

Auditor-General of Queensland

Report to Parliament No. 3 for 2008 Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland A Performance Management Systems Audit



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Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland
A Performance Management Systems Audit**



Queensland

Prepared under Part 6

Division 3 of the

Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977

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Auditor-General of Queensland

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The Honourable M F Reynolds MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Speaker

This report is prepared under Part 6 Division 3 of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977*, and is on the results of the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland. It is the third in the series of Auditor-General's Reports to Parliament for 2008.

In accordance with s.105 of the Act, would you please arrange for the report to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

Yours sincerely



Glenn Poole
Auditor-General



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Glossary

Frequently used terms and abbreviations

Appliance	Emergency fire fighting response vehicle
Back Burning	A fire fighting technique that involves lighting fires ahead of the fire front in order to burn back toward the main fire and remove fuel loads
Brigade Activity Levels	Number of incidents responded to by a brigade
Brigade Area	Geographical area covered by a brigade
Brigade Competency Model	Minimum training standards set for each brigade classification, to ensure a sufficient skill set will be available to ensure brigades can operate safely and effectively
Brigade	Queensland Rural Fire Brigade
DES	Department of Emergency Services
Effectiveness	The achievement of the objectives or other intended effects of activities at a program or entity level
Efficiency	The use of resources such that output is optimised for any given set of resource inputs, or input is minimised for any given quantity and quality of output
Fire Break	Clearing in vegetation used to prevent the spread of fire
Fire Management Groups	Group established to collect and distribute local government rural fire levies according to the actual operational and financial needs of the brigades within a local government area. These groups incorporate QFRS staff, local government and brigade representatives within the area
Fire Management Plans	Wildfire risk identification and mitigation plan to enable an effective and efficient approach to defending the town from wildfire
Fuel Loads	Amount of material available to burn
Future Directions	Process undertaken by Rural Operations, which identified current and future risks to the delivery of rural fire management and suppression services. This process involved input from Rural Operations regional managers and identified a number of significant threats and explored recommendations to improve existing practices. Findings and recommendations have been documented in a paper titled Future Directions Report
Hazard Reduction	The processes directed towards effective minimisation of fire hazards
Incident	A situation which requires a response from a brigade
iZone	Brigade area consisting of high-density rural residential development. The area may contain significant sections of bushland but the predominant risk is to life, property and infrastructure
Local Action Plans (LAP)	Brigade plan containing specific information needed in the event of an fire emergency (predominantly developed for iZone brigades)

Personal Protective Equipment	Uniform and equipment worn by fire-fighters during an incident
Prevention	All activities concerned with minimising the incidence of wildfire
QFRS	Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
Rural Fire Brigade Manual	This manual assists brigades conduct non-emergency related business; it contains information regarding administrative policies, procedures and other relevant issues
Rural Fire Levy	Funding collected from ratepayers by the rural fire brigades' respective local government and paid directly to the brigade
Rural Operations	Division of QFRS responsible for managing rural fire services. Rural Operations consists of the Assistant Commissioner for Rural Operations and approximately 120 training and support staff
Structure Fires	Fire emergency involving a building
Suppression	Activities connected with restricting the spread of a wildfire and making it safe
the Act	<i>Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990</i>
Urban Encroachment (Urbanisation)	Population shift into wildfire prone areas
Urban/Rural Interface	Interface where urban and traditional wildfire prone landscape meet
WH&S	Workplace health and safety
Wildfire Prone Areas	Areas with a history of bushfires (high fuel loads and high fire danger weather conditions)
Wildfire	Used synonymously with bushfire to describe any unplanned grass, scrub or forest fire

Section 1

Executive summary

1.1 Management of rural fires

Under the provisions of the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, government has a responsibility to protect persons, property and the environment from fire emergencies. The government has established within the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) two distinct models to deliver this service; the paid staff urban 'red truck' service model, to protect major cities and towns across the State and the volunteer rural fire 'yellow truck' service model, to protect rural areas and minor townships and villages. Rural fire services are responsible for protecting approximately 17 per cent of the population and 93 per cent of the land area of Queensland.

The rural fire service consists of 1,525 rural fire brigades, involving approximately 35,000 dedicated volunteers. These volunteers commit their time and effort, not only in dealing with incidents, but also toward training and fundraising to ensure the success of this service.

The rural service model is funded from a number of sources. The State Government provides funding through the provision of grants toward the acquisition of appliances and for the construction of rural fire stations. The State also provides training and protection equipment to brigade members and the subsidisation of general fire fighting equipment that brigades may purchase. In addition to State funding, Local Governments may collect a rural fire levy from their ratepayers and remit this to rural fire brigades within the local government area. Other sources of brigade funds include grants from non-government organisations, fundraising and donations.

1.2 Audit opinion

After auditing the performance management systems of the rural fire service, I consider that while the rural fire service currently provides effective management of fires within rural communities, the service is at risk of becoming unsustainable due to the combination of a number of external and internal factors.

Within QFRS, there is a lack of comprehensive forward planning and risk management processes as well as inadequate systems to effectively assess the funding and resource requirements of the brigades. Effective decision making is also hindered by inadequate performance measurement. There are limitations in the systems to ensure training and workplace health and safety standards are met. In my opinion, these deficiencies become even more critical when allowance is made for: the potential for increases in the frequency and intensity of wildfire incidents as a result of climate change; urban encroachment; and difficulties in recruiting and training new volunteers to replace the ageing volunteers.

I note that QFRS recognises these sustainability issues and has taken a number of positive actions toward addressing them. This audit highlighted however, that QFRS needs to improve its existing management systems to not only provide an appropriate level of governance and accountability now, but to ensure issues affecting the continuation of this service are identified and included in future planning.

In addition, one issue that requires urgent clarification is the financial accountability framework of rural fire brigades. Rural fire brigades appear to be managed as separate entities with their own financial accounts operated independently of QFRS. However the legislation provides for brigades to be part of the QFRS structure, with QFRS responsible for the liabilities of these brigades. As outlined in section 3.3, the framework for the financial management and audit of these brigades needs clarification.

The significance of the need to maintain a volunteer based service delivery model is highlighted by the cost to Government of alternative models of fire service delivery. QFRS estimate that in the past two years, (which have been relatively quiet years with respect to bushfires given the drought conditions across Queensland), at least 350,000 hours of service have been undertaken by rural fire service volunteers within the most populated areas of Queensland covered by the rural fire service.

1.3 Key findings

The primary focus of this audit report is to examine the QFRS systems which enable QFRS to manage rural fire services. The audit identified a number of systemic issues requiring improvement, including planning, risk management, performance measurement, brigade funding and resourcing and training. These issues are addressed more fully in section three of the report.

Forward planning

There is a lack of comprehensive forward planning processes to identify and manage all future risks to the sustainability of the rural fire service. In addition, there are limited forward planning processes at the regional level and there are no formal mechanisms to ensure significant brigade issues are taken into account in the planning process.

