

Emergency Service Volunteers — update August 2016

Transcript

Acting QFES Media Director, Matthew Rigby:

Mike, thanks for your time for another video, I know everyone really appreciates the update. It's been a really busy few months as it always is – and a really busy time for SES down in the South Eastern region in relation to that recent search down there.

Deputy Commissioner Emergency Service Volunteers Mike Wassing:

It has been a really busy time and it's good to be talking to you Matt and the broader audience. The South East region search – it was a really important search and a great outcome for Justin Lewis. SES supported Queensland Police in that search. The significance of that is the great outcome and also recognising we do this together across the services. We want to be consistent with that message – it's not just about us, it's actually about all our partners with a great outcome in this case.

Matt Rigby: One of the things for the community Mike is that our volunteers gave up their time during the week to look for Jocelyn.

DC Wassing: It's an enormous contribution our volunteers make. The support we get from their employers, many of our volunteers are self-employed as well. They give up their time from work, they give up time from their family, day in, night in, all the time. In this case it was great to see a really positive outcome.

Matt Rigby: Talking about that incredible commitment that's given by our volunteers, it's a good time to talk about Taskforce Action and the work Tom is doing in relation to really trying to assist our volunteers.

DC Wassing: Taskforce Action started because the amount of change we're focused on across the whole department makes it really difficult to get some tangible things for our volunteers on the front line. Taskforce Action led by Assistant Commissioner Tom Dawson supported by a small team has been able to achieve some great results.

We've been able to get the uniforms rolling out across Rural Fire and SES for staff and volunteers, which is fantastic.

We've got identification cards rolling out and several hundreds of those are with volunteers in the field. There's been a long term need for that as well.

Significantly for Rural Fire, the implementation of Commissioner's announcement, a really positive announcement, about fuel and vehicle maintenance for the Rural Fire Service fleet. That's been fantastic. We've now got about 250 processed applications for the fuel and vehicle maintenance.

Just on that point, I really encourage brigades out there to fill out the paper work and apply for fuel and vehicle maintenance. It's fundamental for our support to our brigades. There's no strings attached. If I can dispel the myth that there is some sort of hidden agenda, there is no hidden



agenda – just straight out support for fundamental operating costs for our brigades and on the back of that we can then support brigades and brigades can support their community in a number of ways as well.

Matt Rigby: Do you think that's why not as many brigades have come forward at this time?

DC Wassing: The feedback we've got is that there's some concern that they will lose in some other way or there will be some other expectation. That's not the case. This is fundamentally about supporting our frontline volunteers, making sure our vehicles are safe, making sure that basic fuel costs are paid for and supported by the Department. It's a reflection of the Department's support for our frontline volunteers.

Matt Rigby: Of course with Taskforce Action we're at the point where Tom is going to transition back to his normal role so how will that play out in the future?

DC Wassing: That's right, Tom is returning to his substantive role in leading the Rural Fire Service and it was really intentional that the Taskforce was a short, sharp three month period. We've got a small team that we still support, that will transition back into business as usual and that will see things like uniforms, identification cards, fuel and vehicle maintenance transition into normal business. But also continuation of the work we are doing closely with our training people around Level One Swift Water Rescue training and also, importantly, the AIIMS Level One Incident Control training as well, which are fundamentally new to many of our people but really import for our leadership model in the field.

Matt Rigby: Mike you mentioned before about the commitment the Commissioner made for funding for brigades. She also made a commitment in terms of Office 365. Can you give us an update of how things are rolling out there?

DC Wassing: That commitment by the Commissioner has been really well received by staff and volunteers generally, recognising it's for everybody. We're rolling out Office 365 to our volunteers first. We've had a small trial, that has tested that, by volunteer stakeholders and members and we are now in the process of rolling that out more broadly and that can be accessed by our volunteers through the volunteer portal.

Matt Rigby: While we're talking about Office 365, what's the general uptake and feel been from that trial?

DC Wassing: People have been really interested. It's not just about an email address. Office 365 gives you a whole suite of opportunities through to video conferencing - recognising we're a very diverse and geographically spread organisation. Those things are really important for us to be connected and have more important conversations more often. People are really interested in a key communications tool for the future and also, more importantly, we're recognising that volunteers are fundamentally part of the broader workforce within Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

Matt Rigby: Talking about consultation and feedback, recently the (Volunteer) survey closed. Were you happy with how many responses you received?

DC Wassing: Very happy with the amount of responses we received. We received well over 5500 responses from our volunteers, which is fantastic input into understanding what their needs



are into the future. At the moment we are analysing these so we haven't got the detailed information associated with the survey responses just yet and we've still got paper copies coming in. It will be really important and I absolutely guarantee that once we've done that we'll share that back to our volunteers and the broader department and services so we can understand what our volunteers are looking for into the future.

Matt Rigby: Coming up in the next couple of weeks is the next conference of the senior executive for QFES, what sort of things will you be talking about? It's in Cairns isn't it?

DC Wassing: The next conference is in Cairns. I'll be heading up a bit earlier to catch up with some brigades, groups and locals up there, which is fantastic. It'll be a great opportunity to head up to the Far North. Part of the senior executive conversation will be around the Regional Integrated Planning Executive. That planning executive is part of the integration of working together as a team at a regional level. The Assistant Commissioners are in the regions fundamentally to lead and facilitate that group, which is representative by the Regional Managers or the equivalent across Fire and Rescue, Rural Fire and State Emergency Services. That's a maturing exercise in terms of where we are at, but more importantly, for our people to recognise it's a key aspect in the field about how we work together, plan together and, ultimately, learn from each other going forward.

