



QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT **COMMITTEES**

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee



Report No. 4

58th Parliament, September 2025

Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee

Chair	Mr James Lister MP, Member for Southern Downs
Deputy Chair	Mrs Margie Nightingale MP, Member for Inala
Members	Mr Adam Baillie MP, Member for Townsville
	Mr Mark Boothman MP, Member for Theodore
	Mr Michael Healy MP, Member for Cairns
	Ms Joan Pease MP, Member for Lytton

The following members contributed to the committee's work as substitute members appointed under SO 202(1):

- Ms Nikki Boyd MP, Member for Pine Rivers
- Ms Jonty Bush MP, Member for Cooper
- Mr Sean Dillon MP, Member for Gregory
- Hon Mark Furner MP, Member for Ferny Grove
- Mr Joe Kelly MP, Member for Greenslopes

Committee Secretariat

Telephone	07 3553 6657
Email	lgsbcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au
Committee Webpage	www.parliament.qld.gov.au/lgsbcsc

All references and webpages are current at the time of publishing.

Acknowledgements

The committee acknowledges the assistance provided by the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers.

Table of Contents

Chair's Foreword	v
Terms of Reference	vi
Executive Summary	vii
Recommendations	viii
Glossary	xi
1. Overview of the Inquiry	1
Context of the Inquiry	1
Submissions	1
Briefings and Hearings	1
Site visits	1
2. Terms of Reference part 1	2
2.1 The current state of volunteering in Queensland	2
2.2 The value contributed by volunteering	3
2.3 The benefits of volunteering	4
2.3.1 Fulfilment from helping others	5
2.3.2 Learning skills and pathways to employment	6
2.3.3 Reducing social isolation and loneliness	7
2.4 The benefits that volunteers bring to organisations	8
2.4.1 Voluntary work and mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payment recipients	9
2.5 The benefits of volunteering for Queensland communities	10
2.5.1 Providing services in areas with limited resources.....	11
2.5.2 Increasing community resilience.....	12
2.5.3 Building social cohesion and connections	13
2.6 The benefits that volunteering provides for the State.....	15
3. Terms of Reference part 2	20
3.1 Legislative, compliance and administrative burdens	21
3.2 Cost-of-living, financial constraints and the costs of volunteering	25
3.3 Insurance and liability concerns.....	29
3.3.1 Insurance Council of Australia's views	32
3.3.1.1 Data requested from the Insurance Council of Australia	33
3.3.2 Fear of personal liability.....	33
3.3.3 Proposal for Statewide insurance coverage for volunteers	34
3.4 Time pressures and work commitments	35
3.5 Volunteer recruitment, retention and burn-out challenges.....	37
3.6 Training, technology and support gaps	41
3.7 Other barriers to volunteering	43
4. Terms of Reference part 3	46
4.1 Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers - Case study 1	46
4.1.1 Burdensome bureaucracy	48
4.1.1.1 Slow onboarding processes.....	48
4.1.1.2 Blue Card requirement	48
4.1.1.3 Delays in construction of local brigade infrastructure.....	51
4.1.1.4 Brigade finances.....	53
4.1.2 Cultural toxicity and lack of respect	54
4.1.3 Inadequate and unsafe equipment	55
4.1.4 Poor training and accreditation systems	56
4.1.5 Generational and cultural disconnect.....	57
4.1.6 Volunteering for Queensland Survey 2025 and other engagement strategies ..	57

4.1.7	Recommendations from rural fire fighting stakeholders	58
4.2	State Emergency Service volunteers - Case study 2	61
4.2.1	Increasing workloads	62
4.2.2	Bureaucracy and governance issues	62
4.2.3	Respect and treatment of volunteers	63
4.2.4	Training and resource limitations	64
4.2.5	Safety and injury concerns	64
4.2.6	Financial costs of volunteering	64
4.2.7	SES retention data	65
4.2.8	Recommendations from SES stakeholders	65
4.3	Volunteer Resource Centres - Case study 3	67
4.3.1	Funding instability and unsustainability	68
4.3.2	Operational challenges	69
4.3.3	Structural and governance issues	69
4.3.4	Disaster and emergency response volunteering	70
4.3.5	Recommendations proposed by Volunteer Resource Centres	70
4.4	Other volunteer experiences, challenges and stakeholder recommendations ..	73
4.4.1	Bullying and harassment concerns	73
4.4.2	Legal protections for volunteers and potential gaps in these provisions	73
4.4.2.1	<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> (Qld)	73
4.4.2.2	Bullying protections	75
4.4.2.3	Sexual Harassment Protections	75
4.4.2.4	Civil liability protections	75
4.4.2.5	'Good Samaritan' protections	75
4.4.2.6	Coverage for non-emergency government volunteers	76
4.4.2.7	Industry Sector Standing Committees	77
4.4.3	Corporate volunteering	77
4.4.4	Volunteering Passport	77
4.4.5	Rewards and incentive programs to better recognise and encourage volunteer efforts	78
5.	Terms of Reference part 4	80
5.1	Challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds	80
5.1.1	Opportunities to improve volunteering participation for people from diverse backgrounds	82
5.2	Unique challenges experienced by gender	83
5.2.1	Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by gender	84
5.3	Unique challenges experienced by age groups	84
5.3.1	Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by age groups	85
5.4	Unique challenges experienced by ability	86
5.4.1	Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by ability	86
5.5	Unique challenges experienced by location	87
5.5.1	Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by location	87
6.	Terms of Reference part 5	89
6.1	Fragmentation and lack of coordination	89
6.2	Administrative complexity and lack of streamlined processes	90
6.3	Inadequate financial support and grant programs	91
6.4	Need for modernisation and a centralised digital infrastructure	92
6.5	Lack of awareness and visibility of support	92
7.	Terms of Reference part 6	94
7.1	Cultivating a positive, human-centric volunteer experience	94
7.2	Modernisation of the volunteer environment	95
7.3	Fostering inclusivity and diverse participation	97
7.4	Mitigating risks to the grassroots volunteering sector	97

8.	Terms of Reference part 7	99
8.1	Increased demand and strained capacity	99
8.2	Navigating the spontaneous volunteer paradigm	100
8.3	Systemic and governance barriers	101
8.4	Socio-economic and employment related impediments	101
9.	Terms of Reference part 8	103
9.1	Deficiencies in recruitment and cultural safety	103
9.2	Financial and administrative impediments	104
9.3	Co-designed and locally led frameworks	104
9.3.1	From top-down to co-designed frameworks	104
9.3.2	The case for locally-led hubs	105
10.	Terms of Reference part 9	106
10.1	Reports and reviews	106
10.2	Academic and other sources	107
Appendix A – Submitters		108
Appendix B – Public Briefing, 19 February 2025		126
Appendix C – Witnesses at Public Hearings		127
Public Hearing - Dalby, 24 March 2025		127
Public Hearing - Toowoomba, 24 March 2025		127
Public Hearing - Gympie, 25 March 2025		128
Public Hearing - Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025		128
Public Hearing - Brisbane, 2 April 2025		129
Public Hearing - Brisbane, 30 April 2025		129
Public Hearing - Roma, 15 May 2025		130
Public Hearing - Brisbane, 21 May 2025		130
Public Hearing - Brisbane, 16 June 2025		131
Public Hearing - Cairns, 14 July 2025		132
Public Hearing - Cooktown, 15 July 2025		132
Public Hearing - Townsville, 16 July 2025		133
Public Hearing - Gold Coast, 4 August 2025		133
Public Hearing - Emerald, 11 August 2025		134
Public Hearing - Rockhampton, 12 August 2025		134
Statement of Reservation		136

Chair's Foreword

This report presents a summary of the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. The committee's task was to consider the current state of volunteering and the value it contributes to communities and the state, barriers to volunteering, and the benefits and unique challenges faced by volunteers in Queensland.

The work and objectives of the inquiry were enthusiastically embraced by the Queensland community. More than 500 written submissions were received, and 15 public hearings were conducted, not only in Brisbane, but throughout our large and decentralised state. Our expeditionary approach connected us with the authentic voices and stories of Queensland's volunteers. It revealed the richness and diversity of our volunteering sector and demonstrated in no uncertain fashion the enormous economic and social dividend contributed by volunteers and their organisations.

However, it also revealed, in worrying clarity, that volunteering as we have traditionally understood it is in decline. The community service, charity, social cohesion and sense of purpose delivered by a strong volunteering culture are at risk unless the reasons for this decline are understood, and the preferences, limitations and expectations of volunteers, or potential volunteers, adapted to.

Every volunteer, and every volunteer organisation that submitted or came before us had their own unique story to tell. However, it is clear that there are common challenges pervading the sector. Some of these challenges were simple to identify (although considerably less simple to overcome), such as the aging demographic of our volunteers, the time constraints and fast pace of modern society, and the increasing difficulty of filling secretary and treasurer positions on the committees of our local halls, footy clubs and Landcare groups. Other more subtle and complex themes became apparent thanks to the astute insights of individuals and organisations who have been working to grow volunteer numbers, and to enhance the volunteering experience.