Risk management

Current risk management processes are informal, ad-hoc or inconsistently implemented across the State. Further, there is no system to ensure key risks at all organisational levels are identified and managed effectively by QFRS.

Brigade funding and resourcing

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

Performance measurement

Performance measurement systems within QFRS Rural Operations division were found to be inadequate to support effective decision making. This impacts on any management and resource allocation decisions made by executive management.

Training

Currently there is a significant gap between QFRS accepted minimum standards of brigade training and the actual levels. This training gap has been recognised and prioritised by QFRS Rural Operations division and is subject to reporting and planning by management. Information collected during the audit suggests that the training gap reported by QFRS may be inaccurate.

There also needs to be adequate recognition of the changing nature of rural fire brigade activity and a change to the training of brigades to better reflect this. I noted during the audit that rural fire brigade activity is changing with some brigades reporting that only 50 per cent of the incidents they attend are traditional bush or grass fires. Rural fire brigades are increasingly dealing with incidents such as structure fires, motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies.

It was noted that QFRS have recognised a number of issues that may effect the sustainability of the rural fire service model and have taken a number of positive actions toward addressing them. Over the past two years there have been structural changes within QFRS, which increased the number of regional based brigade training and support staff. In addition QFRS has commenced the reclassification of rural fire brigades based on risk, and are focused on measuring the volunteer training gap and introducing processes to address this gap. Also, there has been significant investment over the past seven years in upgrading the rural fire fighting fleet including the introduction of a policy of replacing all fire fighting appliances before they reach 20 years of age.

However if QFRS do not take steps to address the issues noted above, the sustainability of the current rural fire service may be at risk. I have made a series of recommendations within this report which I consider to be important in ensuring the effectiveness of the current and future service.

1.4 Recommendations

FORWARD PLANNING

It is recommended that:

1. QFRS implement a forward planning process specific to rural fire management as part of the QFRS strategic planning process, which involves regional and area offices and incorporates:
 - a process for identifying risks and opportunities
 - the development of strategies to address the risks and opportunities
 - a system to monitor and report on the implementation of strategies.
2. QFRS provide guidance and support to rural fire brigades in the development of their one year operational plan and three year management plan.
3. QFRS implement a process to review brigade plans and incorporate specific issues identified into forward planning at the area and regional levels.

RISK MANAGEMENT

It is recommended that:

4. QFRS establish a structured risk management process for rural fire management, which involves regional and area offices, to enhance decision making processes and ensure opportunities are maximised and losses are minimised. This process should be linked to forward planning and incorporate existing processes such as:
 - brigade hazard identification and reduction plans (brigade fire management plans)
 - brigade one year operational and three year management plans
 - local action plans for iZone brigades (high risk areas).
5. QFRS implement a brigade issues management process to capture, manage and report specific brigade issues.

BRIGADE FUNDING AND RESOURCING

It is recommended that:

6. QFRS ensure compliance with the brigade accountability requirements for funding received by rural fire brigades as specified in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual
7. QFRS review the financial accountability and audit requirements of the rural fire brigades to reflect their status as part of QFRS
8. QFRS implement a system to collate and analyse brigade funding information
9. QFRS provide assistance to brigades in determining and budgeting for their resource needs
10. QFRS utilise performance information on brigade activity as a factor in determining brigade resource and funding needs
11. QFRS implement a system to monitor the condition and safety of brigade buildings and equipment.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

It is recommended that:

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

TRAINING

It is recommended that:

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

1.5 Department of Emergency Services response

The Director-General, in his response of 6 May 2008, stated:

“Strong community involvement has been the feature of rural fire brigades for the past 60 years. This feature was encompassed in legislation from 1947 and provided the basis for service provision to rural communities. As a result, rural fire brigades were established as community based organisations. Since 1990 the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) continues to treat brigades as community based organisations and strives to ensure that the relationship with the community is maintained.

Since its beginnings in 1947, the Government has taken positive steps to reinforce the role that rural fire brigades play in protecting the Queensland community. This has been through the provision of additional resourcing and support, through restructuring of the organisation to better meet the changing needs and an increased focus on risk management. QFRS Rural Operations continues to monitor the profile of rural fire brigade volunteers and all indications are volunteer numbers continue to be sustainable and the age profile is being augmented by the recruitment of younger volunteers.

QFRS Rural Operations took the initiative in 2007 to develop a Future Directions Paper, identifying key organisational risks specific to QFRS Rural Operations and strategies to address the risks. This document was endorsed by the QFRS Commissioner in March 2008.

Rural fire brigades are community self-help organisations with brigades expected to assist with funding their own operations, purchases and expenses. Legislation was enacted in 1994 that enables, but does not compel, local governments to raise a levy for local rural fire brigades. Currently in Queensland, local governments collect a levy for a total of 392 rural fire brigades (25%). The levy amount is decided by local government in consultation with ratepayers, rural fire brigades and the QFRS. Instead of raising a separate rural fire levy, some local governments choose to support its local brigades with funds from general rates.

Rural Operations is currently in the process of developing the Rural Operations’ State and Regional Business Plans for 2008-2009 with appropriate performance measures identified to measure the effectiveness of the strategies outline in the plan. Rural Operations is also currently developing a Quarterly Performance Review – Area Report for measuring performance at area level for implementation in financial year 2008-2009.

Fundamental to the training strategy being implemented by Rural Operations is the recently released Volunteer Learning and Development Framework (VLDF) and the processes of training targets and volunteer roles. The willingness and availability of volunteers to engage in training events is at the discretion of volunteers themselves and is a major consideration as a limiting factor in closing the training gap. However to further improve training engagement and completion rates, flexible learning methodologies that include e-Learning are being developed and introduced through access to specific government election commitment funding. These alternative learning resources aim to encourage and support self directed learners with a resulting reduction in the demand for face-to-face training, thereby freeing up both volunteer and staff trainers to provide skill development training and assessment and to deliver supervisor and management courses and programs.

It should be noted that the report did not recognise the role the 'Permit to Light Fire System' and the 2650 volunteer Fire Wardens covering 2634 Fire Warden Districts play in mitigating the impacts of bushfire in Queensland. The Fire Warden has a pivotal role in addressing changing community attitudes to the use of fire, particularly in higher density population areas of the state. The future impacts on climate change, the continuing migration into Queensland and changing societal values over smoke and environmental burning are all pressures that are placing greater demands on the skills of Fire Wardens. QFRS Rural Operations has recently undertaken a review of the permit to light fire system, including the role of the Fire Wardens, to ensure its viability into the future."

Auditor-General's additional comment

During the audit Departmental officers indicated that the role of the Fire Wardens was being reviewed. Initial advice to audit was that while the Fire Wardens are an important part of rural fire management, they operated at arm's length to QFRS Rural Operations.

The lack of integration of the Fire Warden network with QFRS Rural Operations was reinforced during the audit with no substantive references being made to the links between Rural Fire Brigade and Fire Warden operations during the discussions between audit and QFRS staff and volunteers.

