

# Annual Report 2019-20

## About the Queensland Disaster Management Committee

The QDMC is chaired by the Premier of Queensland, or her nominee, and comprises a core group of Ministers, supported by their Directors-General (Assisting Officials) and assisted by other Ministers, senior officers, and representatives from other government agencies (from all three levels of government) and non-government organisations (NGOs) as required. Additional support is provided through the State Disaster Coordination Group (SDCG), the State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC) and the Queensland Tropical Cyclone Consultative Committee (QTCCC).

The QDMC serves as the disaster management policy and decision-making committee for Queensland. Its role is to ensure the development and implementation of effective disaster management for the State and to provide clear and unambiguous senior strategic leadership in relation to the four phases of disaster management: prevention, preparation, response and recovery (PPRR). The QDMC allows direct Ministerial participation in the strategic management of disaster events, resulting in faster, better-informed decision-making during a disaster event.

Secretariat support is provided by the Queensland Police Service, with additional support from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

### Governance

The QDMC is established under section 17 of the *Disaster Management Act 2003* (the DM Act) and its functions are prescribed in section 18 and include:

- Develop a strategic policy framework for disaster management for the State;
- Ensure effective disaster management is developed and implemented for the State;
- Identify resources inside and outside the State that may be used for disaster operations;
- Provide reports and make recommendations about matters relating to disaster management and disaster operations; and
- Prepare a State Disaster Management Plan (SDMP).

### Members:

- Premier and Minister for Trade (Chair)
- Minister for Fire and Emergency Services
- Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services
- Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Digital Technology and Minister for Sport
- Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services and Seniors
- Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations
- Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
- Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
- Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs
- Minister for State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
- Minister for Transport and Main Roads

### Attending Officials:

- Director-General, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Director-General, Department of Housing and Public Works
- Director-General, Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors

- Director-General, Department of Education
- Director-General, Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
- Under Treasury, Queensland Treasury
- Director-General, Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs
- Director-General, Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
- Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Reconstruction Authority
- Director-General, Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Chief Health Officer, Queensland Health
- Commissioner, Queensland Police Service
- Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service
- Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Emergency Service

#### Observers:

- Inspector-General Emergency Management
- Chief Operating Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland
- Chief Operating Officer, Public Safety Business Agency

#### 2019-20 Meetings

##### Ordinary meetings

- Nil

##### Extraordinary meetings

- Sixteen (16) meetings – 24 February 2020; 12, 13, 14 and 17 November 2019; 7 (2 meetings), 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 24 September 2019

## The Year in Review

### **September 2019**

#### **Extreme Fire Conditions 5-24 September 2019**

- The fire season for 2019 began earlier than usual in Queensland, though this wasn't unexpected. QFES, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), HQ Plantations, local governments and landholders were aware of the catastrophic potential the 2019 bushfire season may have on Queensland. QFES' Operation Cool Burn was conducted to reduce the bushfire risk to communities through hazard reduction burns, community engagement with land users and resilience.
- While preparedness activities helped to reduce the risk to some communities, 2019 broke the record as the driest year in Australian history. This, coupled with the hottest year on record, led emergency management stakeholders to monitor fire danger conditions closely. Bushfire numbers increased from August.
- On 2 September, a vegetation fire started in Sarabah (Scenic Rim Regional Council). The fire heavily impacted the Lamington National Park. On the 6 September an Emergency Warning was issued for the fire as it approached properties. EAs were issued to advise the public to take appropriate action. Warning levels increased then decreased over multiple days. The fire destroyed 11 houses and 5 commercial properties and burnt more than 5,000ha of land.