This report, rather than being an exhaustive account of today's volunteering picture, seeks to highlight these common themes and the commendable efforts of the volunteering sector to adapt to them. It also suggests ways in which the Queensland Government could act to encourage, facilitate and simplify volunteering participation. The government's recognition of volunteering's importance through its elevation to full departmental and cabinet status, along with the initiation of this inquiry and the consideration of its products, are sound foundations from which to embark on this important work.

On behalf of the committee, I thank those individuals and organisations who made written submissions and came before us at public hearings. I also thank our Parliamentary Service staff for their hard work in making this inquiry possible. Lastly, I thank the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers for its assistance.

I commend this report to the House.



James Lister MP
Chair

Terms of Reference

On 11 December 2024, the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee inquire into and report on volunteering in Queensland.

The terms of reference call upon the committee to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly by 18 September 2025 on:

1. The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;
2. The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers;
3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;
4. The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups;
5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;
6. Opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
7. Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery;
8. First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap; and
9. Any other relevant matters, including academic and other diverse sources, and any relevant reports and reviews at the national level and across other states and territories.

Executive Summary

The Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland was established on 11 December 2024, when the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion to refer the matter to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee.

During its inquiry, the committee heard from a broad range of stakeholders. These included volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, volunteering peak bodies, volunteer research centres, members of the SES and RFSQ, and members of the public. These groups shared their experience and viewpoints with the committee through written submissions and at public hearings, which were held in Brisbane, Dalby, Toowoomba, Gympie, Sunshine Coast, Roma, Cairns, Cooktown, Townsville, Emerald and Rockhampton.

The inquiry found that while volunteering contributes immense civic, social, and economic value—estimated at over \$117 billion annually—participation rates have declined significantly, falling from 75.7% in 2020 to 64.3% in 2023, equating to a loss of around 200,000 volunteers. Those who remain are increasingly burdened by rising expectations, financial costs, and regulatory hurdles.

The committee has made 8 recommendations. These recommendations relate to the following key areas:

- adopting a whole-of-government approach to recognising, investing in, and supporting volunteers
- reducing barriers to volunteering
- changes to the Rural Fire Service Queensland to address cultural and organisational issues
- improving the volunteer experience for State Emergency Service volunteers
- improving operating conditions for existing Queensland Volunteer Resource Centres
- furthering engagement with government organisations and stakeholders
- reviewing volunteer onboarding requirements
- investigating policy approaches for First Nations and multicultural communities.

Volunteering is vital to Queensland's economy, society, and disaster resilience, yet it is under threat from declining participation and systemic barriers. The inquiry calls for reforms and a reset of the volunteering experience—removing impediments, addressing entrenched challenges, and recognising the immense contributions of volunteers. By adopting the committee's recommendations, Queensland can reinvigorate its volunteer sector, ensuring it remains a cornerstone of community life and a foundation for the State's future prosperity.

The recommendations can be found from pages viii - x of this report.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 20

That a whole-of-government approach be adopted to recognise the efforts of volunteers and the significant contributions that volunteers make to Queensland.

The government investigate and adopt approaches that will better support volunteers and enhance the overall volunteering experience, including developing a whole-of-government volunteering plan to provide a strategic vision for the volunteering sector up to and beyond the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics.

This includes investing in volunteers and volunteering by providing funding for a network of volunteering hubs, and to provide funding for other Government Volunteering Organisations.

However, equally important is promoting the mental well-being benefits of volunteering through positive social interactions and physical activity.

Recommendation 2 44

The government should commit to working with volunteer stakeholders to find genuine options to reduce and remove barriers to volunteering. This includes:

- establishing a dedicated Ministerial Advisory Panel for volunteering
- removing any excessive legislative or regulatory burdens that are imposed on volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations
- establishing a dedicated task force comprised of constituent departments and agencies to develop and monitor a plan for Government Volunteering Organisations to ensure they remain model volunteer-involving organisations
- investigating which state government charges or fees can be provided at a discounted rate, or reimbursed entirely, to volunteers who incur genuine volunteer-related expenses in relation to these charges or fees
- collaborating with the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) and local governments to identify opportunities to reduce red tape for volunteer organisations in the local government space, as well as opportunities to provide recognition for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations through local services
- determining the feasibility of providing any such discounts or reimbursements and the criteria by which they could be provided to volunteers
- reviewing the *Civil Liability Act 2003* (Qld) to consider amending the Act to provide further protections for volunteers in line with other Australian jurisdictions
- investigating mechanisms to drive down insurance costs for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in order to lessen the costs, burdens and complexities that now appear inherent in the commercial insurance options available to the volunteer sector
- adopting a whole-of-government approach to better support and respect volunteers.

Recommendation 3 60

The Government urgently consider and implement changes to the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) to address cultural and organisational issues surrounding volunteers.

This includes but is not limited to:

- investigating ways to improve the application process and onboarding system for prospective RFSQ volunteers
- empowering local brigades with regard to training for their volunteer applicants
- standardising recognition of obtainable accreditation that could be transferable to other education outcomes, where possible
- improving the training systems for volunteers, including recognition of relevant prior service, skills and experience

- returning options for the delivery of brigade infrastructure to local brigades where local brigades seek to do so
- encouraging local input and knowledge in disaster events
- adaptive consultation processes and local decision making to better reflect and address the evolving demands and experiences of RFSQ volunteers whilst working towards stronger retention rates through volunteer satisfaction.

Recommendation 4 66

That the government commit its determination to improve the volunteer experience for State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers across Queensland. This includes:

- improving the recognition and support that is provided to SES volunteers
- improving the training systems for SES volunteers, including recognition of relevant prior service, skills and experience, but also the recognition of obtainable accreditation that could be transferable to other education outcomes, where possible
- improving the application and onboarding process for new volunteers, including options to commence training while applications are being processed
- consider any other engagement and recruitment strategies that may assist in increasing SES volunteer numbers and retention rates.

Recommendation 5 72

That the government commit its determination to improve the operating conditions for existing Volunteer Resource Centres in Queensland.

This includes by:

- provision of emergency funding to each of the four (4) existing regional Volunteer Resource Centres as appropriate in order to best ensure their ongoing operations whilst appropriate corporate and industry support is established
- develop and fund a new Volunteer Resource Centre model to establish a network of volunteering hubs across Queensland (ideally in major regional centres) so as to support place-based volunteering, connect volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) with potential volunteers, and to build capacity within local volunteer networks
- identifying and implementing preferred options for existing and future Volunteer Resource Centres to become better involved in the co-ordination of spontaneous and disaster volunteer management systems.

Recommendation 6 79

That the government investigate:

- the creation of a dedicated volunteer passport, which enhances the portability of skills and experience for volunteers between different organisations and for career recognition, with a phased model to ensure scalability and expansion
- the development of a streamlined national Working with Children Checks through inter-jurisdictional advocacy
- the development of nationally accredited, standardised training where possible
- review and reform the government grant applications system
- avenues to allow for dispute resolution and mediation within VIO's for administrative matters.

The Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers further engages with government organisations, peak volunteer organisations and VIOs representing diverse groups to explore solutions raised during the conduct of this inquiry, including the feasibility of corporate volunteering options.

Recommendation 7 93

That the government investigate:

- conducting a review of background checks and Blue Card requirements for emergency service volunteers to ensure that processes and interfaces are more volunteer-friendly and timely
- additional structural changes to achieve a better alignment between organisational management, operational capability and volunteer experience, particularly in regional and remote areas
- amending the current training and induction models to ensure it is timely, manageable, relevant and support volunteers.

Recommendation 8 105

The government should investigate a policy approach where government and volunteering organisations act as facilitators, providing resources and platforms for First Nations and multicultural communities to develop their own solutions.

Glossary

ARCES	Australian Rescue and Communications Emergency Services
CLA	<i>Civil Liability Act 2003 (Qld)</i>
CQ	Clubs Queensland
DRA	Disaster Relief Australia
EV CREW	Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather
FRRR	Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GMT	Gympie Medical Transport Inc.
ICA	Insurance Council of Australia
IGEM	Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management
ISSC	Industry Sector Standing Committees
JP	Justice of the Peace
LGAQ	Local Government Association of Queensland
MRQ	Marine Rescue Queensland
PACT	Protect All Children Today
PCBU	Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking
QCOSS	Queensland Council of Social Service
QFD	Queensland Fire Department
QDN	Queenslanders with Disability Network
QPS	Queensland Police Service
QYPC	Queensland Youth Policy Collective
QLS	Queensland Law Society
QDMA	Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements
QRO	Queensland Revenue Office
QRL	Queensland Rugby League
RRR	Rural & Regional & Remote
RFSQ	Rural Fire Service Queensland
SES	State Emergency Service
SSI	Settlement Services International
VIO	Volunteering Involving Organisations
VMA	Volunteer Management Activity

VQ	Volunteering Queensland
VRC	Volunteer Resource Centres
WHS	<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> (Qld)
WHSQ	Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

1. Overview of the Inquiry

The inquiry was moved by the Honourable Dr Christian Rowan, Leader of the House on 11 December 2024 and was then referred to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee (the committee) by the Legislative Assembly.