For the Fire Warden network to play a pivotal role in mitigating the effects of bushfires would require a significant enhancement to the current communication, operational and planning systems within QFRS.

Section 2

Audit focus

2.1 Audit objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether suitable systems are operating to ensure the efficient and effective management of rural fire brigades. The audit also considered whether adequate systems are in place to ensure any increased risk of fire as a result of climate change and urban encroachment patterns is addressed.

2.2 Reasons for the audit

Climate change

Bushfires are an inherent part of the Australian environment, however in recent years concern has grown among fire agencies, land management agencies, policy makers and researchers regarding the apparent increase in the frequency and intensity of bushfires.

It is now accepted that global warming is occurring and higher average temperatures, more extreme temperature days and reduced rainfall are expected; all of which have adverse effects on bushfire risks¹. Research based on future climate change scenarios predicted an increase in the number of days with a very high and extreme fire risk in most parts of southeast Australia (refer Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Percent changes in the number of days with a very high and extreme fire-weather for two climate change scenarios, relative to 1990²

Forest fire danger index	2020		2050	
	Low global warming (0.4%)	High global warming (1%)	Low global warming (0.7%)	High global warming (2.9%)
Very high	+2 to +13%	+10 to +30%	+5 to +23%	+20 to +100%
Extreme	+5 to +25%	+15 to +65%	+10 to +50%	+100 to +300%

Specifically, research suggests that climate change has a distinct effect on the area burnt and the timing of the start of the bushfire season³. Earlier starts to the bushfire season imply a reduced window of opportunity for pre-season fuel-reduction burns, which may increase the intensity of subsequent fires.

While climate research has focused on the likely impacts on southeast Australia, QFRS have acknowledged that the predicted effects of climate change are applicable across Queensland, particularly as they relate to the increase in intensity and frequency of wildfires.

The increased risk of fire has led to a re-examination of the balance between suppression and prevention and to a greater focus on issues such as year-round land management practices, policies, planning and legislation. Logically, more frequent and more intense fires suggest that efficient and effective fire management systems will be crucial to maintain current levels of bushfire suppression.

Expanding rural/urban interfaces

The population growth in Queensland has resulted in expanding urban interfaces with wildfire prone areas and changes to the nature of brigade fire fighting operations, including the need for increased response to structural fires and the need to modify hazard reduction and fire fighting techniques. Also, brigades noted an increasing community concern over the effects of hazard reduction on the flora and fauna.

¹ Bushfire CRC. *Are Bush Fires Inevitable? A Report on the National Bushfire Forum 27 February 2007, Parliament House Canberra, 2007.*

² C. Lucas, G. Mills, K. Hennessy and J. Bathols. *Bushfire Weather in Southeastern Australia: Recent Trends and Projected Climate Change Impacts.* Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. September 2007.

³ Bushfire CRC. *Are Bush Fires Inevitable? A Report on the National Bushfire Forum 27 February 2007, Parliament House Canberra, 2007.*

Ageing volunteer workforce

One of the major issues facing QFRS is the ageing volunteer population and difficulties recruiting new members. Presently the average age of Rural Fire Service volunteers is over 50 years. Currently the average age for QFRS urban firefighters (paid staff) is 43.82 years.

2.3 Audit scope

Entities subject to audit

The focus of this audit was on the Rural Operations division of QFRS, including the head office in Brisbane, regional and area offices and rural fire brigades.

Audit matters examined

The following broad areas were assessed across Rural Operations' regional and area offices and individual brigades:

1. *Research, information and analysis*

Are there adequate systems in place across QFRS to ensure:

- research related to climate change, urban sprawl and population growth have been used to for decision making and plan for the future requirements of rural fire brigades
- any changes resulting from this research and communicated to the district offices and rural fire brigades as appropriate.

2. *Risk modification*

Are there adequate risk management systems in place to ensure appropriate bushfire prevention and mitigation strategies (such as fuel management and urban planning practices) are developed, implemented and communicated to reduce risk to life and property.

3. *Readiness*

Are there adequate systems in place to ensure rural fire brigades are prepared to respond to the possibility of any present and increasing demands. The audit considered resources, training, planning and coordination and community awareness issues.

4. *Response*

Are there adequate systems to enable QFRS to:

- respond efficiently and effectively to fire emergencies, including coordination and logistics practices
- measure and report on performance measures such as response times within operational reporting.

5. *Post event review*

Are post event reviews undertaken to both learn from the present and any increasing risks of bush fires and is there a mechanism in place to communicate the results of these reviews to QFRS management.

Time period covered by the audit

Audit field work was conducted from January 2008 to April 2008.

Audit procedures

The audit concentrated on reviewing the systems in place to ensure preparedness and readiness to respond to a potential increase in frequency and severity of bushfires. Background research, review and analysis was conducted on:

- Queensland Government documents including Ministerial Portfolio Statements, Annual Reports and relevant agency publications
- literature reviews, including publications from international and Australian jurisdictions
- QFRS management systems and processes.

QFRS management systems and processes were examined through interviews with audit field work conducted at:

- QFRS Rural Operations head office
- Townsville Regional Office
- Townsville Area Office
- Charters Towers Area Office
- South West Regional Office
- Toowoomba Area Office
- North Coast Regional Office
- Caloundra Area Office.

The audit also included field work at eight rural fire brigades covering all brigade classifications (brigade classification noted in brackets). Brigades visited were:

- Bambaroo RFB (Rural)
- Rangewood RFB (iZone)
- Betts Creek RFB (Primary Producer)
- Pentland Town RFB (iZone)
- Karara Leyburn RFB (Rural)
- Cambooya RFB (iZone)
- Montville RFB (iZone)
- Wattle Camp RFB (Village).

The audit sample was chosen independently of QFRS and determined after analysis of brigade activity levels. The selection also provided audit coverage across the full suite of brigade classifications, while concentrating on the higher risk brigade areas.

2.4 Organisational context

The management of fire services in Queensland is the responsibility of QFRS. QFRS is established under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* (the Act), which specifies the responsibility of QFRS as including (in summary) the following:

- *“to protect persons, property and the environment from fire and hazardous materials emergencies; and*
- *to protect persons trapped in a vehicle or building or otherwise endangered, to the extent that the service’s personnel and equipment can reasonably be deployed or used for the purpose; and*
- *to provide an advisory service, and undertake other measures, to promote –*
- *fire prevention and fire control; and*
- *safety and other procedures if a fire or hazardous materials emergency happens ...”*

The Act also sets out the role of the commissioner and states that with respect to the management of rural fires, the commissioner may undertake the responsibilities of QFRS through the registration of a rural fire brigade. The functions of a rural fire brigade are specified as:

“fire fighting and fire prevention and such other functions as the commissioner may direct.”

Further the Act notes that:

“the commissioner must notify a rural fire brigade of the area and the circumstances in which the brigade is in charge of fire fighting and fire prevention.”

