

‘It’s all about Roles and Responsibilities’

Using the ‘Wildfire Alert Level’ system to integrate QFRS Preparedness and Response Efforts.

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The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) is considered unique amongst Australasian Fire Agencies, in that it is a single agency responsible for the administration and management of both urban and rural fire service delivery. This co-joined structure brings many benefits, particularly in the development and implementation of organisational wide systems.

It is a reality that all emergency response agencies have resource limitations. This being the case, the efficient and effective use of available resources is paramount. With this principle in mind, the QFRS developed and implemented an initiative known as the ‘Wildfire Alert Level’ (WAL) system.

Historically within Queensland, preparedness and response to wildfire during periods of heightened fire weather has been somewhat ad hoc to say the least. Whilst a lot of effort has been put into improving the different aspects associated with wildfire management, the overall level of coordination has until recently not been of an adequate standard. To use an analogy, “Not everyone has been singing off the same music sheet”. In keeping with his commitment to improve wildfire response operations, QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson determined that ‘best practice’ be sought in this field of operations.

WAL is an integral part of the QFRS ‘Wildfire Preparedness Plan’, and is simply a mechanism by which the QFRS determines and communicates various levels of preparedness. The alert levels (see table below) indicate preparedness levels for every level of the organisation, ranging from a crew at a station or local brigade, right up to the State Operations Coordination Centre. When a WAL level is determined and communicated, roles and responsibilities are outlined for the many different players involved. This supports the objective of having all players “on the same sheet of music”.

Wildfire Alert Level Activation Table for a Region								
ALERT LEVEL	WILDFIRE ACTIVATION ACTIVITIES – #							
	Staff & Agencies	Weight of Initial Attack*	Rural Region Reporting**	Resources Prepared	Fire Permits+	ICC	RFCC	SOCC
4	Notify & activate relevant staff & agencies	Maximise initial response	RMRO Liaise with Region AC	Optimum resources (staged where appropriate)	Consider Fire Ban	Standby	Activated	Alert
3	Notify relevant staff & agencies	Increase initial response	RMRO Liaise with Region AC	Additional resources verified	Consider Local Cancelling of Fire Permits	Alert	Alert/ Standby	Watching brief
2	Notify relevant staff	Normal response	Liaise Through RMRO	Additional resources identified	Ensure Adequate Fire Permit Conditions	Alert	Watching brief	Watching brief
1	NORMAL BUSINESS							

* **Weight of initial attack:** Regions should consider additional appliances and air attack based on the risk and available resources

** Rural reporting to the Region AC at WAL 3 & 4 because level 2 or 3 incident (s) are expected to occur or have occurred

These are the minimum activity requirements. Regions may increase these activity categories (columns) based on local conditions (but may not increase or decrease the Alert Levels 1 to 4)

+ RMRO or designate to solely handle attaining Fire Ban approvals along with implementation of Fire Permit variations and instructions in a Region

Whilst other Australasian agencies responsible for wildfire operations have approached this aspect in a variety of ways, it is proposed that these agencies may benefit from the WAL concept being utilised by QFRS.