- A fire burning at Stanthorpe starting at the beginning of September and burnt for multiple days. The area was already impacted by drought with severe water restrictions in place. On 6 September, with fire danger ratings at Catastrophic, an Emergency Warning was issued advising residents to 'leave now or seek shelter immediately'. Four dwellings were destroyed by this fire. Fire continued to burn for several days. Fires also impacted areas around Ballendean and Applethorpe, near Stanthorpe.
- The area of Peregrin Springs was impacted by devastating fire conditions in the 2018 fire season and again in 2019. On 9 September a bushfire broke out in the afternoon. Residents were advised to evacuate from the area as the fire advanced towards Peregrin Beach. Several properties were damaged, one destroyed and about 1,000ha burnt.
- Other fires of significance during September occurred at Lakes Creek (Rockhampton LGA) where over 1,300ha burnt, Warkton (Maranoa LGA) where five dwellings, three sheds and stables were lost, Stradbroke Island (Redland LGA), and Biboohra (Mareeba LGA) where one dwelling was lost.
- The SDCC activated to support DDMGs, LDMGs and disaster management agencies from 5 – 24 September. Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements were activated for Scenic Rim, Southern Downs, Noosa, Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast LGAs. By the end of September more than 60,000ha had burnt across the state with fires continuing to burn through October.

#### ***October 2019***

- In October 2019 significant fires occurred in Mount Sylvia (Lockyer Valley LGA) where over 15,900ha burnt, Peregrin Beach (Noosa LGA) where fire near the high school resulted in an EA being issued, Carney Creek (Scenic Rim LGA) where over 16,000ha burnt, and at Maroon (Scenic Rim LGA) where a multi-day bushfire occurred, involving QPWS.

#### ***November – December 2019***

- On 9 November a State of Fire Emergency was declared across 42 LGAs, predominantly in the east of the state. Significant fires burned in Ravensbourne & Peachy (Toowoomba LGA), Teewah (Noosa LGA), Jimna (Somerset LGA), Thorton (Lockyer Valley), Cooktown (Cook LGA), Lower Beechmont (Gold Coast LGA); Cooroibah (Noosa LGA), Moogerah (Scenic Rim LGA), Cobraball (Livingstone LGA), Moreton Island (Brisbane LGA), Border Ranges Complex Fire (Scenic Rim LGA), Lake Mitchell (Mareeba LGA), and Biboohra (Mareeba LGA). The SDCC activated for 18 days to provide support for the response and recovery efforts underway.
- In total for the 2019 Bushfire season in Queensland, over 3000 fires were reported, more than 7.7 million hectares burnt, 49 dwellings and 101 other buildings were destroyed, and the SDCC was activated for 38 days in total.

#### ***January 2020***

##### ***COVID-19***

- A new strain of coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Designated COVID-19 by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the global spread of the virus was quick. The infancy of this new virus strain meant that health professionals had no vaccine to combat its impacts. Most at risk, are those with a compromised immune system, individuals with chronic medical conditions, the elderly, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and those in grouped living settings such as unit complexes and detention centres.
- On 28 January 2020, Queensland recorded its first case of COVID-19, with an international visitor to the Gold Coast. On 29 January the Queensland Government, through the Chief Health Officer, declared

a public health emergency. In response, the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre (SHECC) stood up. On 2 February the SDCC moved to Stand Up to support the SHECC and health response to the pandemic. The SDCC remained at Stand Up for the remaining 150 days of this financial year, commencing the longest recorded activation of the SDCC.

- Disaster management groups activated to provide Queensland Health, as the lead agency, support. For months, almost all local and district DMGs remained at some heightened activation level. The role of the SDCC during this event was to support a whole-of-government response to the pandemic in the effective implementation of the Chief Health Officer Directions. The SDCC also supported DMGs and agencies to respond to and begin the recovery from COVID-19. At the end of the financial year, Queensland had recorded 1,067 COVID-19 positive cases and 6 deaths with more than 370,900 COVID-19 tests being conducted.