In addition to the provisions of the Fire and Rescue Services Act, Section 128A of the *Local Government Act 1993* permits a local government to collect and remit a levy to a rural fire brigade operating within its local government area. QFRS have provided guidelines to local government on the collection and disbursement of a rural fire levy however, the decision over whether to raise a levy, and the amount raised remains with the local government. It should be noted that not all brigades receive a Rural Fire Levy (the full range of funding sources is detailed in section 3.3 of this report). The brigade manual states that regardless of whether a local government collects a rural fire levy it has no role or responsibility to the brigade. Rural fire brigades apply for the levy through their respective QFRS Area Director, who will approach the local government on behalf of the brigade.

In the case where a rural fire levy is supplied to a brigade, the brigade has a responsibility to supply the local government with annual audited accounts as well as a three year management plan, one year operational plan and an annual budget.

In addition all brigades are accountable to QFRS. They are required to prepare and supply a statement of income and expenditure, assets and liabilities and auditor's report to their respective Area Director within two weeks of the brigade's annual or biennial general meeting.

Queensland currently has 1,525 rural fire brigades staffed by approximately 35,000 volunteers. These brigades are supported by QFRS Rural Operations division, which consists of the Assistant Commissioner for Rural Operations and approximately 120 training and support staff. These staff are located across 17 areas within seven regions covering the State of Queensland. The structure of QFRS and its relationship with the Department of Emergency Services is described in Figure 2 on the following page.

The 1,525 rural fire brigades have been split into four classifications. Numbers of the brigades under each classification and a description of each classification are as follows:

100 iZone brigades — These brigades are located in high-density rural residential areas, usually with a well developed commercial centre. The brigade area may contain significant sections of bushland but the predominant risk is to life, property and infrastructure.

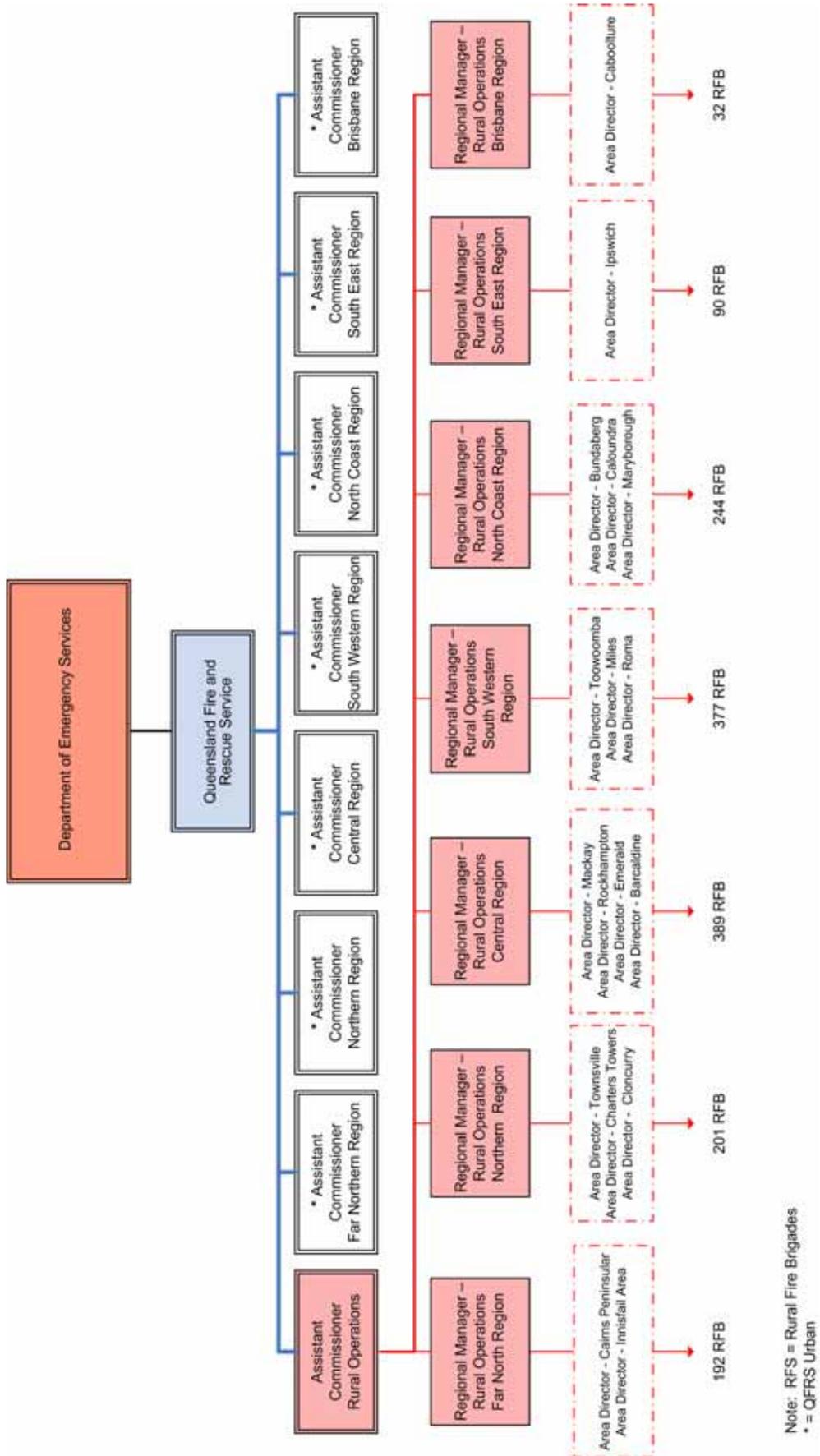
331 Village brigades — The brigade area has a community centre with greater than 10 buildings and other government infrastructure. They are often located in remote areas with little or no assistance available from other rural, urban or auxiliary brigades.

458 Rural brigades — The brigade area is predominantly rural producing land with possibly some low density rural development. The risk is mostly from bush and grass fires, with a high level of utilisation of property based equipment for fire management. There is little or no government infrastructure and if a community centre exists, it has less than 10 buildings.

636 Primary producer brigades — The brigade area 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 QFRS.

Recently, QFRS modified their brigade classification model and brigades were automatically assigned a new classification based on their old one, without a comprehensive review of each brigade's characteristics. Since original classifications have not been reassessed for nine years, and the nature of brigade work is changing, current classifications may be inaccurate. QFRS is in the process of confirming the new classifications with each area director.

Figure 2 — Departmental reporting relationships



Section 3

Findings and recommendations

At present QFRS through its Rural Operations division and the volunteer rural fire brigade network provide an effective rural fire management service to the Queensland community. However, the audit highlighted a number of concerns regarding QFRS Rural Operations systems that may impact on the continued sustainability of the rural fire service model. The audit identified a number of improvement opportunities in the areas of forward planning, risk management, performance measurement, brigade funding and resourcing and training. Without addressing the weaknesses identified within these systems, the provision of this important emergency service may be at risk. Issues identified and relevant recommendations are noted within this section.

