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Enhanced emergency services for Queenslanders following independent review

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Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services The Honourable Mark Ryan

Queensland's fire and emergency services will enter a new era, delivering more resources, more personnel, and better focussed and aligned services for Queenslanders, following the release of an independent review.

The Palaszczuk Government will today announce an enhanced investment in fire and emergency services capabilities to ensure Queensland's committed frontline officers, staff and volunteers are best positioned to respond to emergency situations and keep Queenslanders safe in the face of disaster.

The \$400 million commitment will mean more resources, more personnel, improved equipment for crews and, importantly, better services for Queensland.

It will mean an increase of almost 500 full time emergency services staff, with dedicated allocated budgets for each service entity to uplift resourcing and further back our State's fire and emergency services personnel.

This important investment in community safety will see the establishment of a new Queensland fire department, while the Queensland Police Service will have primary responsibility for disaster response and coordination.

The fire department will have a clear focus on fire prevention, response and control.

It will encompass the Fire and Rescue Service and the Rural Fire Service as a separate entity with its own dedicated budget.

The reform will also see the State Emergency Service and volunteer marine rescue services - to be named Marine Rescue Queensland- aligned more closely with, and hosted by, the Queensland Police Service.

The Palaszczuk Government will implement the changes as a result of recommendations from the independent review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, to be tabled by Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Mark Ryan on Wednesday.

The Government's response to the independent report will deliver good jobs and better fire and emergency services to support Queensland's great lifestyle.

Minister Ryan said these important reforms would ensure Queensland was in a national leading position to meet the challenges ahead.

"Queenslanders can be assured that the high standard of service delivery they have come to expect, will not only be maintained, but will be surpassed," Minister Ryan said.

"The additional funds and resources announced today will enhance the delivery of emergency and fire services in the face of the increasing challenges from climate change, and the expected intensification of impacts from emergencies and natural disasters on communities.

New and reallocated positions will be in areas such as frontline firefighting, SES, MRQ, QPS and RFS.

The Minister highlighted the need for dedicated frontline officers across all areas of emergency response.

“Queensland experiences more natural disasters than any other state in the country and it is crucial that we continue to be well prepared,” Mr Ryan said.

“The adoption of a dedicated funding base for the SES, RFS and MRQ will better support the frontline in continuing to save lives and properties when disaster strikes.”

To oversee these critical reforms, the Palaszczuk Government will stand up a Reform Implementation Taskforce, led by State Disaster Coordinator, Deputy Police Commissioner Steve Gollschewski.

The Taskforce will ensure the required changes will be undertaken in a measured and considered way, and will not have any impact on the preparation or response to the upcoming severe weather season.

Consistent with the report’s recommendations, the Government has asked the Inspector General Emergency Management to review Queensland’s disaster management arrangements and propose any necessary legislative reforms and updates to the State Disaster Management Plan.

“We are committed to providing additional funding to support not only the transition associated with the reforms, but to permanently uplift the resourcing provided by Government for the delivery of fire, emergency and disaster services,” Mr Ryan said.

“The reforms are a strong show of support for our frontline emergency services personnel and their life-saving role in natural disasters.

“They will also promote the safety of our state’s most precious resource, our thriving communities”.

QFES Commissioner Greg Leach welcomed the review and reiterated that emergency services will still be providing Queensland communities with the highest level of response.

“With Queensland experiencing more than 60% of disasters in Australia, it was crucial that underpinning any new model, Queenslanders receive the same service they have come to know and trust.

“I welcome the review recommendations and the enhancement of focus for the fire services, both paid and volunteer, as this emphasises the important role they play in our community.

“I can assure Queenslanders that during this period of transition, our level of service delivery will not change from what Queenslanders have come to expect, particularly with the Severe Weather season on our doorstep.”

Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said the changes will streamline co-ordination and improve interoperability with existing capabilities in the QPS

“We welcome these services, their volunteers and staff, and know they will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to strengthen not only our Service, but our commitment to community safety.”

FAST FACTS

Once the reforms are fully implemented, the Palaszczuk Government will deliver:

- A substantial increase to the SES annual baseline budget to approximately \$60 million for more staff and more resources, including crucial safety equipment, vehicles and vessels
- Establishment of MRQ with an annual baseline budget of approximately \$27 million for frontline support, resources, vessels and equipment, and delivering on the Government election commitment for a sustainable single integrated marine rescue service for Queensland
- A resourcing boost to the RFS of more than 100 extra FTE positions and additional funding for new appliances, facilities and equipment
- An additional 143 firefighter positions for the FRS (bringing the total commitment to an additional 500 firefighter positions over 6 years from 1 July 2020); additional funding and 30 extra FTE positions for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) to support further disaster preparedness programs and initiatives
- Dedicated annual funding of approximately \$20 million for disaster management functions.

Media:

Minister's office: 3035 8300

QFES Media: 3635 3310

QPS Media: 3015 2444

QUOTES FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS**United Firefighters Union Queensland Secretary, John Oliver**

Members of the UFUQ, being professional firefighters, welcome the review and ultimately the announcement of the restructure.

The current QFES model has run its course and we are looking forward to a new Queensland fire department being established.

Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland President, Ian Pike

It's probably the best thing that's happened to Rural Fire for many years. I would like to thank the Minister and the staff for their input into having this put through for us.

Together Union Delegate (Rural Fire Service) Alan Gillespie

This is the best news for RFS in its 100 years history. An increase in staff, an increase in funding and an increase in resources will allow us to provide a far better service to our brigades, and empower them to provide a far better service to their communities.

SES Volunteer Consultative Committee Chair, Sharn Pogan

This is very positive for the future of the SES, its volunteers, and our communities, because it means better service to the community. It also gives the SES a renewed identity and wonderful improvements to equipment, resources and relationships that will benefit us well into the future.

Fire and Rescue Senior Officers Union President, Adrian Stafford

We are very supportive of the Queensland Government's decision to revise the structure of emergency services. The approach being taken will ensure fire and rescue services in Queensland are more effective and provide for a focus on preparedness and response that will enhance service delivery to the community.

Volunteer Marine Rescue General Manager, Keith Williams

This means our future is assured, where not so long ago it was very uncertain how we were going to fund ourselves. We're looking forward to improving the situation for our vessels without our volunteers having to go around rattling collection tins for funds.

Australian Volunteer Coastguard Association Deputy National Commodore, Allan Tennant

Extra funding is really great and it's going to go a long way, it's really fantastic. Money is something we were always short of, so this will be excellent and keep the place going.

Royal Life Saving Association Queensland Executive Director, Paul Barry

We're pleased to be associated with this restructure and we're looking forward to working with QPS. We have a good strong working relationship with Minister Ryan, who has supported volunteer and lifesaving organisations since he has been in the portfolio. We also look forward to working with Commissioner Carroll, who we worked closely with when she was fire Commissioner.

Surf Life Saving Queensland CEO, Dave Whimpey

We believe these changes will create a narrower focus, and positions SLSQ extremely well into the future. On behalf of our 36,000 volunteers and State Council and Board, I congratulate the Government for its progressive thinking.

PCYC Queensland CEO, Phil Schultz

We already have a strong working relationship with QPS, and I think this will only strengthen our relationship moving forward.

Local Government Association of Queensland CEO Alison Smith

Funding for the SES – including extra operational funding to support for councils – is much welcomed. The SES provides a vital service to Queensland communities in their time of need so ensuring it is properly

resourced and staffed is crucial. The LGAQ and its members now look forward to consultation beginning with the Reform Implementation Taskforce.

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