away from their business to provide volunteer assistance for an extended period of time.

Volunteers themselves cite concerns about the possible negative impacts of climate change on the frequency and severity of large fires which would inevitably require greater demands on volunteers' time amid the current economic uncertainty.¹⁶ An additional and repeated issue raised by volunteers is the increasing hours required to be spent on paper work and processes.

Measures to retain volunteers

A number of measures have been taken by the State to support and retain volunteers.

The recruitment and retention of volunteers is an ongoing challenge. In addition to constraints of time, volunteers cite financial imposts and out-of-pocket expenses as an ongoing concern. Volunteers also cite concerns about the administrative and reporting obligations increasingly applied to volunteers. Members who provide voluntary services to their local communities often do not have the time, capacity or

¹⁶ McLennan, J. (2008) *Issues facing Australian volunteer-based emergency services organisations: 2008-2010: A report prepared for Emergency Management Australia (EMA)*. Complex Decision research Group, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University, Bundoora in McLennan, J. Birch, A, Cowlishaw, S., and Hayes, P (2009) Maintaining volunteer firefighter numbers: Adding value to the retention coin. *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Vol.24, No. 2, p 40

inclination to observe the increasing number of performance and accountability measures.

Enhancements have been made to the Rural Fire Service, particularly over the last 5 years, to assist RFBs with planning for budget allocations, appliances, communications, equipment, geographic information systems, training, reporting and staff support.

In particular, a focus on training over the past two years has seen the number of rural volunteers who hold firefighter status increase from 6,500 in June 2008 to 9,478 in February 2010. The heightened level of training and expertise within brigades greatly assists RFBs during incidents.

The Payroll Tax Act 1971 was amended, from 1 July 2008, so that tax exemptions apply to volunteer fire fighters, as well as other emergency services volunteers. The exemptions apply to wages paid or payable to an employee in relation to any period during which the employee is taking part in bushfire fighting activities as a volunteer in the Rural Fire Brigade, or engaging in emergency activities as a volunteer.

The exemptions also include a range of associated activities including training in bushfire and emergency procedures and prevention activities such as hazard reduction burning. (Exemptions do not apply to paid sick leave, annual leave, long service leave or similar leave taken while the employee is absent due to these volunteer activities).

In addition, under Directive 18/09 pursuant to the *Public Service Act 2008*, a public service employee who is also an emergency service volunteer, such as a fire brigade member or an auxiliary fire fighter, will be granted special leave when called out for emergencies or to fight fires.

The Government has an insurance agreement in place with WorkCover Queensland covering a number of volunteer groups, including RFB members. The department pays a capped premium to Workcover for compensation claims associated with volunteer duties.

The Rural Operations Volunteer Conference

In 2008, the inaugural Rural Operations Volunteer Conference was held. The purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity for volunteers to participate in learning and networking with other volunteers from around the State. A key message of the conference was that Rural Operations places great faith in its volunteers and values the services that they provide. Presentations from key speakers included the latest developments in fire management and the outcomes of research and projects.

170 volunteers from around the State attended the two day conference and provided feedback through a survey conducted by Rural Operations. The volunteers rated the conference as "excellent" and "extremely useful" to understanding their role in the context of a State wide approach to rural fire management. A CD of the presentations was given to attendees for volunteers to share with their RFB colleagues.

Due to the success of the conference it will become a biennial event, with the next conference being held in 2010. The focus of the 2010 conference will be on community education and the role of the Volunteer Community Educator.

Honours, awards and medals

To demonstrate the value that is placed on rural volunteers and to pay tribute to the high standard of work performance and conduct of volunteers, a number of awards, certificates and honours are granted each year. In 2009, 500 awards were made. Categories include years of service, bravery and acknowledgement of service to community.