Context of the Inquiry

It was a commitment of the Liberal National Party ahead of the 2024 Queensland state election to 'Establish a Parliamentary Inquiry into volunteering to strengthen community participation'.¹

In regard to the establishment of the inquiry by the Parliament, Hon. Ann Leahy MP, Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers, noted the recent decline in the rate of volunteering participation and the impact that this had on many community organisations.²

Submissions

The committee announced the call for submissions on 16 December 2024. Details about the inquiry were then sent to almost a thousand volunteer-related stakeholders who had been identified by the secretariat. The inquiry was further promoted through the committee's subscriber list and social media. While the submission closing date was advertised as being 14 March 2025, the committee continued to receive and accept submissions until August 2025.

The committee received a total of 571 written submissions for the inquiry. It accepted and published 529 of these submissions, with 42 being determined to be confidential (and therefore not published). A list of the submitters can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Briefings and Hearings

The committee conducted 15 public hearings and 1 public briefing, receiving evidence from a total of 156 invited witnesses during these proceedings. The public hearings took place in Brisbane, Cairns, Cooktown, Dalby, Emerald, Gold Coast, Gympie, Rockhampton, Roma, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba and Townsville.

The committee also published on its website over 3,500 pages of evidence that were received during the course of the inquiry.

Site visits

The committee visited:

- Guide Dogs Queensland on 16 June 2025 to learn about its volunteer program
- the office of FNQ Volunteers Inc. in Cairns on 14 July 2025 in order to meet the FNQ Volunteers team, learn about their work and understand the unique problems faced by volunteers in Far North Queensland.

¹ See Liberal National Party, The First 100 Days, <https://online.lnp.org.au/first-one-hundred-days>

² Record of Proceedings, 11 December 2024, p 340.

2. Terms of Reference part 1

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee inquiry that were relevant to the first term of reference:

The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State

2.1 The current state of volunteering in Queensland

Volunteering is defined by Volunteering Australia as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.³ Research by Volunteering Queensland found the following snapshot of key volunteering statistics for the 2022-23 period:

- an estimated 64.3% of Queenslanders (2.8 million people) aged 15 years and over volunteered
- these Queenslanders gave approximately 719.8 million hours of their time volunteering
- this represented an average of over five hours volunteered per person per week
- the economic value of this volunteering in Queensland was over \$117 billion
- for every dollar invested in volunteering, \$4.70 was returned (the benefit-to-cost ratio).⁴

To place the above calculated economic value of volunteering figure of \$117 billion in perspective, for the same period of 2022-23, Queensland's Gross State Product – that is the total economic production of the state economy – was \$505 billion.⁵

As indicated by the numbers above, volunteers make an enormous contribution to Queensland. However, research also shows that volunteering has declined significantly since 2020. Specifically, from 2020 to 2023:

- volunteering participation decreased from 75.7% of Queenslanders (aged 18 and over) to 64.3% of Queenslanders (aged 15 and over)
- this represented a loss of approximately 200,000 volunteers, and
- the amount of time volunteered fell by approximately 20%, from 900.4 million hours to 719.8 million hours.⁶

Additional research shows that the downward trend of volunteering in Queensland is consistent with a longer-term decrease in the rate of volunteering across Australia. For example, Volunteering Australia found that rates of volunteering have been gradually declining nationally from around one-third of adults in 2002 to around one-quarter in 2022. This

³ Volunteering Australia, Volunteering Australia Project: The Review of the Definition of Volunteering, 2015, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Definition-of-Volunteering-27-July-20151.pdf>

⁴ Volunteering Queensland, State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024, pp 4 and 6, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, Table 1. Gross State Product, Chain volume measures and current prices, June 2023 amount. The ABS calculation of Queensland's GSP for 2023-24 ranged from \$510 billion (Chain volume measure) to \$515 billion (current prices measure).

⁶ Volunteering Queensland, State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2021, p 3., <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2021-full-report/>

represented approximately 1.86 million less volunteers in Australia at the start of 2022 as compared to pre-COVID years.⁷

There also appears to be a similar pattern of decline in regard to emergency management volunteers across Australia. This was noted by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience in the 2024 report by the Parliament of Australia's Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience.⁸

Throughout this inquiry, the committee has heard considerable evidence to support the above findings that fewer Queenslanders are now volunteering and that those who continue to volunteer are increasingly being expected to give more. The committee heard from stakeholders about numerous factors that have contributed to the volunteering participation rate falling so dramatically over recent years. These issues will be detailed and explored throughout this report.

In order to better explore the current state of volunteering in Queensland, this chapter will consider the value that volunteering contributes, as well as the benefits that volunteering provides for volunteers, organisations, communities and the State.

This introductory chapter could be viewed as highlighting the most positive elements of the complex volunteering story. Subsequent chapters will include discussions of the more challenging parts of Queensland's current state of volunteering.

2.2 The value contributed by volunteering

Research by Volunteering Queensland has attempted to quantify a dollar value for the value contributed by volunteering. In their submission to the committee, they stated 'Volunteering in Queensland contributes a staggering ~\$30 billion annually in social and economic benefit ...'⁹

Separate to this, Volunteering Queensland's 'State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024' included a broader cost benefit analysis which calculated that volunteering in Queensland enabled \$117.8 billion worth of benefits across the community in 2022-23.¹⁰ This analysis stated that the significantly higher value of over \$117 billion was comprised of the following 3 parts:

- commercial benefits calculated as being worth \$22.8 billion
- civic benefits calculated as having a value of \$40.5 billion, and
- individual benefits valued to be \$54.5 billion.¹¹

Volunteering Queensland's definitions of the 3 parts of their \$117 billion calculation are outlined below:

- 'Commercial benefit' distinguishes the financial gains enjoyed by ordinary businesses and the employers of volunteers. These benefits include increases in productivity and

⁷ Biddle, N., Boyer, C., Gray, M., & Jahromi, M. (2022) Volunteering in Australia: The Volunteer Perspective. Volunteering Australia, pp 10-11, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

⁸ See Chapter 3 - The decline of volunteerism in Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience, 2024, https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Disaster_Resilience

⁹ Submission 544, p 4.

¹⁰ State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024', Volunteering Queensland, p 78.

¹¹ State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024', Volunteering Queensland, p 78.

skill development among employees as well as purchases made by individuals and organisations in the course of their volunteering efforts. The commercial benefits generated by volunteering in Queensland were valued at \$22.8 billion. This is the sum of producers' surplus (\$2.2 billion) and the productivity premium returned to employers (\$20.6 billion).¹²

- 'Civic benefit' is the valuable contributions made or inspired by volunteers that, in their absence, would have to be supplied by the State Government to maintain the current standard of community living. These contributions can be understood as costs that the government avoids incurring because volunteers are stepping in to provide those services or benefits.¹³
- 'Individual benefits' are the tangible benefits provided to the community, also known as the 'outputs' of volunteering. In economic terms, when individuals engage with volunteering through an act or a purchase, it is assumed they derive some level of benefit or utility from that decision.¹⁴

In regard to these 'Individual benefits', Volunteering Queensland stated:

At a minimum, this benefit is equal to the costs individuals bear in the pursuit of their volunteering. Therefore, using the revealed preference method, it can be said that in Queensland, volunteers enjoyed at least \$21.7 billion in individual benefits from their volunteering. This is the sum of the money they spent (\$8.8 billion) and time they contributed (\$12.9 billion).¹⁵

Several submitters quoted Volunteering Queensland's research that volunteering enabled \$117.8 billion worth of benefits across the community in 2022-23 in their submissions to the committee.¹⁶

2.3 The benefits of volunteering

The committee heard from a number of individual submitters and witnesses about the benefits that they have experienced from volunteering. This general sentiment was perhaps most effectively communicated by Evie Wright, a 10-year-old primary school student who has volunteered with the nonprofit group commonkind.¹⁷ Miss Wright told the committee:

... the best part of volunteering is knowing I am helping others in my community. It feels good to give back, and I also think it is a great way to build skills that will help me when I am older at school, at work and in life.

When you help others it makes you feel really good about yourself, which makes you feel really happy. I think if other people volunteered too, they would feel happy and better about themselves, and that might get them into volunteering.¹⁸

¹² State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024', Volunteering Queensland, pp 78-79.

¹³ State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024', Volunteering Queensland, p 81.

¹⁴ State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024', Volunteering Queensland, p 85.

¹⁵ State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024', Volunteering Queensland, p 85.

¹⁶ See for example, submissions 278, 358, 369, 388, 413, 430, 488, 534, 536, 550 and 555.

¹⁷ commonkind is a Brisbane-based nonprofit that provides age-appropriate community service opportunities for children and their families to assist fellow Australians suffering disadvantage and distress. They focus benevolent relief on tackling poverty, eliminating food insecurity and improving health and wellbeing. See submission 260.

