



**ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**  
**ANNUAL REPORT – 2011 to 2012**

I would like to commence my report from February 2012, as we as an association now look significantly different since that date.

Undertaking these changes took the commitment and will of all RFBAQ retained staff, the President and Senior Executive Management and all of the RFBAQ Elected District Representatives and Support Representatives.

For us to have all achieved this monumental change in focus and deliverables under some of the most extreme circumstances shows that this association will move into 2013 ready to effect fundamental change and improvements for all 1,400 brigades in Queensland, and for us to have profound input into the Review of the Rural Fire Service that commences after the wet season in March 2013.

This review, which was initiated by the RFBAQ as part of the groundwork leading up to the 2012 Queensland State Election will probably be the most important work that the RFBAQ has ever undertaken. It clearly meets the primary function of the association as outlined on the first page of our constitution -

**“OBJECTS**

*2. The objects for which the association is established are:*

*To consider and make representation in matters affecting the welfare and efficiency of Rural Fire Brigades including the provision of financial assistance and support and to look after the interests of individual Members of these Brigades.”*

For the RFBAQ to have called for a review and for that call to be heard by the government, will now allow for the elected representatives to formulate a broad outline into -

**“What is a Rural Fire Brigade?”**

How are they empowered to meet local need and risk reflecting their local community's expectations and how will this model work into the need for the ability to correlate weight of attack across the state?

The submission that the RFBAQ elected representatives draft will have a profound impact on the very nature of Rural Fire Brigades, the delivery of service to brigades and volunteers by Rural Operations and the psychometric outline for the role of Deputy Commissioner, Rural Fire Service.

As such, the submission could be the basis for what 93% of Queensland rely on for fire and mitigation for the next 15 to 20 years.

The RFBAQ has already initiated great change by the bringing together of the Senior Officers Union, The United Firefighters Union Queensland and the Queensland Auxiliary Firefighters Association to provide a submission on Fit for Duty to the QFRS. This is the first time that all four firefighter organisations have worked together and the submission of a limited scope paper will have ongoing and positive effects for all firefighters in Queensland. This has only been able to happen due to the RFBAQ now being recognised as an open, honest and transparent broker.



Consultative Leadership as opposed to adversarial brinksmanship has allowed for the RFBAQ to create an environment where brigades have directly benefited in meeting their local need and risk. The best example of this is where a brigade located on an island tried to replace a tractor that they had used for the last fifteen years to tow their RFS trailer and cut fire breaks. The brigade applied for and received a Gambling Fund grant where the money went to the QFRS. The brigade was then informed that they were not approved for adding a tractor on-fleet and the QFRS returned the money to the Gambling Fund. The brigade attempted to have this decision overturned to no avail.

This brigade then contacted the RFBAQ requesting support. The RFBAQ tabled the request at an SEM meeting, where support was ratified. The RFBAQ then organised a meeting with the local brigade and the local Member of Parliament where risk and need was assessed and it was identified that there was no equipment available on-fleet that would meet brigade needs. The local Member of Parliament then consulted the Minister for Police and Community Safety and the RFBAQ advised Rural Operation of our actions.

Subsequently, Rural Operations has re-assessed the needs of this island brigade, and will support the brigade application to the Gambling Fund, and the island will be able to defend itself using the equipment as best identified by the local community.

Considerable RFBAQ staff resources were allocated in this test case, as the RFBAQ is cognisant that “one size does not fit all” and there are a number of brigades that need to be able access off-fleet equipment whilst still working within and with Rural Operations.

These are just two headline initiatives of many where the association can claim to be actively improving the environment in which Rural Fire Brigades and volunteer firefighters operate.

For the association to move forward, it is planned for an extra Representative meeting to be held, and for that meeting to be solely devoted to defining the aims, goals and core belief of the RFBAQ that will then transition into a mission statement for the Association. Once the elected representatives clearly define “who we are” as an organisation, then the discussion on “where do we want to go” and “what do we want to achieve” can commence with the financial knowledge of “where we are now”.

Once there is a defined and agreed policy (Strategic Plan) from the representative arm of the RFBAQ, this can then be translated into direction to the retained arm of the association, so that the facilitation of these aims can be assessed, costed and provided.

Currently Marilyn King, SEM & Bundaberg Representative is sourcing funding for this extra meeting; as a full meeting of the RFBAQ costs \$18,000.

While looking forward to the future, we must acknowledge that in November 2011, Graham (Butch) Walker of Gillespie Station and a fire-fighter with Eastwood Rural Fire Brigade was tragically killed while undertaking a hazard reduction burn on a property near Blackall in the Central Region.