Awards and certificates currently available to Rural Fire Service Volunteers include:

Australian Honours:

- Bravery Awards
- Order of Australia
- Australian Fire Service Medal, National Medal

Achievement Awards:

- Australia Day Achievement Awards
- Minister's Awards of Excellence

QFRS Honours:

Diligent and Ethical Service Medal

Certificates:

- Minister's Certificate of Commendation
- Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation
- Assistant Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation
- Certificate of Appreciate for Years of Service
- Regional Rural Fire Service Volunteer of the Year Awards

Rural Fire Services in Australia – Interstate Comparison
Summary Table of Operational Funding, Staffing and Responsibility

	South Australia Country Fire Services	Victoria Country Fire Authority	New South Wales Rural Fire Services	ACT Rural Fire Service	Qld QFRS Rural Operations⁵
Total Revenue (\$'000) 2008-2009	67,838 ¹ CFS provides support (operational, equipment, funding) to the volunteer brigades in regional and semi-metropolitan areas. Chain of command indicates that salaried staff are only at senior level – firefighters are all volunteer	451,715 In addition to “fires in the country area”, the CFA is responsible for provision of fire and rescue services to more than 50% of metropolitan Melbourne and every provincial city, town and village in Victoria. All urban brigades have both paid and volunteer staff. Brigades in rural areas may consist of volunteers only	267,689 NSWRFS is a funding, coordinating and training body for the State’s volunteer brigades, who are attached to local governments. Rural fire districts are based upon local government boundaries, and may contain several volunteer brigades.	Not provided in Annual Report. RFS provides direction, support, funding and equipment to the ACT’s rural fire brigades. Rural brigades have responsibility for areas outside of “built up” areas	29,077 Rural Operations forms part of QFRS, and is responsible for a management framework for the State’s rural brigades. Rural Operations is responsible for rural and semi-rural communities.
Insurance or Property Levy Funding (\$'000)	33,673 ¹	239,231	169,030		13,358 ⁶
State Government Funding (\$'000)	27,842	171,034 ²	54,118 ⁴		9,250
Other Income (\$'000) (fees, interest etc)	6,323	41,450	44,541		6,469 ⁷
Number of Volunteers	15,400	58,943 ³	70,701	~400	34,000
Number of Full-Time Equivalent Staff (salaried)	108	1,481	752	11	115

Sources: Annual Reports, legislation. Notes:

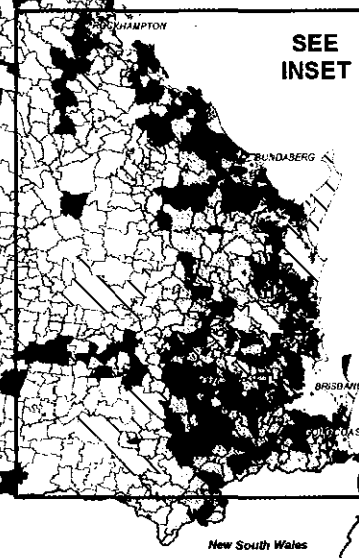
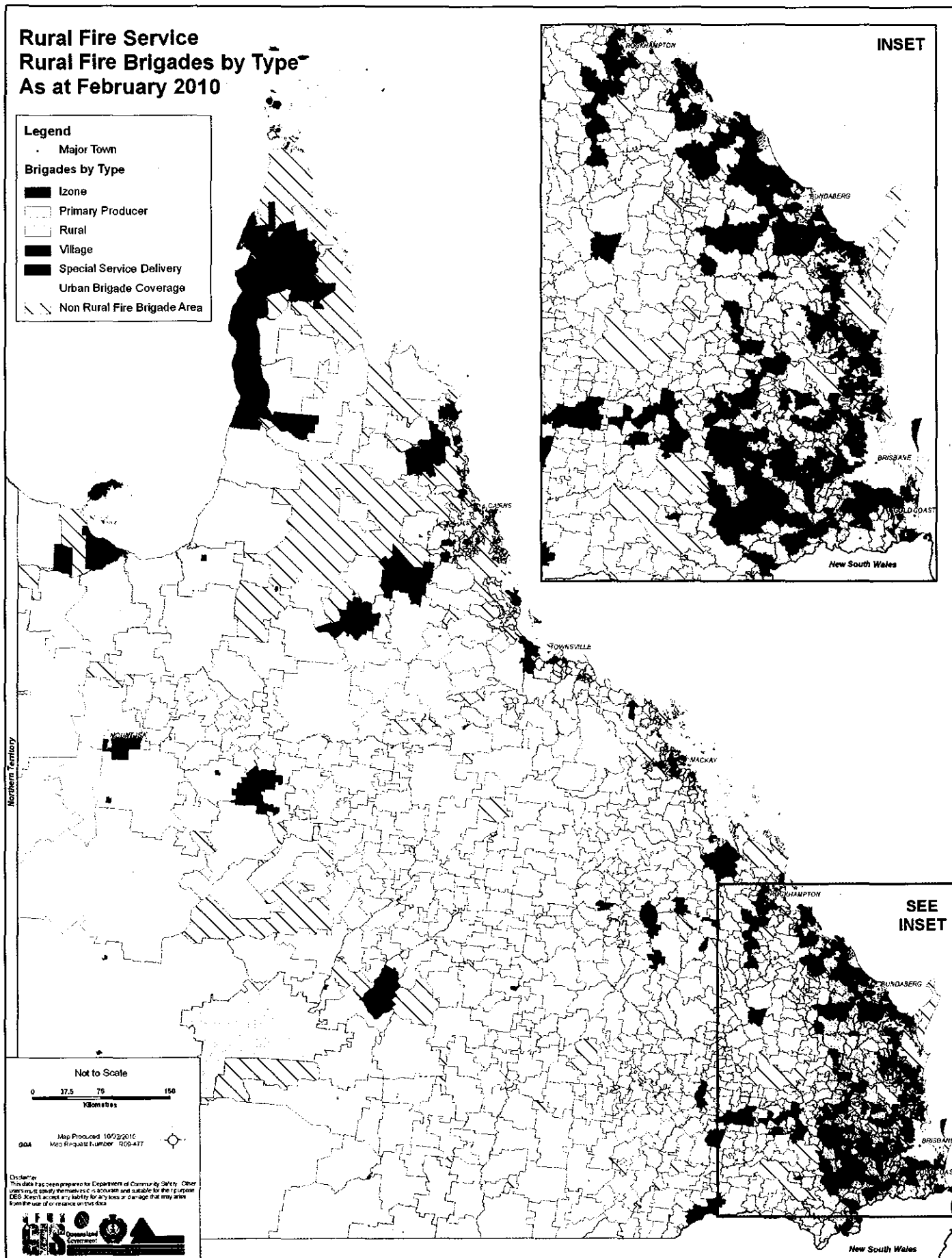
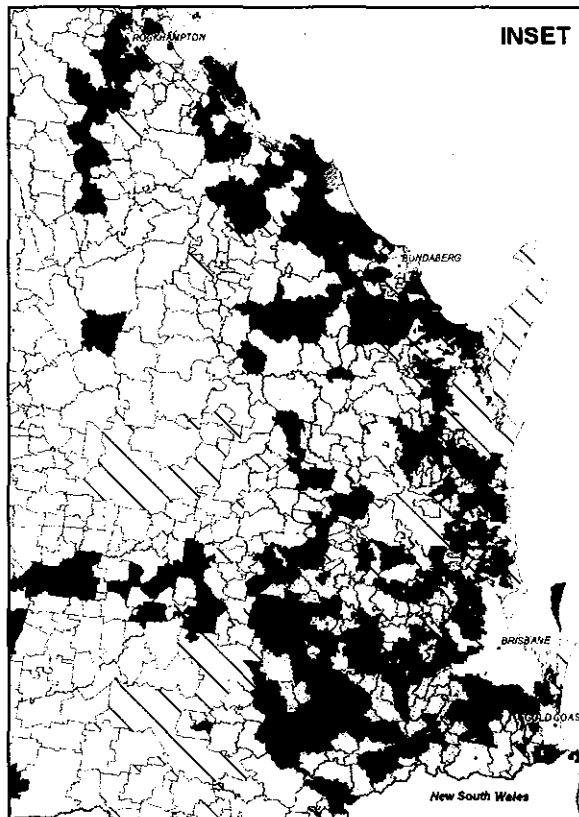
1. The South Australian Emergency Services Levy applies to all fixed and some mobile property. The SA Government also contributes to the dedicated Emergency Services Fund to compensate it for concessions to pensioners, payment of liability on its own property and remissions to a variety of property owners.
2. Includes \$112.1 million in 2008-09 due to the 2009 bushfires in Victoria.
3. Of these volunteers, more than 9,000 are urban brigade volunteers. Every CFA Urban Brigade is partly staffed by volunteers.
4. Includes \$13.3 million in 2008-09 due to the 2009 bushfires in NSW.
5. Funding and staffing information provided for QFRS Rural Operations only. Information of local government funding to RFBs is in Table 5..
6. Estimated contribution to QFRS Rural Operations revenues from the Urban Fire Levy.
7. Includes other QFRS Urban Services-sourced revenues, \$5.1 million and contributions from rural fire brigades, \$1.4 million (for equipment and vehicles).

