



# FIRE & RESCUE SENIOR OFFICERS

Strategic, Operational and Tactical Leaders of Queensland's Fire and Emergency Services

September 2020

The Queensland Fire and Rescue - Senior Officers Union of Employees (QFR-SOU) is a professionally led industrial organisation operating within Queensland's industrial relations framework. In the interests of its members, the QFR-SOU leads the profile of Fire and Rescue Senior Officers in partnership with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES).

This QFR-SOU publication introduces Fire and Rescue Senior Officers and communicates the valuable function they perform.

## An overview

Queensland Fire and Rescue Senior Officers have a proud history delivering fire and emergency services in Queensland; a service that is built on a unique history of courageous individuals with strong values to serve and protect the community and to deliver on the priorities of Government.

In modern times the Fire and Rescue Senior Officer role has expanded from the tradition of firefighting to a skilled and experienced commander, leader, and manager of the 'all-hazard emergency frontline' and the 'board room'. Unlike many leaders within government Fire and Rescue Senior Officers are required to manage their normal business responsibilities and accountabilities as well as providing emergency management leadership whenever emergency and disaster events occur.

This expanding role is driven by the high degree of internal and external change that typifies a modern organisation<sup>1</sup>. A fire and emergency service experiences change like no other and the organisation—and all its component parts—must be agile to

smoothly transition to emergency response operations, which may occur locally, interstate or internationally.

Our Fire and Rescue Senior Officers' evolving role is commensurate with this and the expectation of QFES to deliver the right resources, in the right time, to the right place to alleviate any emergency, disaster and/or humanitarian situation.

The Fire and Rescue Senior Officer cohort is represented by the ranks of **Inspector**, **Superintendent** and **Chief Superintendent**. Fire and Rescue Senior Officers occupy both state and regionally based positions to lead and deliver strategic and operational outcomes in partnership with the Assistant Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Commissioner, and our partner agencies.

## How many Fire and Rescue Senior Officers are there?

In the current model, there are approximately 17 Chief Superintendents, 34 Superintendents, and 108 Inspectors positioned across Queensland's geographic area of 1,730,648km<sup>2</sup>.

Fire and Rescue Senior Officer modelling is typically based on span of control and command surge capacity for emergency response operations, including multiple, large scale and/or long duration incidents.

The most recent review of Fire and Rescue Senior Officers occurred in 2009<sup>2</sup> whereby the (then) Queensland Fire and Rescue Service performed a comprehensive review of functions, roles, responsibilities, span of control and resourcing levels were

recommended, including the introduction of the new rank of Chief Superintendent.

Since this review, Mercer performed a work value assessment in 2016, which translated into wage relevancy with Queensland Police Service senior officers. This review, however, did not examine resourcing levels necessary to meet the changing environment.

## Who can be a Fire and Rescue Senior Officer?

As the profession's strategic, operational and tactical leaders, Fire and Rescue Senior Officers are shaped from their first day as a recruit firefighter.

A firefighter progresses through the ranks after a rigorous path of obtaining skills, experience, knowledge and also after formal learning and development has been achieved. This path forms the underpinning requirements for a Fire and Rescue Senior Officer's higher-level role as a commander, leader and manager.

Entering the Fire and Rescue Senior Officers ranks however does not preclude the continuation of skills maintenance, experience and development. Fire and Rescue Senior Officers are required to:

- maintain technical skills, such as annual breathing apparatus competency maintenance, and develop new technical or specialist skills as required,
- maintain and continuously develop incident management skills and experience, and
- respond to and command complex and escalating emergency incidents.



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## What do Fire and Rescue Senior Officers do?

Fire and Rescue Senior Officers perform diverse and inter-connected functions as commanders, leaders, managers and change agents. Fire and Rescue Senior Officers must therefore have the adaptability to transition through tactical, operational and strategic building blocks of the department.

Fire and Rescue Senior Officers:

- respond under emergency conditions (lights and sirens) to emergency incidents to perform frontline functions at the tactical, operational or strategic level, as the situation demands,
- operate in a complex emergency environment which is characterised by the 'high 3 operations' of high technology (reliance on information and communications), high intensity (intense time pressures and urgency) and high reliability (errors can lead to unacceptable consequences),
- perform high level command and incident management functions in regional, state, national, international as well as inter-agency operations centres for emergency and disaster incidents and major events, including high profile, security and global political and sporting events,
- perform a variety of regionally and organisation wide functions in formulating and/or implementing the service's strategy for enhanced emergency response capability,
- operationalise and implement whole of government priorities and strategic objectives of the department,
- establish and maintain critical relationships with superior and sub-ordinate officers, the public, industry and also the interface of local and state Government, and
- perform a mentoring role to develop emerging leaders.

## Are Fire and Rescue Senior Officers frontline?

Yes. Fire and Rescue Senior Officers have a frontline emergency response role at a number of levels – tactical, operational and strategic. All of which contribute to and enable the effective management of an emergency incident whether that be a singular incident, multiple incidents and/or a large-scale incident over a sustained period.