3.1 Planning for the future

Findings

Effective forward planning processes are crucial to address the increasing demands placed on QFRS Rural Operations' resources as a result of climate change, increasing rural/urban interfaces, ageing volunteer workforce and difficulties recruiting new volunteers. Planning should provide clear direction for the future taking into account challenges and opportunities faced by the organisation. It is therefore important that planning involves all levels of the organisation to ensure key issues are understood and to ensure consistency in the delivery of services.

Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive forward planning processes for the management of rural fires. Planning does not include a level of detail sufficient to recognise the risks and opportunities faced by the Rural Operations division and to develop robust strategies and measurable targets. Agency strategic planning is undertaken by QFRS, with minimal reference to the specific risks and needs of the rural service delivery model. The actual strategic planning process included regional representatives from the urban fire service only, limiting the ability of QFRS to capture regional based rural operational issues.

The Rural Operations division has developed its own business plan for 2007-08, which directly links to the goals identified in the QFRS Strategic Plan, but does not address all future risks to the sustainability of the current rural fire service model.

Similarly, limited rural operational planning is undertaken at the regional level. The South West Region has implemented a comprehensive planning process for rural fire management, however this process has not been consistently adopted across the State (refer to better practice regional planning example at Figure 3). QFRS regional offices are required to develop eight functional plans to assist with operational management. Only two of these plans relate to rural fire management (Wildfire Operational Plan and iZone Plan), however in the current format these plans are inadequate in achieving effective forward planning for Rural Operations.

Figure 3 — Better practice guide example: South West Region Business Plan

This business plan was developed by South West Rural Operations team members and outlines the key objectives and strategies that will enable them to deliver on QFRS's goals and strategies.

The plan provides an environmental scan and assesses the risks and opportunities unique to South West Rural Operations. Activities for each of the rural areas within the region are grouped under five Key Result Areas which are linked to the QFRS strategic plan. An action officer, performance indicator and risk category have been set for each activity. The performance indicators are reported on quarterly.

This regional plan enables the objectives and strategies of the government, the Department and QFRS to be linked with lower level strategies that are relevant to the region's rural fire management and broken down into specific measurable tasks.

It was noted that in recognition of the need to identify and plan for the risks and opportunities specific to rural fire management, Rural Operations recently established a process to identify current and future risks to the delivery of rural fire management and suppression services. This process involved input from Rural Operations regional managers and identified a number of significant threats and explored recommendations to improve existing practices. Findings and recommendations have been documented in a paper titled Future Directions Report.

While this process has been a valuable exercise, it is concerning that there is currently no mechanism to prioritise and elevate the issues to departmental management. Strategies to address some of the risks are now in place and while they had been endorsed in principle by executive management, at the time of the audit the initiatives required costing and further research in some areas. Furthermore, there is no system in place for monitoring progress against strategies and no process for reporting progress to QFRS management.

It is also concerning that there is no systematic process for ensuring individual brigade issues are understood and considered by Rural Operations. It was noted that there is a range of communication strategies in place which are designed to keep all levels of the organisation informed of emerging issues and key changes, including various management group meetings, internal newsletters, bulletins and brigade visits. However there were examples of miscommunication noted during the audit and communication strategies were found to be inconsistently applied throughout the State.

At the brigade level, planning consists of one year management plans and three year operational plans which are required to be prepared by brigades that receive a rural fire levy. There is however, an inconsistent level of compliance with this requirement. Further, no guidance has been provided by Rural Operations as to what brigades should include in their plans and area office involvement in the development of these documents varies throughout the State. This limits the ability for brigade level risks and issues to be brought to the attention of area and regional offices and incorporated into their planning processes.

From discussion with brigade members at the sites audited, it was clear that they were aware of local issues, particularly in relation to hazard reduction, equipment, recruitment and training. At present brigades manage these issues through informal and often ad hoc processes and QFRS, Rural Operations have limited systems to capture this information.

An example of brigade level planning considered appropriate was noted at one brigade visited. Details of their plan have been included in Figure 4 to highlight this better practice.

Figure 4 — Better practice guide example: Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade Planning

Rangewood Rural Fire Brigade has developed an effective planning process consisting of a 12 month operational plan and three year activity plan. The brigade receives a fire levy and has used this planning process to satisfy the QFRS requirements to provide a three year management plan and a one year operational plan.

In the absence of any guidance from Rural Operations regarding these plans, Rangewood has covered the following areas within their 12 month operational plan:

Hazard reduction/fire break program – describing hazard reduction burns necessary in identified risk areas within the brigade area and maintenance of established fire breaks.

Brigade training – outlining brigade training plans for the period.

Maintenance, repair and replacement of equipment – identifying upcoming maintenance on brigade equipment.

Community awareness – outlining plans to continue community awareness at local shopping centres and schools.

Response to wildfires – commenting on fuel loads and potential for wildfires in the coming season.

Station improvements – detailing capital works and associated expenditure for the period.

Each of these areas are also covered in the three year activity plan. In addition, the three year plan includes the maintenance and replacement program for personal protective equipment and plans for the upgrade to communications. As estimated cost has been attributed to each area and this has been used to support the brigade's budgeting process and levy application.

Conclusion

There are no comprehensive forward planning processes within QFRS to ensure the future sustainability of the rural fire service and limited rural operational planning is undertaken at the regional level.

Rural Operations recently identified possible strategies to address current and future risks to effective service delivery, although there remains no mechanism to prioritise and elevate the issues to QFRS executive management and no system is in place for monitoring progress against strategies.

Further, there is no systematic process for ensuring individual brigade issues are understood and considered by Rural Operations. The inconsistent level of compliance with the requirement for levy brigades to submit one year operational and three year management plans, limits the ability for brigade risks and issues to be brought to the attention of area and regional offices and incorporated into their planning processes.

Without an effective forward planning process Rural Operations is potentially at risk of underestimating resource needs; inefficiently allocating resources; providing an inconsistent service delivery; and not realising their goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. **QFRS implement a forward planning process specific to Rural Operations, which involves regional and area offices and incorporates:**
 - a process for identifying risks and opportunities
 - the development of strategies to address the risks and opportunities
 - a system to monitor and report on the implementation of strategies.
2. **QFRS provide guidance and support to rural fire brigades in the development of their one year operational plan and three year management plan.**
3. **QFRS implement a process to review brigade plans and incorporate specific issues identified into forward planning at the area and regional levels.**

3.2 Risk management

Findings

Risk management is an integral element to achieving an appropriate balance between realising opportunities and minimising losses. It is an interactive and systematic process, which enables continuous improvement in decision making and facilitates continuous improvement in performance. In order to be effective, risk management involves establishing an appropriate infrastructure and culture and applying a logical and systematic method of establishing the context, identifying, analysing, mitigating, monitoring and communicating risks appropriately.

A number of risk assessment processes are in place throughout QFRS, however they are either inadequate for the effective management of rural fire services or inconsistently applied across the State.

In January 2008 QFRS reviewed their business risks and developed a risk management plan linked to the goals and key result areas outlined in their 2007-08 Strategic Plan. This process involved all key staff who manage the various activities and projects in QFRS head office. Regional assistant commissioners and the Rural Operations regional managers were not directly consulted.