Attachment Two – Rural Fire Brigades by Type

Rural Fire Service Rural Fire Brigades by Type As at February 2010

Legend

- Major Town
- Brigades by Type**
 - Izone
 - Primary Producer
 - Rural
 - Village
 - Special Service Delivery
 - Urban Brigade Coverage
 - Non Rural Fire Brigade Area



Not to Scale

0 37.5 75 150
Kilometres

Map Produced 10/02/2010
Map Request Number 1009-477

Disclaimer
This data has been prepared for the Department of Community Safety. Other users must verify the accuracy and suitability of the data for their purposes. DES does not accept any liability for any loss or damage that may arise from the use of or reliance on this data.



Recommendations of the Queensland Auditor-General (QAO) arising from Report to Parliament No. 3 for 2008 – Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland.

A Summary of Progress Achieved by Rural Operations (as at February 2010), Queensland Fire and Rescue Service on QAO Recommendations:

QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – FORWARD PLANNING
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. QFRS implements 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a process for identifying risks and opportunities; ▪ the development of strategies to address the risks and opportunities; and ▪ a system to monitor and report on the implementation of strategies. 2. QFRS provides 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.
Progress Achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As at August 2009, 65% of Future Directions Report Recommendations have been 'Completed', 30% of Future Directions Report Recommendations are 'Work in Progress' (and 5% are either 'On Hold' or are 'Not Being Progressed'). ✓ Rural Operations Risk Register has been developed. ✓ Development of 2009-2010 Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business Plans with strategies that address the key risks. ✓ New Quarterly Performance Review and Area/Regional Reporting Process Implemented. ✓ Commenced monitoring the development of brigade plans through Area Quarterly Performance Process. ✓ A brochure has been developed to promote the benefits of the Local Area Finance Committee concept.
QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – RISK MANAGEMENT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. QFRS establishes 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ brigade hazard identification and reduction plans (brigade fire management plans); ▪ brigade one year operational and three year management plans; and ▪ 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.

Progress Achieved

- ✓ Ensure the ongoing viability of both the State and Regional Bushfire Interdepartmental Committees through ensuring regular meetings are programmed and the key issues as outlined in the Committee's Terms of Reference are being addressed.
- ✓ Included the trial implementation of the Wildfire Mitigation concept in the 2008-2009 Rural Operations Business Plan and Regional Business Plans.
- ✓ A strategy to ensure that brigades in receipt of a levy submit plans to Area Office annually has been included in the Rural Operations Business Plan.
- ✓ Commenced monitoring the development of brigade plans through the Area Quarterly Performance process.
- ✓ Area Offices report on the current level of reporting by brigades in receipt of a levy, including the auditing of books and how many have a 12 Month Operational Plan and a 3 year Activity Plan in place.
- ✓ Ensure ongoing consultation with the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland Inc (RFBAQ) through both correspondence and the continuation of the consultative forums as well as regular meetings at regional levels.
- ✓ Other mechanisms already in place include: Rural Operations Area staff attend brigade meetings; feedback mechanisms in place through the Volunteer Portal, Bulletin magazine, website and Rural Fire Brigade Manual.
- ✓ Anti Discrimination awareness strategies implemented: a supply of brochures and DVDs provided to Regional Managers for distribution to Area Offices/brigades; informative article included in the Rural Fires Bulletin magazine; and information included in new members Welcome Packs.

QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – BRIGADE FUNDING AND RESOURCING

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

Progress Achieved

- ✓ One of the initiatives currently being implemented is the concept of the Local Area Finance Committee, which is intended to be established in each Local Government Area, responsible for administering all aspects of the collection, distribution and accountability requirements of the rural fire levy, so as to satisfy local government's accountability requirements in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993* (NB; On hold pending further consultation in the Rockhampton area).
- ✓ A strategy to ensure that brigades in receipt of a levy submit a 12 Month Operational Plan and a three year Activity Plan to Area Offices annually has been included in the Rural Operations Business Plan.
- ✓ Rural Operations has commenced monitoring the development of brigade plans through the Area Quarterly Performance Process. Area Offices report on the current level of reporting by brigades in receipt of a levy, including the auditing of books and how many have a 12 Month Operational Plan and a three year Activity Plan in place.
- ✓ Audit of all rural fire brigade stations finalised in June 2008.
- ✓ Implemented a strategy to ensure that all appliances are issued with an annual safety certificate.

NB-Director-General sent a letter to Auditor-General dated 22 April 2009, advising that the department is

of the view that Recommendations 7, 8 and 9 have already been addressed – no reply received to date.

QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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

Progress Achieved

- ✓ Scoping document developed for a project team to review the current brigade incident reporting system.
- ✓ Implemented new Quarterly Performance review and Area/Regional level reporting process.
- ✓ Further development of Rural Operations Quarterly Performance Review with improved measures around the key risks and strategies.
- ✓ Developed 2009-2010 Personal Performance Plans for Rural Operations staff.
- ✓ Implementation of the new brigade classification system to assist with ensuring that available resources and support are appropriately allocated.

QAO RECOMMENDATIONS – TRAINING

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

Progress Achieved

- ✓ Introduced new Brigade Training and Support Officer positions, bringing the total across the State to 22.
- ✓ Released and promoted the Volunteer Learning and Development Framework to all volunteers.
- ✓ Established volunteer training targets.
- ✓ Provided volunteers with access to 2008 Volunteer Conference presentation DVDs.
- ✓ Commenced monitoring progress towards achieving training targets through the Area Quarterly Performance process.
- ✓ Developed the Rural Fire Service Awareness training package.
- ✓ Commenced development of the Brigade Management Program – First Officer training.
- ✓ Included in the 2008-2009 Business Plan, the strategy for minimum level training being delivered by Volunteer Trainers in brigades
- ✓ Policy and Supporting Business Rule developed to ensure the utilisation of Casual Trainers is undertaken within a corporate governance framework and they are utilised to deliver the greatest outcomes for the cost.