In March 2012, Brendon Goldsmith passed away while delivering a Prepare, Act, Survive presentation. Brendon was a long serving Volunteer within his community and the Rural Fire Service. Further to being 1st Officer, Brendon was a BTSO for the Toowoomba District as well as the Caloundra District and Group Officer for Nanango Group alongside his wife Tracy who is a Volunteer Community Educator and Volunteer with South Nanango RFB.

I believe that it is important for the RFBAQ to not only remember these volunteer firefighters, but also to re-confirm our commitment to supporting their families in these times of tragedy.



The association has again shown that we can and do meet our primary function of the association as outlined on the front page of our constitution -

## **“OBJECTS**

**2. The objects for which the Association is established are: -**

*To consider and make representation in matters affecting the welfare and efficiency of Rural Fire Brigades including the provision of financial assistance and support and to look after the interests of individual Members of these Brigades.”*

These objectives are also currently being met by the provision of welfare support to volunteers and family who have suffered and are in need of support either directly through the RFBAQ or through the provision of RFBAQ support in submitting applications to the Olga Wilson Firefighter Trust.

Since February 2012 the exposures that we as the retained arm of the association immediately needed to face were many and complex, reflecting that as an organisation we were not immediately able to establish what communications and agreements the RFBAQ held with our many external stakeholders and suppliers, what promises had been made and what our relationship dynamic was with these bodies.

- Insurance – there was no insurance policy for RFBAQ head office, no policy for stock in the 6 storage sheds, no coverage for office bearers liability of the association
- Leases – the leases for the contact centre and head office had not been renewed or re-negotiated, and one had expired
- 240 volt power plugs – All 240 volt power plugs (to recharge the torches and GPS) that the association had sold and held in stock were non-compliant to Australian Standards and found to be a potential fire hazard, resulting in a recall overseen by the ACCC and Queensland Justice Department
- Contact Centre Server – had crashed for 10 days in 2011 with no backup server and subsequent loss of revenue
- Office of Gaming Licence – There was no licence for an Art Union that had already commenced
- Inconsistent reporting to Office of Gaming
- No internal financial controls
- WorkCover Investigation – WorkCover Investigation into complaints relating to contact centre staff
- Fair Work Australia – investigation into contact centre staff not being paid correctly since the commencement of the contact centre
- Association stock and assets stored away from association control / access
- Antiquated contact centre systems that could no longer be maintained by provider
- Ageing contact centre infrastructure
- Outstanding invoices from up to 18 months
- No internal policies, procedures or set of operating guidelines
- Inconsistent and non-transparent financial reporting



- Bushfire CRC had been supported by \$100,000 over 2 years with a final \$50,000 payment due
- AAVFBA had been supported by \$90,000 with a request for further support
- Telephony supplier with no contract
- RFBAQ history and records unable to be accessed
- No consistent stocktaking records
- Up to 50% failure rate of some stock supplied from China
- Business closure for six weeks each Christmas
- Ageing and exposed head office server with no backup

Financially the RFBAQ is at a crossroads where decisions will need to be made regarding staffing and the level of service delivery that Representatives and Brigades receive. As covered in the audited financial statement and the forecast for 2012/2013 financial year, we have a number of expenses such as the relocation of the contact centre and amalgamation of business onto one site with a budget of \$35,000 and the system upgrade for the contact centre for a further \$22,000. These are one off costs that are unavoidable and will allow for future efficiencies and savings. A provision of \$50,000 has also been made for further legal expenses. Grants of \$121,000 have been factored into the forecast as well as provision for \$10,000 benefit for Volunteers who pass away while undertaking registered brigade activities.

As stated above, once the association has developed a strategic plan, which will translate into direction, the retained arm of the association will be able to cost and plan for the level of service provision that the elected representatives of the RFBAQ desire.

As a part of the wider volunteer firefighter association community, the Rural Fire Service Association (NSW) has very kindly offered the services of their General Manager to fly up to Queensland and review the operations of our business at no cost to the RFBAQ. As the RFSA also has a contact centre and runs Art Unions to provide support to volunteers and brigades and that the General Manager is a qualified accountant, the RFBAQ will be taking advantage of this most kind offer. In September 2011 the RFSA were onsite in Gympie before the server crash (which they identified as a potential hazard during their visit) and this will allow them to gauge our progress so far and to identify further improvements.

The association has worked through or is working on all of the above matters as well as a myriad of smaller exposures. To even contemplate addressing the above major exposures is daunting for the small number of retained staff, and to have more matters brought to our attention as we addressed the ones we knew about is reflected in the saying, "you eat an elephant one spoon full at a time." It has been seven months since the EGM in Brisbane, and in that time miracles have been performed by all of the RFBAQ retained staff. In addition to this the SEM, Committees and Representatives have also been actively engaged in helping to eat the elephant.