This process identified a number of risks related specifically to Rural Operations. However, the QFRS risk management plan incorporates only high level risks and the process did not involve all key rural stakeholders. Additionally it is of concern that a number of potential operational risks have not been systematically identified and assessed. Through discussion with QFRS officers and brigade members, audit identified the following potential risks related to the management of rural fire services which had not yet been formally assessed:

- vision of land in wildfire prone areas
- planning for wildfire/urban interfaces
- adequacy of brigade resources
- maintaining brigade volunteer numbers

- impact of council amalgamations on brigade funding and obligations
- increasing iZone areas.

At present Rural Operations do not have an appropriate risk management process to identify and mitigate risks such as these.

It is also concerning that there is no mechanism to ensure key risks at regional, area and brigade levels are brought to management's attention. Considering the ageing volunteer workforce, brigade level risks in particular must be captured and documented to ensure adequate succession planning. During the audit, QFRS staff and volunteers provided advice of many specific brigade risks however these are not presently documented. The Pentland Fire Management Plan (as highlighted in the better practice example at the end of this section) is considered a good example of the recognition and documentation of brigade specific risks.

In addition, there is no issues management process at the QFRS level to consolidate, record and manage brigade issues as they arise. Therefore, significant risks in relation to the management of rural fires may not be known to QFRS. At present in order to identify issues, Rural Operations communicate with different levels of the organisation through various avenues, including: management and group meetings, regional newsletters, bulletins and email. Area offices also try to attend brigade and community meetings where possible. While these methods are important, they have not been consistently adopted throughout the State and do not ensure all issues are captured and managed appropriately.

Currently there are a number of processes in place to identify and manage the risks known to Rural Operations, but these processes are ad hoc and the risks are not formally or centrally documented and monitored. Some of the risk management processes in place include:

- the Future Directions process — to identify current and future risks to the delivery of rural fire management and suppression services
- brigade reclassification process — to review brigade characteristics and risks
- the Bushfire Prepared Communities campaign — to enhance community awareness
- hazard reduction plans — developed by some brigades to reduce the risk of major fires in their area
- brigade area fire management plans (see better practice example below)
- Local Action Plans (LAPs) — for iZone brigades to document key information needed in the event of an emergency
- Stanthorpe Group/Shire business case resourcing plan for 2007-10 — documents their future risks and developed a comprehensive plan. The plan includes information on each individual brigade within their group/shire
- Workplace Health and Safety external review — which identified areas for improvement and determined a management plan to reduce the risks.

Figure 5 — Better practice guide example: Pentland Town Fire Management Plan

This wildfire risk identification and mitigation plan identifies key town infrastructure such as water points as well as dedicated fire breaks and other existing natural breaks that would be suitable for back burning etc. in the case of a wildfire approaching the village. It also specifies the best methods of defence for the particular town boundaries such as graded fire breaks and back burning.

This fire management plan provides an effective and efficient approach to defending the town from wildfire. It enables the key players in defending the town including the Pentland RFB members, other visiting brigade members and Council machinery operators for example, to have clear guidance as to the best course of action in dealing with a wildfire. It also provides access to the key information necessary in a clear and readily identifiable manner. Significantly, this plan has been established prior to the emergent circumstances of an approaching wildfire.

Conclusion

There is no formalised risk management process in place to identify, manage and monitor risks throughout all levels of Rural Operations. Rural Operations have a range of informal risk management processes in place, however they are not consistently implemented throughout the State. Therefore, QFRS may not be in a position to maximise opportunities, reduce loss and avoid negative outcomes. Without a systematic risk assessment process, QFRS management may not have all the information necessary to enable sound decision making. Further, capturing brigade specific risks will provide an important part of QFRS succession planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

4. **QFRS establish a structured risk management process for rural fire management, which involves regional and area offices, to enhance decision making processes and ensure opportunities are maximised and losses are minimised. This process should be linked to forward planning and incorporate existing processes such as:**
 - **brigade hazard identification and reduction plans (brigade fire management plans)**
 - **brigade one year operational and three year management plans**
 - **local action plans for iZone brigades (high risk areas).**
5. **QFRS implement a brigade issues management process to capture, manage and report specific brigade issues.**

3.3 Brigade funding and resourcing

Findings

Rural fire brigades are funded and resourced through a combination of formal and informal mechanisms. Funding is provided through either one, or a combination of:

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

In addition to direct funding, other resources are provided to rural fire brigades by QFRS such as:

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

The accountability requirements for funding received by brigades are specified in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual. All rural fire brigades are to prepare and supply a statement of income and expenditure, assets and liabilities and auditor's report to their respective Area Director within two weeks of the brigade's annual or biennial general meeting. In addition, brigades that receive a rural fire levy, are to provide a copy of its three year management and one year operational plans to their Area Director.

At present compliance with these requirements is not consistently enforced by Rural Operations area offices and comprehensive records of accountability details of rural fire brigades are not maintained. Further, there is no system in place for Rural Operations to analyse and report on brigade financial data.

I note that Rural Fire Brigades are established under the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990*. Accordingly, they are part of QFRS and not individual entities in their own right. The current financial and accountability requirements in effect, treat the brigades as separate entities to QFRS. As part of QFRS the brigades revenues, expenditures, assets and liabilities should be accounted for in the financial records of the Department of Emergency Services. At present there is no reflection of these financial records other than for appliances and buildings in the accounts of the Department.

The lack of an adequate system to capture brigade activity information (as referred to under the performance measurement section following) is a key element currently missing from the resource allocation process. Rural Operations do not presently have a robust and systematic process to identify the nature and level of brigade activity and to allocate resources based on the level of risk and need.

In addition to a lack of formalised operational reporting, it was also noted that brigade resource levels and needs cannot be adequately assessed due to the lack of systematic communication between brigades and Rural Operations. At present the level of brigade access to area staff is not consistent throughout the State and the brigades that have good access to staff appear to be better resourced. It was also noted that some brigade resourcing needs, including for essential safety equipment, were unknown to QFRS.

One initiative currently being implemented by Rural Operations is the formation of Finance Management Groups to collect and distribute local government rural fire levies according to need to brigades within each local government area. By examining operational and financial issues facing a group of brigades in a particular local government area, these financial management groups can then facilitate the collection and distribution of the levies based on the actual operational and financial needs of the brigades. These groups incorporate Rural Operations staff, local government and brigade representatives within the area. The involvement of Rural Operations area staff provides additional operational expertise to assist local governments to ensure wildfire risks are adequately addressed within their area. At the time of the audit, Financial Management Groups had been established in one region.