¹⁸ Public hearing transcript, 30 April 2025, Brisbane, pp 14-15.

Melanie Annand, a volunteer with the RSL and a Women's Veterans group said:

*My motivation for volunteering stems from the profound sense of fulfilment it brings, positively impacting both my physical and mental well-being. It is gratifying to assist others and give back to the community, particularly to those in need of support and care. I firmly believe that my lived experiences enable me to make a meaningful contribution, and if my volunteer efforts help even one individual or save a life, it is entirely worthwhile.*¹⁹

Additionally, Lance Mergard, a long-time volunteer and co-ordinator stated, 'Volunteering is more than an act of goodwill; it is a powerful economic driver, a foundation of social cohesion, and a key enabler of personal and professional development.'²⁰

Ms Lou Shipway, a dedicated Central Queensland volunteer advised:

*Volunteering is a two-way street. While communities benefit from the energy and the dedication of volunteers, the volunteers themselves are transformed in many ways. Being a volunteer fosters a sense of belonging, purpose, skills development and social interaction. Volunteerism is a powerful tool for community development, social inclusion and personal fulfilment.*²¹

Cancer Council Queensland added:

*Studies on community participation highlight that volunteers experience enhanced psychosocial connections with the communities they serve, reinforcing positive mental wellbeing and resilience. Particularly among older adults and individuals facing health challenges, volunteering has been shown to provide demonstrable health benefits.*²²

The views expressed to the committee from volunteers about the benefits that they have received from their volunteering can be summarised into the following top 3 general themes:

- fulfilment from helping others
- learning skills and a pathway to employment
- reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Each of these 3 themes are discussed below.

2.3.1 Fulfilment from helping others

In regard to the altruistic satisfaction that comes from helping people, stakeholder views presented to the committee can be further summarised into the following 3 general themes:

- volunteering provides a renewed sense of purpose from giving
- assisting someone in need is intrinsically gratifying, and
- contributing creates a shared sense of belonging and civic responsibility.²³

A selection of stakeholder views discussing these points is contained below.

¹⁹ Submission 15

²⁰ Submission 526, p 3.

²¹ Public hearing transcript, Rockhampton, 12 August 2025, p 18.

²² Submission 441, p 2.

²³ See for example, submissions 2, 34, 40, 49, 90, 91, 102, 206, 212, 248, 254, 268, 270, 304, 315, 319, 327, 358, 360, 373, 406, 413, 415, 422, 438, 441, 485, 487, 488, 490, 525, 536, 546, 555, 556, 567, 557, 560 and 566.

Rosies - Friends on the Street is a volunteer-driven organisation dedicated to supporting individuals experiencing homelessness, social isolation, disadvantage and hardship. Rosies advised the committee that their volunteers 'gain a deep sense of satisfaction from making a tangible difference in the lives of others ... By giving back, volunteers become more connected to their local communities and develop a greater understanding of social issues.'²⁴

Serving Our People Inc. said that 'Volunteering provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from helping others, offering individuals a sense of purpose and belonging.'²⁵

Andrew Clegg noted that 'people want to feel a sense of purpose where they can help others'.²⁶

Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc. said:

*Volunteering is not just about giving back; it also enriches the lives of those who serve. Volunteers gain skills, build friendships, and experience a sense of purpose, contributing to both personal and community well-being.*²⁷

2.3.2 Learning skills and pathways to employment

The committee also heard that volunteering benefits volunteers by increasing their pathways to employment through:

- building confidence
- aiding in the development of skills, and
- offering work experiences that are valued by employers.²⁸

These opportunities can be particularly important for some young people and others who may be vulnerable and seeking employment. A selection of stakeholder views discussing these points is below.

Queenslanders with Disability Network advised:

*For people with disability, volunteering is more than social participation; it is a proven pathway to skill development, confidence and leadership but also employment. Through volunteering, people with disability gain transferrable skills, expand their networks, build work experience and strengthen self-advocacy, directly supporting transitions into sustainable employment.*²⁹

Australian Red Cross advised that 'through volunteering experiences, people can improve and demonstrate employable skills, which helps create pathways to employment.'³⁰

The Queensland Police noted that among the many reasons that people are motivated to join the State Emergency Service (SES), some see it as their pathway to paid employment within the emergency services.³¹

²⁴ Submission 490, p 3.

²⁵ Submission 413, p 4.

²⁶ Submission 206, p 2.

²⁷ Submission 102, p 4.

²⁸ See for example, submissions 40, 101, 247, 358, 373, 483, 521, 532 and 542.

²⁹ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 30 April 2025, p 9.

³⁰ Submission 224, p 7.

³¹ Submission 567, p 11.

2Spirits & The Queensland Council for LGBTI Health stated that an internal survey found that 77.3% of their volunteers had developed new job-related skills, increased their self-confidence, and built social networks.³²

AFL Queensland stated that they invest 'in education and upskilling of women across coaching, umpiring, playing and as leaders of their clubs to make them feel empowered and capable to assist in volunteer and paid roles in community clubs both on and off the field, as well as career opportunities in the AFL industry.'³³

2.3.3 Reducing social isolation and loneliness

The committee heard that volunteering also benefits volunteers by reducing loneliness and providing potentially vulnerable people with roles, routines, purpose and importantly, opportunities for increased social interactions.³⁴

The importance of volunteering in reducing loneliness and connecting communities was previously highlighted in the 2021 Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland, that was conducted by the Queensland Parliament's Community Support and Services Committee.³⁵ As with that inquiry, a number of this inquiry's stakeholders discussed how volunteering promotes social inclusion. A selection of these views is below.

Neighbourhood Centres Queensland said that 'Volunteering helps individuals build relationships, reduce loneliness, and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community.'³⁶

Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) said:

... there are significant positive personal benefits from volunteering, ranging from reducing social isolation and loneliness, strengthening relationships and a sense of belonging, to improving mental health and wellbeing'.³⁷

Settlement Services International (SSI) said that volunteering 'builds community resilience, reduces social isolation and loneliness, and reinforces social and cultural cohesion'.³⁸

Community Qld said 'Volunteering is a rewarding and meaningful activity that reduces loneliness and delivers rewards of wellbeing and community connection.'³⁹

Bulimba Community Centre said that 'Many of our volunteers join us to fill a personal gap in their lives after retirement.'⁴⁰

³² Submission 422, p 7.

³³ Submission 463, p 3.

³⁴ See for example, submissions 49, 53, 59, 90, 102, 105, 160, 235, 236, 247, 260, 315, 340, 357, 359, 371, 422, 430, 435, 438, 444, 454, 470, 487, 488, 490, 534, 544, 550 and 556.

³⁵ Community Support and Services Committee, Inquiry into Social Isolation and loneliness in Queensland, 2021, <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5721t2070/5721t2070.pdf>

³⁶ Submission 438, p 7.

³⁷ Submission 235, p 2.

³⁸ Submission 247, p 4.

³⁹ Submission 315, p 3.

⁴⁰ Submission 90, p 1.

Volunteering Gold Coast expanded on this topic, saying:

Volunteering delivers direct benefits to both volunteers and the recipients of services / programs delivered by volunteers. The impact of volunteering is being recognised for its health benefits and therapeutic value to individuals through social prescribing in countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and the UK.

General Practitioners and Primary Health Practitioners are seeing the value of volunteering as a form of social prescribing to address loneliness, anxiety, and a way to build personal resilience without the use of medications or medications alone.⁴¹

2.4 The benefits that volunteers bring to organisations

The committee heard that many volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) such as community groups and non-profit organisations are generally reliant on the contributions of their volunteers.⁴²

For example, Clubs Queensland (CQ) advised the committee that while the community club industry employs 35,000 Queenslanders, it also engages a base of 41,500 volunteers. CQ represent 1,290 clubs across Queensland including sporting clubs, RSL and services clubs, surf lifesaving supporters clubs, racing clubs and all forms of social, special interest and cultural clubs.⁴³ They stated that without the club industry's 'army' of volunteers, clubs could not operate.⁴⁴ CQ added:

Volunteers are the heart and backbone of many clubs. They contribute in ways that allow clubs to thrive, ensuring that they can serve their members, sustain their operations and foster a sense of community and purpose.⁴⁵

CQ summarised the benefits that volunteers bring their member organisations (clubs) as:

- volunteers save costs
- volunteers bring an increased capacity
- volunteers foster a sense of community
- volunteers bring skills.⁴⁶

Cancer Council Queensland advised the committee that they 'could not deliver the life-changing services that we do without the support of volunteers, in particular across regional and rural communities.'⁴⁷ They added:

For every staff member that we have, for every paid employee, we have 25 volunteers. They are not just the backbone of our service delivery but really the heart of the organisation. Many of the volunteers bring deep personal experience and connection to our mission not only through their lived experience but also through their professional experience. What they contribute goes far beyond volunteering and

⁴¹ Submission 430, p 8.

⁴² See for example, submissions 2, 49, 102, 141, 142, 170, 185, 194, 248, 264, 276, 373, 419, 438, 478 and 481.