### ***February 2020***

#### ***Western & Southeastern Severe Weather January & February 2020***

- Above average rainfall in late January and into February 2020 saw significant flood levels recorded in parts of western, southern, and eastern Queensland. Affected catchments included the Georgina, Eyre, Logan, Albert, Condamine, Balonne, and Warrego catchments.
- Heavy rainfall was recorded in northwest Queensland in late January and the resulting floodwaters extended downstream on the Georgina River toward the Eyre Creek. In early February heavy rainfall in the Logan, Albert, Condamine, Noosa, and Mary River catchments saw river level rises that impacted several townships including heavily populated areas around Logan City, Warwick, Dalby, Chinchilla, Tewantin, and Gympie. Eleven Watch and Act EA warnings were issued to areas affected by the floods. The second half of February saw heavy rainfall around the Warrego and Maranoa regions with major flood levels seen at Surat, St George, Dirranbandi, Bollon, and Quilpie.

#### ***Talgai Dam – 14 February 2020***

- In the early evening on Friday 14 February 2020 a leak in a private irrigation dam in Talgai (around 60km south of Toowoomba) was reported which led to a series of warnings and evacuations in the area. Initial concerns suggested the dam may fail which would cause flooding to several properties in the area. An EA message was sent to people in the potential impact zone advising to evacuate to a safer location. QPS evacuated nine properties under the Public Safety Preservation Act (PSPA). The dam was inspected by private engineers and State Government representatives which identified a reduction in outflow of water. The PSPA was lifted, and most residents could return to their homes on 16 February.

#### ***TC Esther – 21 – 24 February 2020***

- TC Esther formed from a tropical low, which was identified in the Gulf of Carpentaria on 21 February 2019. The low reached tropical cyclone strength and was named TC Esther in the southern area of the Gulf at 4am on 24 February. The system then tracked southwest, moving to the north of Mornington Island. The system maintained a category 1 intensity as it made landfall just east of the Queensland-Northern Territory border at 11am, 24 February. Esther was downgraded to a tropical low moving west through the Northern Territory and crossing into Western Australia. The low turned along the WA coast and was on a track to cross back into Queensland, however the system lost energy, dissipating as it crossed the Queensland border.

### **Activations**

There were five activations of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020. The DRFA is a jointly funded program between the Australian Government and state and territory governments, through which the Australian Government provides financial assistance to support state governments with disaster recovery costs.

### Declarations

There were four Disaster Situations declared pursuant to section 64 of the *Disaster Management Act 2003* during the reporting period. Disaster declarations were made for Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast, Logan and Gold Coast Disaster Districts.

## Disaster Management Activities

The following is a sample of activities undertaken to maintain or enhance Queensland's Disaster Management Arrangements during 2019-20:

- Operation Cool Burn commenced on 1 April 2019 and implemented a range of mitigation activities including hazard reduction burns covering more than 15,000 hectares, targeted education activities and fire line upgrades.
- As noted in the Inspector-General Emergency Management's *The 2018 Queensland Bushfires Review Report 2: 2018-2019*, increased resourcing had resulted in improved capability, equipment and community engagement activities and reduced risk from bushfires.
- In July 2019, QFES delivered the *Queensland State Earthquake Risk Assessment 2018* and the accompanying *Tsunami Guide for Queensland*.
- Administered the final round of the jointly funded Commonwealth/Queensland 'Natural Disaster Resilience Program' to reduce Queensland communities' vulnerability to natural hazards and build community resilience.
- Administered the Commonwealth-funded 'Prepared Communities Fund', allocated to 10 community preparedness and resilience initiatives from local governments.
- Participating in the implementation of the Brisbane River Strategic Floodplain Management Plan (SFMP) outcomes, including the preparation and adoption of Local Floodplain Management Plans which reflect the outcomes of the SFMP for Lockyer Valley Regional Council, Somerset Regional Council, Ipswich City Council and Brisbane City Council planning schemes.
- Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) reviewed extreme weather event contingency plans for all Queensland ports and coastal waters and has worked with Whitsunday Island tourist operators in relation to evacuation options. In February 2020 MSQ exercised the Queensland Coastal Contingency Action Plan, which sets out roles and responsibilities in response to ship-sourced pollution that may impact Queensland's coast waters in the event of a significant storm or cyclone.
- The Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (DCDSS) has partnered with the University of Sydney, the Queenslanders Disability Network and the Community Services Industry Alliance to develop a Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Framework and toolkit, aiming to provide practical guidance for people with disability, as well as their families and carers, to prepare for disaster events.