There is also a lack of an appropriate system for Rural Operations to monitor the condition and safety of rural fire brigade equipment. As QFRS maintains ownership of brigade equipment (under the Fire Services Act) QFRS need to have adequate systems to ensure that the equipment is maintained to a safe standard and any directions over the use of the equipment and restrictions on modifications are complied with. For example, audit noted instances of modified and overloaded appliances that may effect their roadworthiness and safe use. Further, the importance of a QFRS system to monitor and ensure its appliances remain unmodified and not overloaded with additional equipment is highlighted by circumstance of the current light appliance used by brigades. QFRS advise that there is only approximately a 50kg margin between this vehicles weight when it is crewed and loaded with water and its Gross Vehicle Mass. At present there are 164 of these appliances in use.

Further, it was noted that QFRS commissioned an external Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) review of the rural fire service in March 2007. This review found that the legal obligations of QFRS relating to WH&S issues such as brigade equipment and station maintenance, were not being addressed in a systematic manner and there were limited procedural frameworks in place to enable these issues to be managed effectively. For example, the WH&S review found that hazard identification processes such as shed inspections occur on an ad hoc basis and are rarely recorded. Incidences such as the absence of testing and tagging of electrical equipment, lack of pest control in sheds and non-compliance with the manufacturers expiry date of helmets and first aid kits were also identified during the review. Recommendations from the WH&S review are currently being implemented and monitored. Without adequate systems to monitor the condition of QFRS assets, QFRS may not be able to meet its obligation to ensure a safe workplace and that assets are maintained in a serviceable and safe condition.

Conclusion

The brigade accountability requirements that are specified by QFRS in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual are not consistently complied by brigades. Furthermore, these financial accountability requirements treat the brigades as separate entities from QFRS and therefore the Department of Emergency Services do not meet the accounting and reporting obligations of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977*.

The lack of an adequate system at QFRS to capture brigade activity information is a key element currently missing from the resource allocation process and may lead to the allocation of resources without adequate regard to the level of risk and need.

The establishment of Finance Management Groups to collect and distribute local government rural fire levies, bring together key participants in the assessment of funding needs. I see this initiative as a positive step in allocating operating funds. Financial Management Groups should be formally implemented where appropriate across the State.

Also, as QFRS maintain ownership and responsibility for rural fire brigade buildings and equipment, it is essential that it has an adequate system to ensure these assets are maintained in a serviceable and safe condition. At present, QFRS do not have adequate systems in place to monitor the condition and safety of rural fire brigade equipment. QFRS have a responsibility to ensure its equipment is maintained to a safe standard and any directions regarding restrictions on modifications are complied with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 6. QFRS ensure compliance with the brigade accountability requirements for funding received by rural fire brigades as specified in the Rural Fire Brigade Manual**
- 7. QFRS review the financial accountability and audit requirements of the rural fire brigades to reflect their status as part of QFRS**
- 8. QFRS implement a system to collate and analyse brigade funding information**
- 9. QFRS provide assistance to brigades in determining and budgeting for their resource needs**
- 10. QFRS utilise performance information on brigade activity as a factor in determining brigade resource and funding needs**
- 11. QFRS implement a system to monitor the condition and safety of brigade buildings and equipment.**

3.4 Performance management

Findings

Performance management is a fundamental requirement for good planning and decision making for any organisation. To enable effective performance management, an organisation needs to have effective systems to capture and report appropriate and relevant performance information. At present, performance measurement systems within Rural Operations are considered inadequate to support effective decision making. This may also have an impact on any management and resource allocation decisions made by the Department of Emergency Services.

Performance measurement, and as a consequence performance management, is presently limited due to deficiencies across all levels of the organisation including:

- There is currently no reporting by Rural Operations against the strategies in their business plan for management purposes.
- There is a poor level of compliance with primary performance information gathering procedures, such as the incident reporting process in place for rural fire brigades.
- Due to the incomplete and inaccurate primary performance information gathered, there is limited capacity for Rural Operations to analyse and report on brigade activity and systematically identify any brigade issues that may arise. Further QFRS is unable to accurately benchmark its services against other state and territory governments.
- There is limited performance information provided by QFRS to regional and area offices and this is primarily of a financial nature only. Operational information on the activities of the respective rural fire brigades within each region and area is not captured and reported.
- There is currently no system in place for brigade financial data to be collected and reported to Rural Operations. The Rural Fire Brigade Manual requirement that brigades provide their financial information is not consistently complied with. Further, the limited financial information that is provided by brigades is not reported on or analysed by Rural Operations.
- Other systems for collecting brigade financial and operational information are not consistently complied with across the State.

The key brigade operational reporting process which consists of the brigade completing a pro-forma incident report form was found by audit to be poorly undertaken. Rural Operations incident data collated from these forms indicates very low incident levels for the majority of the rural fire brigades, this appears an unrealistic picture of brigade activity. It was noted that four of the eight brigades visited by audit did not comply with the requirement to report all incidents. For example some very active (iZone) brigades were significantly behind (over 12 months in one case) in sending the forms to Rural Operations. Further, Rural Operations have no system to effectively assess the rate of compliance with the provision of this operational information.

The incident reporting form includes information collected for external statistical purposes, including the 'Report on Government Services 2008'⁴. However the report acknowledges the incompleteness of the data on Queensland rural fire services. Further the majority of the information collected is not used by Rural Operations. To improve its value to the organisation the incident reporting process could be a basis for brigade activity analysis, brigade issue analysis and to support the resource allocation process, however the current level of compliance with this reporting mechanism would preclude this. Information held on Rural Operations systems such as brigade activity levels and brigade funding for example, was found to be materially inaccurate and not appropriate for decision making. For six of the eight brigades visited, actual brigade membership numbers differed from QFRS data.

It was also noted that there is limited performance information provided to Regional and Area offices and this is primarily of a financial nature. Operational information on the activities of the respective rural fire brigades within each region and area is not captured and reported. At present, these offices receive no reporting about their brigades and without directly contacting their brigades have no avenue to analyse what their brigades are doing and therefore, their resource needs. Rural Operations regional management also stated that some of the information currently collected was irrelevant to their decision making process and they would benefit from additional items being reported such as the amount of water used by a brigade in an incident and how often brigades respond outside of their brigade area.

Rural fire brigade financial information is generally unknown to QFRS. Rural Operations have a process in place at the area level to capture brigade financial information, as brigades are required to prepare and supply a statement of income and expenditure, assets and liabilities and auditor's report to their respective Area Director. However this requirement is not consistently complied with and there is no method to collate and report this information across the State.

Other operational reporting requirements in place such as three year management and one year operational reports required to be submitted to area offices and local governments (for levy brigades) were not complied with. Of the six brigades visited that currently attract a local government fire levy, only one had complied with the requirement to send these plans to the area office.

Conclusion

At present, performance measurement systems within Rural Operations are considered inadequate to support effective decision making, particularly in the areas of resource allocation. The lack of these systems also limits the ability to provide an appropriate level of accountability and to report performance against objectives. Information held on Rural Operations systems such as brigade activity levels, brigade membership, and brigade funding, was found to be materially inaccurate. Furthermore, important operational information on the activities of the respective rural fire brigades within each region, as well as financial information is not captured and reported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

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

⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. *Report on Government Services 2008 Volume 1. Part D Emergency Management*. Productivity Commission, Canberra 2008.