⁴³ Submission 533, p 1.

⁴⁴ Submission 533, p 2.

⁴⁵ Submission 533, p 2.

⁴⁶ Submission 533, p 3.

⁴⁷ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 16 June 2025, p 13.

*contributing their time. They bring empathy, insight and authenticity to every volunteer role, helping us to deliver support with compassion and integrity.*⁴⁸

The Leukaemia Foundation reiterated that the cancer care sector relies heavily on volunteers to deliver essential services. They said:

*Volunteers provide administrative support, patient transport, gardening, kitchen assistance, event coordination, concierge services, and retail and hospitality support in op-shops, community cafés, and markets like the Cotton Tree Markets. Volunteer contributions enhance the quality of care for patients and families, and significantly support the ongoing functioning of the organisation and its impact.*⁴⁹

Queensland Council of Social Service (QCROSS) noted that the social service sector they represent includes almost 220,000 employed persons who work for over 7,000 charities across Queensland. The work of these charities 'is supported by more than 413,000 volunteers.'⁵⁰ QCROSS recognised these volunteers 'as a key component and supplement to the paid workforce'.⁵¹

UnitingCare Queensland stated that they employed over 16,000 staff and additionally had 9,000 volunteers. They said, 'those 9,000 volunteers in the last financial year gave 1.2 million hours of time - not just time but also their skills and probably most importantly their passion to serve our local communities and the people we serve within UnitingCare.'⁵²

The Department of Education noted that arts organisations, events and festivals traditionally rely on volunteers. In 2023, 82% of Queensland's small to medium arts organisations engaged volunteers to support their programming and operations.⁵³

The Queensland Rugby League (QRL) advised that in 2024, they had a total of 20,596 registered volunteers who played an essential role in supporting the growth and development of the sport across the state.⁵⁴

Serving Our People Inc. said:

*Charitable organisations play a vital role in bridging societal gaps by providing services that may otherwise be inaccessible to many individuals. These organisations often rely heavily on volunteers to deliver essential support in areas such as emergency response, healthcare and social services. Without the dedication and efforts of volunteers, many of these critical services would be unavailable, leaving significant voids in community support and wellbeing.*⁵⁵

2.4.1 Voluntary work and mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payment recipients

In regard to the benefits received by volunteers from volunteering, and the benefits that volunteers provide to organisations, some submitters noted the connection of volunteering

⁴⁸ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 16 June 2025, p 13.

⁴⁹ Submission 248, p 3.

⁵⁰ Submission 384, p 1.

⁵¹ Submission 384, p 1.

⁵² Public hearing transcript, Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 6.

⁵³ Submission 532, p 4.

⁵⁴ Submission 391

⁵⁵ Submission 413, p 13.

and the receipt of welfare from the Commonwealth Government.⁵⁶ This is called 'mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payment recipients'.

Under this system, the Australian Government allows that persons aged 55 and over can choose to fully meet their welfare requirements through 30 hours per fortnight of approved combinations of paid and voluntary work. If individuals meet their requirements in this way, they are considered to be fully meeting their requirements under provisions of social security law and do not have to undertake any additional requirements such as job search, attending provider appointments and any other suitable activities.

For individuals aged 55-59 during their first 12 months of payment, 15 of the 30 hours per fortnight must be in paid work to fully meet their requirements in this way. All other individuals aged 55 and over can fully meet their requirements through any combination of paid or voluntary work.⁵⁷

The Mary Valley Rattler group commented on the symbiotic relationship between mutual obligation volunteers and community groups such as theirs. They noted:

*... community organisations play a crucial role in supporting Centrelink recipients who are required to complete 15 hours of community service each week to maintain their payments. For these individuals, volunteer groups provide structured opportunities to fulfill their obligations while gaining valuable skills, experience, and a sense of purpose. If these groups were to collapse, it would leave Centrelink recipients with limited options, creating significant challenges for both the individuals involved and the broader system tasked with supporting them.*⁵⁸

Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc. advised:

*FNQ Volunteers Inc. and Centrelink have been instrumental in providing us with a fairly steady flow of volunteers, helping to bridge the gap and support our ongoing programs. Their assistance has been invaluable in ensuring we can continue to serve our senior community effectively.*⁵⁹

2.5 The benefits of volunteering for Queensland communities

The committee heard from stakeholders about the many ways volunteering benefits Queensland communities. The views expressed can be summarised into the following 3 general areas:

- providing services in areas with limited resources
- increasing community resilience
- building social cohesion and connections.

An overview of each of these 3 general themes is contained below.

⁵⁶ See for example, submissions 30, 72, 102, 150, 152, 193, 276, 315, 419, 421, 438, 446, 470, 521, 538.

⁵⁷ Australian Government, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Voluntary work and mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payment recipients', <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/FACTSHEET-Voluntary-work-and-mutual-obligation-requirements.pdf>

⁵⁸ Submission 40, pp 3-4.

⁵⁹ Submission 102, p 1.

2.5.1 Providing services in areas with limited resources

The committee heard how volunteers often fill critical gaps in remote and rural Queensland communities, by delivering services that might otherwise be inaccessible. A selection of these views is presented below.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory said:

The Salvation Army in Queensland provides local social support and spiritual connection through its 43 churches (referred to as 'corps'). These corps are highly reliant on volunteers to deliver their local social programs and community activities, helping to make communities more resilient. In the last 12 months, the local social programs delivered assistance to approximately 30,000 Queenslanders doing it tough, some needing multiple instances of support (approximately 50,000 instances).⁶⁰

Roma Commerce and Tourism said, 'volunteers are the lifeblood of regional communities, underpinning our vital services, events and organisations'.⁶¹

Queensland Law Society said:

Volunteers are the heart of Queensland communities, dedicating their time, skills, and compassion to support emergency response, social services, health services, sports and recreation, environmental conservation, cultural programs and countless other essential programs. Their contributions strengthen resilience, connection, and well-being across the state, often filling gaps that would otherwise go unaddressed.⁶²

Tablelands Regional Council noted that their volunteers:

... provide essential services across arts, culture, emergency management, community health, environmental sustainability, and more. The value of volunteering extends far beyond the work performed, volunteers gain a sense of purpose, develop new skills, and build strong social connections that contribute to a more cohesive and resilient society.⁶³

Queensland Country Women's Association said:

The QCWA has a strong presence in rural and remote communities. Volunteers play a critical role in supporting these areas, particularly where access to formal services is limited. Volunteers contribute to strengthening community resilience, ensuring social inclusion, and providing essential services to geographically isolated populations.⁶⁴

Mareeba Meals on Wheels noted that many of their volunteers had offered their services to the local community for over 40 years. They wrote of the joy that their volunteers bring to their clients and how they are valued by the local committee, clients and their families.⁶⁵

Ms Robyn Holmes, Mayor of the Cook Shire Council said that volunteers 'donate their time and skills free of charge for the prosperity of their communities. This should be embraced and supported by all levels of government.'⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Submission 419, p 5.

⁶¹ Public hearing transcript, Roma, 15 May 2025, p 6.

⁶² Submission 549, p 1.

⁶³ Submission 546, p 1.

⁶⁴ Submission 333, p 1.

⁶⁵ Submission 2, p 1.

⁶⁶ Public hearing transcript, Cooktown, 15 July 2025, p 1.

Neighbourhood Centres Queensland stated:

*Volunteers in Neighbourhood Centres provide essential services, fostering social connections, and strengthening community resilience. Their contributions empower individuals, bridge social gaps, and enhance the overall well-being of Queensland communities.*⁶⁷

Colin Boyce MP, Federal Member for Flynn added:

*Volunteers are the backbone of our society. They provide essential services, connect communities, and offer opportunities for individuals to contribute to causes that are larger than themselves. A community that does not foster volunteering cannot truly be considered a community; it is through the act of giving that we build strong, resilient, and compassionate societies.*⁶⁸

Toowoomba Regional Council said:

*Volunteering often serves a dual function in regional communities, not only in sustaining local groups, programs, and services but in fostering resilience and alleviating the effects of social isolation.*⁶⁹

2.5.2 Increasing community resilience

The committee heard that volunteers play a pivotal role in disaster responses and ongoing community recovery across Queensland. Stakeholder views regarding this are presented below.

Australian Red Cross said that ‘our volunteers help build community capacity and strengthen community resilience across Queensland.’⁷⁰ They added:

*Between disasters, our emergency services volunteers work within their communities to build individual, household and community readiness through our comprehensive resilience and preparedness programs.*⁷¹

Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) spoke about the benefits that they provide to local communities. DRA explained that they provide:

... practical, hands-on support through its team of volunteers who come ready to roll up their sleeves and help where it is needed. Many have skills ranging from medical and combat experience to flying drones, which can all be applied in disaster recovery. These motivations, skills and experiences allow DRA to provide rapid, efficient and effective recovery response to those affected by disaster while fostering a sense of community spirit.