- Continuing the 'If it's flooded, forget it' campaign urging drivers to make alternative arrangements and avoid driving when flooding is a concern.
- Conducted Operation Community Connect, enabling QFES volunteers from the State Emergency Services (SES) and Rural Fire Service (RFS) to have conversations with members of the public about preparation for disasters through door knocking drivers, emergency services' displays and station open days, with a particular focus on Multicultural Month activities.
- Queensland Health continued to deliver its annual media campaign about having the right medication on hand during the severe weather season.
- DCSS launched the Self Recovery App to provide Queenslanders with access to vital information about disasters and emergencies including: insurance information; personal and family support, business support; how to volunteers; how to donate goods and services; and how to make a financial contribution to assist with recovery efforts.
- Undertaking training disaster event training and exercises across all 22 District Disaster Management Groups (DDMGs) covering evacuation, fire and land slip, heatwave, water security, coordination centres, foot and mouth disease, communication methods, storm surge, bushfire, oil spill, cross border multi agency, processing of requests for assistance across local, district and state levels, and pandemic.
- Queensland AUS-1 Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) participated in Exercise Shaken Fury, a full-scale deployment exercise testing Australia's capability to respond to an international earthquake disaster.
- The Department of Transport and Main Roads participated in Exercise Pacific Fire, conducted in Gympie, which explored the integration of Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements during a multi-agency response to a marine scenario of a major oil spill in the vicinity of Double Island Point, across the boundaries of the Gympie and Sunshine Coast DDMGs.
- Continuing to maintain a community recovery workforce ready to assist when a disaster strikes, including more than 1,100 trained and approved Queensland Government Ready Reserves.

Disaster Management Priorities for 2020-21 are as follows:

- Development of a Crisis Communications Toolkit to assist regional tourism organisations and other key tourism stakeholders before, during and after a disaster event. The Toolkit will be made available through the five Regional Tourism Organisations in North and Northwest Queensland.
- Review and rewrite the State Human and Social Recovery Plan in consultation with disaster assistance partners across the state.
- Overseeing community recovery for the 23 disaster events in active delivery during the year.
- Implementing actions identified in the Brisbane River Strategic Floodplain Management Plan, including development of local floodplain management plans and reference material to support community understanding of flood risk.
- Continuing state-wide resilience programs including Get Ready Queensland (GRQ), Resilient Australia Awards and the Queensland Disaster Resilience Fund.

## Abbreviations

COVID-19	SARS-CoV-2 virus
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DART	Disaster Assistance Response Team
DCDSS	Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors
DDMG	District Disaster Management Group
DDMP	District Disaster Management Plan
<i>DM Act</i>	<i>Disaster Management Act 2003</i>
DMG	Disaster Management Group
DRFA	Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
EA	Emergency Alert
GRQ	Get Ready Queensland
LDMG	Local Disaster Management Group
LGA	Local Government Area
MSQ	Marine Safety Queensland
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PPRR	Prevention, Preparation, Response and Recovery
PSPA	Public Safety Preservation Act 1986
QDMC	Queensland Disaster Management Committee
QFES	Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
QPWS	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
QTCCC	Queensland Tropical Cyclone Consultative Committee
RFS	Rural Fire Service
SDCC	State Disaster Coordination Centre
SDCG	State Disaster Coordination Group
SDMP	State Disaster Management Plan
SES	State Emergency Service
SFMP	Strategic Floodplain Management Plan
SHECC	State Health Emergency Coordination Centre
TC	Tropical Cyclone
WHO	World Health Organisation