



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

General Manager

Annual General Meeting Report

For September 2018

From our AGM last year in October until this AGM in September the RFBAQ has driven and been driven by momentous change.

The Legal Status of Brigades Review, which the RFBAQ has been calling for since 2013 has now been completed and we are waiting for the synopsis to be distributed. The six recommendations of the review were all submitted by the RFBAQ and these will be the recommendations adopted by the report and implemented by the RFSQ and the QFES into the future.

In addition to the important purpose of the review, a new way of effectively engaging with brigades on complex matters was something that the RFSQ learnt from this process. I believe that the effectiveness of the engagement was due to the long lead up to the roadshow and the huge amount of prepositioning and support information that was distributed to brigades ahead of the physical engagement piece.

Legal Status is one of the two foundations that the brigades need to be able to choose the level at which they support their individual communities in the future. The other is to amend the QFES Act 1990 to reflect that active volunteer firefighters are Emergency Officers (Fire Officers is the current wording in the Act). This process is currently underway with the QFES recruiting staff to commence the legislative review process. The RFBAQ had our first meeting with QFES regarding our position in February 2016 and our position is well documented as one of our six key strategies.

On successful completion of these two processes, brigades will have a solid legislative and legal base which will for the first time allow them to make long term plans for their brigades and communities and know that these plans will not be disrupted on a whim.

The RFBAQ has moved premises to the old forestry buildings north of Gympie and this will be a long-term arrangement as we have secured a 20 year lease from the State Government. This is our forever home and the contact centre staff are very pleased with the relaxing tree covered grounds. Our Operations Manager Ashleigh Bonfiglio and our Office Coordinator Jessica Stark had many sleepless nights and many long days to ensure that the move was successful. Both Ash and Jess must be commended for the way that they successfully managed a very convoluted transition with a minimum of downtime for the Contact Centre. David McMullen who is still doing his job and also part of Ruth's role alongside Jess who is also fulfilling part of Ruth's role. For us to lose Ruth was a tragedy and certainly a most unwelcome driver of change in the RFBAQ.

Graeme McWilliam also passed away most unexpectedly in May and the impact that this had on his brigade, community and partner has been huge. He was a very valuable part of the RFBAQ and his insight and deliberations will be sorely missed.

The huge amount of activity the RFBAQ was involved in or was an initiator of has led to a revelation this year: that is that there is a productivity disconnect with the RFSQ/QFES.

The problem is that in the RFBAQ we have long serving staff who are specialists in their roles and they predominantly stay in their roles. This allows for the efficiency of experience. Pieces of work that would take ½ a day to complete initially are now no more than an hours work and when new problems or opportunities arise, the experience of the RFBAQ staff allow for risks to be managed or opportunities exploited with the minimum of force. This allows for the organisation to retain balance and momentum.

In dealing with organisations that have high staff turnover we are always negotiating with new people who are in a very steep learning curve and then they move onto another new role. This has seen massive levels of frustration as the RFBAQ are moving faster, covering more ground and achieving in multiple fields while the RFSQ/QFES through both high staff turnover and low level of personal ownership, are unwilling or unable to make the pace.

To try and rectify this performance imbalance the RFBAQ identified the need for a RFSQ officer to facilitate the internal QFES execution of agreed projects. This role commences in early October. This will ensure that the RFBAQ has a constant point of contact within the QFES and has continual access to an officer who will ensure that agreed commitments are actioned. Another identified need for RFSQ is for leaders of the future, this role will be rotated about every 6 months to allow for RFSQ staff to have exposure to a state overview of how brigades are supported by RFSQ and how RFSQ is supported by the department.

The first ever state manufactured Rural Pumper will be released at the LGAQ Annual General Meeting in Brisbane late October on the RFBAQ stand. This will give over 400 mayor and councillors the opportunity to see how the face of future community defence is changing. This Rural Pumper will also have the capacity to carry cutting gear for road crash rescue and space for a BA locker in the appropriate circumstances. This new heavy build of attack appliance will go on a 12-month road tour of brigades before it finds a home with a brigade that has an identified need.

The RFBAQ has been advocating for this build of appliance for a number of years now we are very close to revealing an asset that will allow a number of communities to defend themselves to a higher level. Another excellent outcome will be when this new Rural Pumper moves into an existing brigade it should free up the vehicle currently assigned to another brigade in need of an appliance.

The new builds and increase in the fleet with a defib in each truck are great steps forward for truck brigades and the commencement of the PPB Co-op funding and implementation of findings from the Year of the PPB truly show the value of the RFBAQ to brigades. We have many other initiatives underway and these have been covered in my monthly reports.

Six years ago this month 57% of RFSQ staff were made redundant; through the RFBAQ not only were those roles saved but due to the findings of the Malone Review, which was an RFBAQ initiative, more offices were opened and brigades received a higher level of support from RFSQ. Improvements have been made year on year and as we started from such a low base there is always more to be done.

I trust that you accept this report and accept that the staff of the RFBAQ are committed today as they were in the fight 6 years ago to provide an environment where brigades are able to meet their community's expectations for self-defence.