In the aftermath of disaster we assist people on some of the worst days of their life by providing essential clean-up and support to help pick up the pieces. Because our skilled volunteers freely give their time, the investment in the community is amplified by at least 150 per cent, including the priceless gift of hope in helping rebuild lives. Through our

⁶⁷ Submission 438, p 13.

⁶⁸ Submission 470, p 5.

⁶⁹ Submission 291, p 4.

⁷⁰ Submission 224, p 4.

⁷¹ Submission 224, p 6.

*preparedness capability we also work with communities to identify risks, develop disaster management strategies and build their capability to face future challenges.*⁷²

Protect All Children Today (PACT) advised, 'Volunteering in Queensland is a cornerstone of community resilience, fostering social inclusion, and contributing significantly to the economy and overall wellbeing of the State.'⁷³

Burnett Inland Economic Development Organisation said:

*Volunteers have been instrumental in supporting the Burnett Inland region during and after droughts and natural disasters. Their efforts have significantly contributed to the resilience and recovery of the Burnett Inland community through support for primary producers and businesses impacted by drought and natural disasters, management of resources such as drought relief packages and community events, and disaster relief and recovery efforts.*⁷⁴

Mrs Margie Ryder, Secretary of Volunteering North Queensland told the committee that a well-supported volunteering sector 'is integral to Queensland's social fabric, disaster resilience and community wellbeing'.⁷⁵

Lifeline Australia noted that their 3,000 volunteers ensured:

*... that more people within local communities are educated about, aware of and comfortable talking about suicide prevention, crisis support and emotional distress. This helps to build awareness of these issues within communities, increases the visibility and awareness of support services and reduces stigma, creating more resilient communities.*⁷⁶

2.5.3 Building social cohesion and connections

The committee heard how volunteering also fosters friendships, networks, and a sense of belonging, as volunteers meet like-minded people and become part of supportive communities. A selection of these views is below.

Queenslanders with Disability Network told the committee:

*Volunteering not only strengthens communities; it also empowers individuals to become leaders, advocates and active citizens. It is a cornerstone of our society and a driver of inclusion and opportunity.*⁷⁷

Headspace Gladstone said, 'As an organisation deeply embedded in the community, we witness firsthand the impact of volunteering on mental health resilience, workforce readiness, and social cohesion.'⁷⁸

Mr Michael Moodie, Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Sunshine Coast Inc. said, 'Volunteering is a huge component of the welfare of communities in terms of social inclusion, health care, people connecting ...'⁷⁹

⁷² Public hearing transcript, Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 10.

⁷³ Submission 415, p 3.

⁷⁴ Submission 494, p 1.

⁷⁵ Public hearing transcript, Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 3.

⁷⁶ Submission 555, p 4.

⁷⁷ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 30 April 2025, p 10.

⁷⁸ Submission 363

⁷⁹ Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 9.

Welcoming Australia said, 'Our organisation recognises volunteering as a fundamental social cohesion and community resilience pillar.'⁸⁰

Atherton Tableland Agricultural Society said:

*Volunteering plays a pivotal role in both social and economic aspects of our community. Research has shown that volunteering fosters social cohesion, builds community resilience, and enhances the quality of life for individuals. Economically, volunteers contribute millions of dollars' worth of labour, which supports local economies and reduces the financial burden on not-for-profit organisations.*⁸¹

Volunteering Gold Coast advised:

*Volunteering is not just about giving time; it is about building connections through both deepening existing relationships and forming new ones. Social capital, the web of trust and reciprocity that holds communities together, comes in two key forms: bonding and bridging. Volunteering strengthens both in ways that are essential for resilient, inclusive societies.*⁸²

Ms Janice Moriarty, Mayor of the Central Highlands Regional Council said, 'our smaller communities and towns need volunteers to thrive.'⁸³ Mayor Moriarty added:

*Our volunteers bring young and old together, create social connections and cater for the diverse needs within our communities to improve liveability, preserve our country way of life and enliven our community spirit - in other words, build social and cultural capital.*⁸⁴

Ms Kylie Bourne, Deputy Mayor of Western Downs Regional Council said, 'at a grassroots level, it is volunteers right across our nation who are the very fabric of keeping community connected.'⁸⁵

Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited noted that volunteering provides an opportunity for community members from all walks of life to meet. They added:

*Not only does volunteering provide a valuable service to your community but it improves inclusive culture and wellbeing. Providing an opportunity for an individual who may not be able to commit to the schedules associated with paid work builds pride, self-confidence and resilience.*⁸⁶

The submission from commonkind added, 'Volunteers contribute to community resilience, social cohesion, and the delivery of essential services.'⁸⁷

An SES volunteer said:

Volunteering is the heart and soul of community service in Queensland, offered freely and willingly for those in need. It fosters social cohesion, supports vulnerable

⁸⁰ Submission 393

⁸¹ Submission 451, p 1.

⁸² Submission 430, p 7.

⁸³ Public hearing transcript, Emerald, 11 August 2025, p 5.

⁸⁴ Public hearing transcript, Emerald, 11 August 2025, p 5.

⁸⁵ Public hearing transcript, Dalby, 24 March 2025, p 1.

⁸⁶ Submission 437, p 5.

⁸⁷ Submission 260, p 3.

*populations, delivers emergency response and recovery in a crisis and contributes significantly to the economy.*⁸⁸

2.6 The benefits that volunteering provides for the State

Benefits delivered to the State by volunteers are significant and wide-ranging. As noted above, Volunteering Queensland calculated that the Queensland Government saved \$40.5 billion in 2022-23 in 'civic benefits' as a result of volunteers providing their services to assist the State.

In further understanding the benefits of volunteering to the State, it is worth attempting to compare the size of the Queensland Government workforce with those who volunteer to support the government's services.

The most recent research into the number of persons who had volunteered to assist a government organisation in Queensland found that in 2020 there were estimated to be 500,000 government volunteers.⁸⁹ It should be noted that there is no full-time equivalent (FTE) figure available for these half-a-million volunteers. An accurate comparison with the size of Queensland's paid government workforce is therefore not possible. However, as a general guide, as at September 2020, the Queensland public sector consisted of 234,142.49 FTE employees.⁹⁰ As at March 2025, the Queensland public sector consisted of 270,883.71 FTE employees.⁹¹

From these figures, it is likely that for each FTE public sector employee, there are approximately 2 additional persons who volunteer their services in some capacity for the government.

2.6.1 Government responses to the Inquiry

The committee received detailed information about volunteering from 8 government departments and agencies. These comprised a written brief from the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers⁹² and submissions from the following 7 government departments and agencies⁹³:

- Department of Justice
- Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Queensland Fire Department
- Department of Education
- Queensland Police Service
- Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (specifically from Workplace Health and Safety Queensland)

⁸⁸ Submission 153

⁸⁹ Volunteering Queensland, State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021, p 24., <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2021-Full-Report.pdf>

⁹⁰ Queensland Government, Public Service Commission, Queensland public sector workforce profile, September 2020, p 7. https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/183459/queensland-public-sector-biannual-workforce-profile-sept-2020.pdf

⁹¹ Queensland Government, Sector workforce profile, <https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/pay-benefits-and-policy/state-of-the-sector-report/our-workforce-in-profile/sector-workforce-profile>

⁹² Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers, Volunteering in Queensland, [Departmental brief by Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers - 6 February 2025.pdf](#)

⁹³ Each of these Departments and agencies also appeared before the committee at its public hearing on 21 May 2025

- Office of the Inspector-General of Emergency Management.

2.6.2 An overview of volunteer support provided to the government

From the government submissions listed above, the following volunteer numbers for these departments and agencies were reported.

Department of Justice stated:

- there are more than 80,000 general volunteer Justices of the Peace (JPs) or Commissioners for Declarations (CDecs) in Queensland, and
- volunteers who attend Queensland courts to deliver services to court users, including:
 - mental health, housing and general social support services
 - pro bono legal advice to court users, and
 - witness support programs for children and adults.⁹⁴

Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games noted:

- Queensland's sport and active recreation and racing clubs and organisations are highly reliant on volunteer labour to support their day-to-day operations⁹⁵
- the Queensland racing industry is supported by close to 8,300 individuals providing their skills, time and resources to the racing industry as a volunteer.⁹⁶

Queensland Fire Department (QFD) advised:

- the Department's biggest cohort of volunteers is within the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) which had approximately 27,350 volunteer members as at 30 June 2024, and
- outside of RFSQ, QFD has a network of approximately 200 other volunteers who provide specific services related to the disaster and emergency sector.⁹⁷

Department of Education noted that P&Cs Qld engage more than 58,000 volunteers.⁹⁸

Queensland Police Service stated:

- there are approximately 5,000 SES volunteers across 76 units and 298 groups in Queensland
- Marine Rescue Queensland (MRQ) will soon have around 2,700 volunteers operating across 47 local rescue units
- there are approximately 200 persons in the Volunteers in Policing (ViP) program throughout the state, and
- there are approximately 248 Neighbourhood Watch Queensland (NHWQ) groups located throughout Queensland.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Submission 283, p 1.

⁹⁵ Submission 317, p 1.

⁹⁶ Submission 317, p 5.