Matt Rigby: How are you seeing that working? Are you seeing the results from that approach?

DC Wassing: It's kicking off really well. I'm getting really positive feedback about a lot from people - just about open conversations, dealing with problems on a more collective basis and finding whether it's building new facilities or a new station, whether we co-locate and collaborate more or whether it's actually been a joint exercise in improving some of the opportunities in joint exercising and now we're coming out of Cool Burn into fire season. Right on the back of fire season we'll be into storm season - that sort of environment is so important for us to consolidate how we work together and not just ourselves but how we work with our partners, local government, and all the other community based organisations that are out there.

Matt Rigby: I suppose that's really key to it isn't it? Recognising where those similarities exist across the services but also acknowledging where there are differences

DC Wassing: That's the beauty of it, across the three services, it's actually understanding what our capabilities are, how we can link into those, lever off the best aspects and learn from each other.

Matt Rigby: Mike, have you seen any examples out in the field in recent times?

DC Wassing: I'm lucky in my job. I get to go to lots of parts of the state where our teams and our people are working together. Most recently I attended with Mark Roche the Rockhampton Emergency Services field day. Over 6000 local community members attended that day, which was fantastic to see that. But what stood out to me was Rural Fire, SES and Fire and Rescue people working together, educating the local community, showing their equipment, their capabilities, but having the conversation fundamentally about how they work with local members, how they work with each other.

We had a great opportunity to recognise through awards a number of our members across the services, present formally with the minister a new boat and new trailers for the SES, a couple of



new fire trucks for Rural Fire. Just a wonderful day and a wonderful example of people working together with their local community.

Matt Rigby: I think that's a key point there – delivering what our local communities want.

DC Wassing: It really is about the community at the end of the day. We can't emphasise that enough. Our job is fundamentally about creating safer and more resilient communities. We do that in a range of different ways. We've got wonderful people out there – volunteers and paid staff who work together day-in day-out whether it be the exercising or the lessons learnt after an incident or responding. But more and more our efforts are going into the prevention and mitigation area and things like field days absolutely contribute to that.

Matt Rigby: One of the things there's been some feedback on is the acronyms for the different services. That's come back in relation to the RFS rather than the RFSQ, did you want to comment on that?

DC Wassing: It's really important we clarify that. I've heard some similar feedback. It's not a name change, it's really important that people recognise within Rural Fire and with the new logo with Rural Fire Service Queensland, the Queensland is part of that logo and that's really important and I understand that for our members and the recognition for Rural Fire Service, Queensland is part of that logo. What we're doing is dropping the 'Q' from that acronym and that's for a number of reasons, but primarily to reflect that we're three services and one department. That's consistent with State Emergency Services – SES is how it's known in terms of an acronym, but if you look at their logo it's also got State Emergency Service Queensland in the same way Rural Fire Service Queensland is in the logo but we're now referring to the three services and therefore RFS, SES and FRS.

Matt Rigby: In terms of other events coming up, I know we say this every time we do the reporting, but it is busy times, and AFAC is coming up towards the end of the month – what sort of involvement do you expect to see in terms of volunteering?

DC Wassing: AFAC is a great opportunity for us so the fact that AFAC is in Brisbane gives us a wonderful opportunity for our staff and volunteers to attend. We've got well over 100 people from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services – from the three services – attending that. I'm really pleased to see that for the first time we've got well over 30 volunteers attending that event. Through the Rural Fire Brigade Association Queensland, they're co-sponsoring a number of Rural Fire volunteers, which is fantastic and a really good reflection of working together. There is also free trade access – they have a trade expo there, and the Rural Fire Brigade Association have been able to negotiate the opportunity for volunteers generally to attend the trade expo even if they don't have a ticket to the broader conference. It's a wonderful opportunity for the leaders across the state to attend that and, importantly, to bring the lessons and conversations back to their areas and make sure that occurs locally as we would expect out of any conference or state-based arrangement.

Matt Rigby: I suppose that's the key with those one hundred people – it's one hundred people across QFES so it involves staff members as well.

DC Wassing: It's really important that this is about the whole of our workforce having a great opportunity in attending AFAC – our paid workforce, whether it be Rural Fire, Fire and Rescue, or SES and mixing with our volunteers. And it's really important the networks that you build



nationally out of things like the AFAC Conference and to see new ideas and participate in opportunities in terms of the conference itself and some of the guest speakers, which is really starting to lead the way with how we do business into the future.

Matt Rigby: Mike, I know I say this every time, thank you very much for your time, I know it's valuable. I know the value of you providing these updates to people everywhere and I think it's exciting in the future once Office 365 is out there we're going to have different ways to get information out there to people and I think this is a great way for you to be able to provide that information.

DC Wassing: Thanks Matt and I think it's a wonderful opportunity from my perspective to help share what is occurring around the place and there is so many exciting opportunities and some of those will be challenging for us in terms of time and effort, but it's really exciting to be part of that and I'm looking forward to continued conversation in the future.