This frontline role has also been formally recognised by the Queensland government<sup>3</sup>.

## Is the Fire and Rescue Senior Officers role changing?

Yes. The demand on Fire and Rescue Senior Officers has increased substantially. Some key demand drivers include, but are not limited to:

- Increasing expectation and role in disaster management - a greater disaster management (prevention, preparedness, response and recovery) role under the *Disaster Management Act 2003*.
- Increasing expectation and role as a result of the 2018 McNam C4I Foundations Review<sup>4</sup> and the 24/7 staffing of the State Operations and Regional Operations Centres.
- Increasing expectation to maintain regional and state operational situational awareness at all times for all roles.
- Increasing reliance on the goodwill and availability of Fire and Rescue Senior Officers when not on-call.

- Increasing frequency and duration of operational activities during bush fire and severe weather operational periods.
- Increasing span of control and managing more staff without the commensurate increase in numbers.
- Increasing leadership role with the department's transformational journey.
- Increasing role and responsibilities to lead and coordinate QFES through unprecedented events e.g. pandemics.
- Increasing uncertainty of future expectations and demands - typically, the unprecedented bushfire seasons across Australia will foreseeably increase the demand and expectation on Fire and Rescue Senior Officers and the department. What will this look like? What will be the impact? How will QFES prepare with the right capability and capacity?

## Is the hierarchy of command relevant?

Yes. By virtue of rank, Inspectors, Superintendents and Chief Superintendents are the fire service's most direct, tactical mantle of leadership<sup>5</sup> to ensure operational effectiveness in preparation for and also during emergency response operations.

A fundamental input to the department's capability is command and control, and the leadership paradigm of 'commander's intent' and 'mission command'. Fire and Rescue Senior Officers fulfil commanding roles during frontline operations in their on-call capacity, which is crucial particularly for escalating operations.

The structure and function of the hierarchy of command enables the scaling of command capacity to meet demand and manage



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crews to effectively resolve the emergency situation. Every rank has an important role and function in the command continuum.

## Are Fire and Rescue Senior Officers' leaders?

Yes. Fire and Rescue Senior Officers are skilled leaders who coordinate human effort and resources to achieve outcomes by operationally effective means<sup>6</sup>.

Fire and Rescue Senior Officers are expected to perform a leadership role and be adaptable to the situational context of frontline operations and also the 'board room'. This expectation is fundamental to the delivery of operational effectiveness and professionalism and meeting community expectations.

## Are Fire and Rescue Senior Officers' bureaucrats?

No. A bureaucrat is typically identified as an official or administrator in government concerned with procedural correctness, working by fixed routine.

Some functional similarities may exist between an equivalent senior (bureaucratic) officer and Fire and Rescue Senior Officers, for example planning, human resource management, and strategy formulation<sup>7</sup> associated with the department's administrative function. The fundamental point of difference that cannot be achieved by a non-ranking officer lies in the Fire and Rescue Senior Officers' professional and technical experience, knowledge and judgement when it comes to readiness and emergency response capability.

It is this uniqueness that drives the functional imperative demanded of Fire and Rescue Senior Officers to be commanders, leaders, and managers within the duality of QFES business, which is emergency response and non-emergency response.

This often necessitates Fire and Rescue Senior Officers to work from their emergency office - their emergency response vehicle.

## Are Fire and Rescue Senior Officers professionals?

Yes. The fire and rescue service is a profession organised to produce and deliver a unique type of work and service to the public. This work and service is specialist, which by its very nature society cannot do for itself.

Years of training, development and operational experienced-based learning achieved by Fire and Rescue Senior Officers is fundamental to the continuation of the service.

This is also in addition to self-initiated qualifications and professional / industry association memberships, which have been achieved by the majority of Fire and Rescue Senior Officers. This combined effect with their mentoring role creates the new generation of Fire and Rescue Senior Officers as strategic leaders.

<sup>1</sup> Lyons, J., Swindler, S. & Offner, A. 2009. The impact of leadership on change readiness in the US military. *Journal of Change Management*. 9 (4):459-475.

<sup>2</sup> James, R. 2009. "Senior Officer's Review; implementation of outcomes and change management." Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Community Safety Establishment Management Program – Exempt Frontline Roles (18/05/12).

<sup>4</sup> McNarn, M. 2018. "C4I Foundations Review." Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

<sup>5</sup> Laurence, J. 2011. Military leadership and the complexity of combat and culture. *Military Psychology*. 23:489-501.

<sup>6</sup> Snider, D. 1999. The future of American military culture – an uninformed debate on military culture. *Orbis*. 43 (1):11-26.

<sup>7</sup> Sessions, S. 1996. A comparison of leadership and executive decision making in the military and private sectors. *Journal of Management Inquiry*. 5:122-137