⁹⁷ Submission 530, pp 11-12 (Appendix 1).

⁹⁸ Submission 532, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Submission 567, pp 4-6.

2.6.3 An overview of volunteer support provided to Queensland's disaster and emergency response management services

Disaster response and emergency management are key responsibilities of the State. Below is an overview of the crucial services and support provided by many thousands of Queensland's emergency service volunteers.¹⁰⁰

The QPS advised the committee that Queensland's disaster management arrangements are heavily dependent on the contribution of volunteers.¹⁰¹ This includes:

- volunteer-involving emergency service organisations including the SES, RFSQ and MRQ
- volunteer-involving non-government organisations including Surf Lifesaving Queensland, the Australian Red Cross and Salvation Army, and
- informal and spontaneous volunteers mobilised and coordinated through Volunteering Queensland and local arrangements.¹⁰²

QPS added:

*Volunteer contributions in disaster operations are wide-ranging and include, but are not limited to, critical first responder emergency response and rescue services; supporting community resupply, management and support into evacuation centres, recovery hubs and places of refuge; psychological first aid; and debris removal and clean-up operations.*¹⁰³

QFD advised the committee that Queensland communities rely on volunteers to deliver frontline operations and support before, during and after an emergency.¹⁰⁴ QFD noted:

- volunteers are critical to the successful delivery of frontline services and are essential in building community capacity and enhancing community resilience
- volunteers contribute greatly to social and community cohesion and outcomes for rural and regional communities
- volunteering within the emergency services gives community members an opportunity to serve their local communities in rewarding and fulfilling roles as well as obtaining professional development, training, and expertise that may benefit them within their own chosen careers.¹⁰⁵

The Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management (IGEM) reiterated the above points and added:

- volunteers provide an important surge capacity which can be quickly activated when needed
- volunteerism significantly strengthens the resilience of Queensland communities
- volunteers often work tirelessly to ensure residents are safe even when their own homes and businesses are impacted.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Queensland's emergency service volunteers are further discussed as part of the Terms of References sections 3 and 7 of this report.

¹⁰¹ Submission 567, p 5.

¹⁰² Submission 567, p 5.

¹⁰³ Submission 567, pp 5-6.

¹⁰⁴ Submission 530, p 1.

¹⁰⁵ Submission 530, p 1.

¹⁰⁶ Submission 432, p 1.

2.6.4 Some other benefits that volunteers provide to the State

Stakeholders advised of some other benefits that volunteers and VIOs provide to the State. For example, in the areas of health services and improved health outcomes, the committee heard from Gympie Medical Transport Inc. (GMT).

GMT is a not-for-profit organisation that has acquired 7 vehicles and has over 45 volunteer drivers who transport community members to their non-emergent medical or surgical appointments. GMT's operating radius includes Gympie and the Sunshine Coast where there are limited public transport options and taxi fares may be unaffordable for many of the service's clients. During 2023-2024, GMT volunteers drove 11,823 hours taking clients to and from their medical appointments.

Ms Sally Carkeet, Secretary of Gympie Medical Transport Inc. said:

*Keeping clients within their own communities is a huge saving not only for the clients but for the government as well. They can maintain the services they have been brought up with in the one area. In terms of the ability for this community that does not have a hospital that meets the requirements of this community, we are getting people to those appointments and those surgical appointments, and the health reflects in the statistical data that may well be produced - they probably have a better health outcome because of it.*¹⁰⁷

As well, Suncare Community Services, who operate from Brisbane to Rockhampton, provide services to help older people to remain living in their own home for longer. Suncare advised that their 182 volunteers are integral to achieving their mission. Suncare's volunteers:

- provide transport services enabling customers to attend medical appointments, visit shopping facilities, and participate in social activities
- conduct regular visits to older Queenslanders, reducing their social isolation and providing companionship
- assist with Meals on Wheels meal preparations and delivery.¹⁰⁸

The Salvation Army Australia Territory noted, 'Connection to volunteers increases a community's resilience, preventing reliance on more acute services provided by government (hospitalisation, Medicare-funded services) and isolation.'¹⁰⁹

DV Safe Phone advised that the overall impact of volunteering, 'is a more resilient community and a reduction in the strain on state services.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Public hearing transcript, Gympie, 25 March 2025, p. 10

¹⁰⁸ Submission 411.

¹⁰⁹ Submission 419, p 5.

¹¹⁰ Submission 245, p 1.

Committee comment



Volunteering in Queensland contributes immense civic, social and individual value. The economic benefits of volunteering have been calculated at over \$100 billion annually.

Volunteering also enhances wellbeing, employability, resilience, social cohesion and service delivery, while saving the State many billions of dollars each year.

Volunteers reported their positive experiences, which included increased community connections, personal growth, and the satisfaction from assisting others in times of need.

The committee acknowledges all Queensland volunteers for their incredible efforts which individually and collectively make Queensland better and more resilient.

It was inspiring to hear from so many Queenslanders about their contributions and to recognise how each day so many volunteers give so much to their communities, local organisations and the state as a whole. It is clear how reliant governments have become on volunteers to assist with and provide essential services to fellow Queenslanders.

However, participation rates are falling, signalling a need for reform. Specifically, volunteers need increased support and understanding. Our volunteers have told us that they are increasingly stretched and need help in order to keep volunteering.

For more people to be encouraged to volunteer, in particular, for younger people to understand and experience the benefits of volunteering, the volunteer experience needs to improve significantly. This will take a whole-of-government approach and a Queensland-wide approach.

In effect, the volunteering experience needs a re-set whereby impediments are removed, entrenched problems are addressed, and all stakeholders feel a renewed empowerment that their volunteering contributions are respected, appreciated and have meaningful outcomes.

In committing to these goals, more Queenslanders will likely be encouraged to become volunteers. With more volunteers, and in particular more volunteers who feel supported and respected, the positive impacts for Queensland will increase exponentially.



Recommendation 1

That a whole-of-government approach be adopted to recognise the efforts of volunteers and the significant contributions that volunteers make to Queensland.

To achieve this, the government should investigate and adopt approaches that will better support volunteers and enhance the overall volunteering experience, including developing a whole-of-government volunteering plan to provide a strategic vision for the volunteering sector up to and beyond the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics.

This includes investing in volunteers and volunteering by providing funding for a network of volunteering hubs, and to provide funding for other Government Volunteering Organisations.

However, equally important is promoting the mental well-being benefits of volunteering through positive social interactions and physical activity.

3. Terms of Reference part 2

This section discusses key themes that were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 2 of the terms of reference:

The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers

Throughout the inquiry, stakeholders highlighted numerous barriers that they said are impacting the volunteering sector. The most prevalent of these challenges, as described to the committee, can be summarised into 6 general themes:

- legislative, compliance and administrative burdens
- cost-of-living, financial constraints and the costs of volunteering
- insurance and liability concerns
- time pressures and work commitments
- volunteer recruitment, retention and burn-out challenges, and
- training, technology and support gaps.

The committee heard that each of the above issues is individually acting as a barrier to volunteering. When considered collectively, the concurrent impacts of these barriers provide a clear explanation for why there has been such a significant decrease in volunteering participation rates over recent years.

This chapter serves to acknowledge the views of volunteers and the volunteering sector about the barriers they experience. It presents an overview of the insights that were shared, as they align to the above 6 categories.

3.1 Legislative, compliance and administrative burdens

Firstly, it is important to emphasise that VIOs have a duty of care to ensure a safe environment for employees, volunteers and their clients. Volunteering Queensland state that VIOs:

*... have legal obligations to protect the health and safety of their service users, visitors, volunteers and members of the public. These are especially important when working with vulnerable people such as children, older people and people with disabilities protecting them from harm or abuse.*¹¹¹

To manage these risks, VIOs may establish or undertake:

- criminal history checks (including police checks, blue cards, yellow cards)
- requirement for statutory declarations from volunteers
- referee checks
- policies and procedures
- supervision and/or training
- following codes of conduct, and
- up to date insurance policies.¹¹²

Volunteering Queensland also note that the background checks required for volunteers may vary depending on the services that the VIO provides and the types of activities that a volunteer may be likely to undertake.¹¹³

A chronology of how and why each of the above compliance measures was introduced within Queensland's volunteering sector was not conducted by the committee as this was considered outside of the inquiry's terms of reference. However, stakeholders across the board raised their strong concerns about complying with current requirements. This was advised to be the most significant barrier to volunteering.