3.5 Training needs

Findings

Rural fire brigade volunteers in operational and non-operational roles require a certain level of competency to ensure adequate service delivery and their safety. It is recognised that competency is achieved through the combination of both experience and training. While the completion of training is strongly encouraged and funded by QFRS, competency standards are not mandatory in Queensland, making training ultimately the choice of the volunteer.

In 2001 Rural Operations developed competency based training packages for rural volunteers built on the National Public Safety Training Package used by all State rural fire services across Australia. Currently there is a significant gap between QFRS accepted minimum standards of training and the actual levels (training gap). Only 35 per cent of active volunteer firefighters have completed basic firefighter skills training. This training gap has been recognised and prioritised by Rural Operations and is subject to reporting and planning by management.

While many volunteer firefighters are not formally trained, the majority have considerable experience, which contributes to the general level of brigade competency. However, this position will be impacted by the ageing volunteer workforce; as experienced volunteers retire, formal training for the new volunteers will become more important.

Targeting training according to risk

Rural Operations has developed a new training strategy based on risk to prioritise needs and close the training gap. Part of this strategy includes adopting the Brigade Competency Model, which depicts minimum training standards for each brigade classification, with the expectation that a sufficient skill set will be available to ensure brigades can operate safely and effectively.

The new training strategy also prioritises training according to roles and high risk locations. The current priority is to train firefighters in iZone areas to the minimum standards required.

However, training may need to be reprioritised in the near future to better reflect the changing nature of work carried out by volunteers. Audit found that rural fire brigades are increasingly dealing with incidents such as structure fires, motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies, which are not adequately covered in the basic firefighter skills training for volunteers.

The past two years have produced increased amounts of training and improvements in the recording of training as systems and processes have improved. These improvements have included implementing administrative reforms to the processing of training records and in the implementation of an advanced standing program (Recognised Prior Learning) for volunteers who have a wealth of experience and/or who have undertaken training under previous training standards.

Availability of training/delivery method

Due to the practical nature of the skills required, the majority of training needs to be delivered face to face. Training is currently delivered through a combination of Rural Operations' training officers and brigade volunteer trainers.

The new training strategy aims to improve the overall capacity for training by significantly increasing the numbers of volunteer trainers, improving the efficiency of current training delivery methods, introducing distance learning and self-paced learning for administrative roles, utilising and recognising other industry training, and coordinating training with urban operations.

Whilst significant steps are underway to address the training gap, the ability for Rural Operations to address the changing nature of brigade work may be impacted by the fact that Rural Operation's training staff are currently unable to deliver a number of advanced firefighter courses, including Respond to Isolated Remote Structure Fires, Road Accident Awareness and Hazardous Material. These courses are run by urban trainers. In the past this has presented difficulties in the ability to offer these courses to volunteers due to the time constraints on urban officers.

Meeting the target

Rural Operations predicts that with current financial and human resources, it will take many years to provide firefighter minimum skills training to all active brigade members. Experience in other rural fire service organisations indicates that a target above 85 per cent is not achievable because of a range of factors but is principally related to the attrition rate and the 'lag effect' that occurs as volunteers leave and new volunteers engage in training.

In addition, in some locations despite training being offered it has been difficult to encourage volunteers to attend. This is due to a range of reasons including personal commitments and the belief held by a small minority of volunteers that they have adequate experience and therefore do not require formal training.

QFRS also acknowledges that to increase volunteer attendance at training, scheduling is crucial. For the majority of brigade members, training needs to be offered on weekends or in the evening. To avoid over-committing volunteers, training should also be conducted outside the fire season and take into consideration the main industries in the region, e.g. in cane growing areas training will not be well attended in the harvesting or planting season.

Increasing resources

In 2007 Rural Operations undertook an evaluation to determine whether further investment in training rural fire brigade volunteers was justified. This major review considered current and future training needs, analysed the current situation including the service delivery model, benchmarked Queensland against other States and considered a detailed risk assessment. The review also identified a range of opportunities for improvement. As a result a proposal has been developed seeking additional resources.

Conclusion

There is a significant gap between QFRS accepted minimum standards of training and the actual levels. This training gap has been recognised and prioritised by Rural Operations and is subject to reporting and planning by management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

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

Section 4

Appendices

4.1 PMSA approach

The legislative basis for this audit is Section 80 of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977* (FA&A Act). A performance management systems audit (PMSA) is an independent examination of whether an entity or part of an entity's activities have performance management systems in place to enable management to assess whether its objectives are being achieved economically, efficiently and effectively. While a PMSA will not review or comment on government policy, it may extend to include a focus on the entity's performance measures and whether in the Auditor-General's opinion, the performance measures are relevant, purposeful and fairly represent the entity's performance.

The intent of a PMSA is to provide independent assurance to the Parliament, and to act as a catalyst for adding value to the quality of public administration by assisting entities in the discharge of their governance obligations. A PMSA has a focus on ascertaining whether the systems and controls used by management to monitor and measure performance, assist the entity in meeting its stewardship responsibilities.

The statutory office of the Auditor-General, as the external auditor for the Parliament, is established pursuant to the FA&A Act. The Auditor-General is independent and is not subject to direction by any person in the way audits are conducted. Although the Auditor-General takes note of the entity's perspective, the scope of a public sector audit is at the sole discretion of the Auditor-General as the FA&A Act prescribes that the Auditor-General may conduct an audit in the way the Auditor-General considers appropriate.

4.2 References

4.2.1 Bibliography

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4.2.2 Publications

The primary references sourced during the research phase of this audit include:

Auditor General for Western Australia. *Performance Examination Responding to Major Bushfires Report 7*. October 2004.

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Section 5

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Glenn Poole
Auditor-General

Section 6

Publications

6.1 Publications

Publication	Date released
Annual Report 2007	October 2007
INFORM	
Issue 2 for 2008	April 2008
Issue 1 for 2008	February 2008
Guidelines	
Better Practice Guide — Risk Management	October 2007
Checklist for Organisational Change — Managing MOG Changes	September 2006
Checklist — Preparation of Financial Statements	August 2006
Better Practice Guide — Output Performance Measurement and Reporting	February 2006
Better Practice Guide — Strategies for earlier financial statement preparation	December 2005
Other	
Auditor-General of Queensland Auditing Standards	April 2007
Performance Management Systems Audits — An Overview	December 2006

6.2 Auditor-General's Reports to Parliament 2008

Report No.	Subject	Date tabled in the Legislative Assembly
1	Auditor-General's Report No. 1 for 2008 Enhancing Accountability through Annual Reporting A Performance Management Systems Audit	17 April 2008
2	Auditor-General's Report No. 2 for 2008 Results of 2006-07 Audits of Local Governments, including Aboriginal Shire and Torres Strait Island Councils	1 May 2008
3	Auditor-General's Report No. 3 for 2008 Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland A Performance Management Systems Audit	May 2008

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