QUEENSLAND LOCAL COUNCILS
FUNDS RAISED FOR RURAL FIRE BRIGADES 2008-2009 FINANCIAL YEAR

LOCAL COUNCIL NAME	TOTAL FUNDS RAISED THROUGH A RURAL FIRE LEVY	TOTAL RURAL FIRE FUNDS RAISED AS A PROPORTION OF GENERAL RATES	IN-KIND SUPPORT PROVIDED TO LOCAL RURAL FIRE BRIGADES
Balonne Shire Council	Yes \$3,088	No \$0	No \$0
Banana Shire Council	Yes \$14,650	No \$0	No \$0
Barcaldine Regional Council	Yes \$5,500	No \$0	Yes \$0
Barcoo Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Blackall-Tambo Regional Council	No \$0	Yes \$1,000	No \$0
Boulia Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Brisbane City Council	Yes \$16,900	No \$0	No \$0
Bulloo Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Bundaberg Regional Council	Yes \$360,081	No \$0	No \$0
Burdekin Shire Council	Yes \$4,500	No \$0	No \$0
Burke Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Cairns Regional Council	Yes \$36,325	No \$0	No \$0
Carpentaria Shire Council	No \$0	Yes \$43,000	No \$0
Cassowary Coast Regional Council	Yes \$7,000	No \$0	No \$0
Central Highlands Regional Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Charters Towers Regional Council	No \$0	Yes \$6,000	No \$0
Cloncurry Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Cook Shire Council	Yes \$8,825	No \$0	No \$0
Croydon Shire Council	No \$0	Yes \$5,000	No \$0
Diamantina Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Etheridge Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Flinders Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Fraser Coast Regional Council	Yes \$436,250	No \$0	No \$0
Gladstone Regional Council	No \$0	Yes \$140,000	Yes \$2,000
Gold Coast City Council	Yes \$549,853	No \$0	No \$0
Goondiwindi Regional Council	Yes \$30,000	No \$0	Yes \$2,000
Gympie Regional Council	Yes \$246,000	No \$0	No \$0
Hinchinbrook Shire Council	Yes \$8,640	No \$0	No \$0
Ipswich City Council	Yes \$118,000	No \$0	No \$0
Isaac Regional Council	Yes \$13,290	No \$0	No \$0
Lockyer Valley Regional Council	Yes \$251,747	No \$0	No \$0
Logan City Council	Yes \$415,000	No \$0	No \$0
Longreach Regional Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Mackay Regional Council	Yes \$304,856	No \$0	No \$0
Maranoa Regional Council	Yes \$2,280	No \$0	No \$0
McKinlay Shire Council	Yes \$52,000	No \$0	No \$0
Moreton Bay Regional Council	Yes \$239,000	No \$0	No \$0
Mount Isa City Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Murweh Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
North Burnett Regional Council	Yes \$16,335	No \$0	No \$0
Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Paroo Shire Council	Yes \$3,060	No \$0	No \$0
Quilpie Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Redland City Council	Yes \$51,658	No \$0	No \$0
Richmond Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Rockhampton Regional Council	Yes \$150,000	No \$0	No \$0

QUEENSLAND LOCAL COUNCILS
FUNDS RAISED FOR RURAL FIRE BRIGADES 2008-2009 FINANCIAL YEAR

LOCAL COUNCIL NAME	TOTAL FUNDS RAISED THROUGH A RURAL FIRE LEVY	TOTAL RURAL FIRE FUNDS RAISED AS A PROPORTION OF GENERAL RATES	IN-KIND SUPPORT PROVIDED TO LOCAL RURAL FIRE BRIGADES
Scenic Rim Regional Council	Yes \$156,882	No \$0	No \$0
Somerset Regional Council	Yes \$158,000	No \$0	No \$0
South Burnett Regional Council	Yes \$140,000	No \$0	No \$0
Southern Downs Regional Council	Yes \$143,286	No \$0	No \$0
Sunshine Coast Regional Council	Yes \$500,000	No \$0	No \$0
Tablelands Regional Council	Yes \$70,000	No \$0	Yes \$9,300
Toowoomba Regional Council	Yes \$292,949	No \$0	No \$0
Torres Shire Council	Yes \$98,565	No \$0	No \$0
Torres Strait Island Regional Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Townsville City Council	Yes \$166,000	No \$0	No \$0
Weipa Town Authority	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Western Downs Regional Council	Yes \$83,338	No \$0	No \$0
Whitsunday Regional Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
Winton Shire Council	No \$0	No \$0	No \$0
TOTAL	\$5,153,858	\$195,000	\$13,300

Source: Data collected by telephone survey conducted with each regional council in February 2010

Note: Indigenous Councils were not contacted as they do not collect a Rural Fire Levy.