Following is a general summary of stakeholder views about these matters:

- volunteers and organisations feel that they have been overly-burdened and pushed to the point of breaking as a result of legislative and compliance requirements
- volunteers 'just want to help' but instead feel that they face blue card checks, endless forms, and compliance audits
- red tape has placed heavy administrative loads on both organisations and volunteers
- there is an urgent need to streamline processes and reduce duplication
- many volunteer groups lack the resources and expertise to keep up with their legal requirements, and the energy involved to do so has discouraged participation at all levels of these groups
- while rules are necessary for safety and accountability, complex governance requirements are now disproportionate

¹¹¹ Volunteering Queensland, About Volunteering, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/about-volunteering/>

¹¹² Volunteering Queensland, About Volunteering, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/about-volunteering/>

¹¹³ Volunteering Queensland, About Volunteering, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/about-volunteering/>

- current frameworks apply the same strict requirements to small, purely voluntary groups as to larger organisations with paid staff. This 'one-size-fits-all' approach is seen as unfair and unworkable
- while larger groups often have paid staff to manage compliance, smaller community organisations rely entirely on volunteers, who may find the governance load overwhelming
- volunteering now resembles unpaid employment rather than civic contribution.

The Leukaemia Foundation listed the following barriers associated with their legislative and regulatory burdens that they see as limiting volunteering:

- delays in criminal checks and child safety checks, such as Blue Card approvals or renewals in Queensland, preventing volunteers from commencing their roles promptly
- burdensome paperwork including training modules, multiple forms and checks that need to be carried out before a volunteer can start
- regulatory complexity and inconsistencies between levels of governments, such as:
 - differences between local and State/Territory government with permit and event requirements,
 - Differences between State and Territory governments that create unnecessary duplication. For example, Blue Card in QLD and Working with Children Check in NSW, which require volunteers moving interstate to reapply.
- insurance costs to the organisation which can include public liability insurance, volunteer accident insurance, and professional indemnity insurance
- work health and safety compliance burdens which include risk assessments, training, personal protective equipment, and incident reporting, adding extra administrative work and requiring staff to manage.¹¹⁴

The Leukaemia Foundation added:

*Legislation and regulations can create barriers to participation, thereby limiting volunteer recruitment, retention, and engagement. Current regulations can increase administrative complexity, delay onboarding, and impose financial and resource strains on volunteer involved organisations.*¹¹⁵

It is significant to note that the Leukaemia Foundation advised that the 'Legislative and regulatory barriers faced in Queensland are quite consistent with the challenges experienced across Australia'.¹¹⁶

Concerns about excessive legislative and regulatory burdens were perhaps best expressed by Mrs Maureen Allen, who has served as a volunteer mentor for the past 9 years. Mrs Allen told the committee:

¹¹⁴ Submission 248, p 4.

¹¹⁵ Submission 248, p 4.

¹¹⁶ Submission 248, p 4.

... there is too much red tape. I just want to go and do my mentoring and go home. I do not want to be bothered constantly with filling out forms. I got one and it takes me 84 minutes to fill it in. The next one is 46 minutes. The next one is 35 minutes. I do not want to do that. I am a volunteer. I want to go and do my job and go home. It keeps coming through. It is the same thing, over and over, with one or two different words in it. I have totally refused to do it now because I just feel it is a waste of time.

... we need to make it a lot simpler for people to get involved. I feel that is why people are moving away from it (volunteering), because it has become too complicated.¹¹⁷

Gin Gin Agricultural, Industrial and Pastoral Show Society Inc. said:

Local government requires excessive permits, risk assessments, and approvals, often applying commercial-level compliance to small community events. Small volunteer groups are expected to meet the same governance standards as corporations, leading to frustration and burnout.

Volunteers now spend more time completing paperwork than engaging with their communities, undermining the purpose of volunteering. Without reducing bureaucratic red tape, fewer people will take on volunteer leadership roles, putting more community organisations at risk of closure.¹¹⁸

Suzette Beresford, Mayor of the Paroo Shire Council said:

In most small communities most people are willing to volunteer. We saw it recently during the floods in our region. If people need help, there are people in the community who will come and help. It is when they think, 'I need a blue card,' or 'I need a responsible service of alcohol ticket,' or 'I need a safe food handling ticket,' that, as people have said, there are just too many hurdles. ... It needs to be simplified.¹¹⁹

Loris Doessel said:

Over the last 15 years, volunteer roles have become more complex due to various administrative, insurance, reporting and WHS policy demands. This has reduced the volunteers' desire to be involved. The cost, complexity and responsibility of the management role has increased with no apparent benefit.¹²⁰

David Taylor, former volunteer who stated that he had given up in frustration, said:

A lot of people my age don't volunteer because they don't want to jump through hoops. You volunteer to provide a service. To help a community. Then the powers that be turn it into a military operation, with the paperwork to go with it. We don't want that ... I'm too old for that. You want volunteers, you need to treat them as such. Respect their age and experience. Not treat us as free employees.¹²¹

Western Downs Regional Council added:

¹¹⁷ Public hearing transcript, Toowoomba, 24 March 2025, p 14.

¹¹⁸ Submission 408, p 1.

¹¹⁹ Public hearing transcript, Roma, 15 May 2025, p 21.

¹²⁰ Submission 213

¹²¹ Submission 62, p 1.

*Council and volunteers are impacted from extensive regulations and requirements, such as WHS (Work Health and Safety), insurance, data protection, and reporting, creating significant administrative burdens. While these measures are intended to protect volunteers and Council, they can also be overwhelming and time-consuming.*¹²²

The Salvation Army Australia Territory said:

Volunteer onboarding is estimated to cost The Salvation Army \$200-300 per volunteer to cover background checking costs, resources, IT systems, as well as orientation support and induction training costs (excluding insurance premiums currently at \$18,500 per year for Queensland volunteers).

*The average tenure of a Salvation Army volunteer in Queensland is 2.2 years. There were 2,173 volunteers onboarded last year across the Queensland Division, equating to approximately \$450,000 - 650,000 in onboarding costs per year.*¹²³

Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) said:

*Volunteering has unrecognised costs that are incurred by community organisations. Most significantly, public liability and insurance presents significant regulatory burdens and cost for hosting organisations. It is important to note that there is now a code of practice on managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work, under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act). All organisations covered by the WHS Act must manage risks to both physical and psychological health of workers, volunteers, and service users, so far as is reasonably practicable. An increasingly complex regulatory environment increases costs associated with managing volunteers.*¹²⁴

Serving Our People Inc. said:

*Significant red tape slows recruitment and onboarding, discouraging potential volunteers and adding to operational costs. Compliance requirements require resolute staff, while tools to streamline volunteer management, such as scheduling software, are often expensive.*¹²⁵

Mary Valley Rattler said:

*The cost of medical certificates for rail safety work which volunteers are required to obtain to meet regulatory standards. These certificates come at a significant cost, and we reimburse our volunteers for these expenses, adding to our financial strain.*¹²⁶

¹²² Submission 406, p 7.

¹²³ Submission 419, p 4.

¹²⁴ Submission 384, pp. 2-3.

¹²⁵ Submission 413, p 6.

¹²⁶ Submission 40, p 2.

Committee comment

The level of current legal requirements for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations can be seen to be emblematic of our increasingly complex and litigious society.

As well, it is clear that increased protections for vulnerable peoples have evolved in response to histories of failures to properly protect those individuals and groups.

The committee does not seek to reflect on past motivations for introducing compliance requirements but rather take a pulse-check on their current operation and assess whether they are helping or hindering volunteering in Queensland.

Volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations repeatedly raised their strong concerns to the committee about the legislative and regulatory requirements that they each must meet. This encompassed the number of rules that they must follow, their complexity, and the time and costs involved in doing so.

Some volunteer-involving organisations reported that they must spend significant amounts to onboard each new volunteer and highlighted the financial strain caused by this compliance.

The committee consistently heard from stakeholders that these requirements have become excessive, burdensome and counter-productive. The inquiry received considerable evidence that the current volume of paperwork and checks required to participate in the volunteering sector has driven many volunteers away and resulted in prospective volunteers deciding to give up on their volunteer journey.

Those that remain volunteering, report that their time and energy has increasingly been required to be filled complying with bureaucracy as opposed to helping people through their desired acts of volunteering.

The committee believes that while safety and accountability are essential, the current levels of compliance have become excessive and counterproductive.

3.2 Cost-of-living, financial constraints and the costs of volunteering

The committee heard that the cost-of-living pressures that have impacted many Australians over recent years, have resulted in people being increasingly less able to afford to give their time unpaid. These views were expressed by stakeholders across demographics - from younger people, to working families, to the retired and elderly. Approximately 15% of submissions referred to cost of living issues, or the 'cost of living crisis' as being a current barrier to volunteering.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ See for example, submissions 3, 4, 21, 28, 48, 66, 92, 127, 130, 144, 147, 150, 152, 179, 184, 191, 198, 207, 210, 215, 224, 231, 234, 235, 248, 260, 264, 271, 280, 304, 306, 309, 325, 330, 331, 336, 340, 351, 352, 355, 358, 359, 362, 368, 369, 379, 384, 386, 388, 389, 394, 419, 427,

Research has found that volunteers in Queensland reported spending an average of \$336 per month, or \$15.57 per hour they volunteered. In 2023, this was a gross amount of \$4,000 per volunteer.¹²⁸ As well, there are inherent costs for VIOs in having volunteers. Volunteering Queensland research calculated that in 2023, the average expense per volunteer hour for VIOs was \$5.09.

A summary of stakeholder views regarding cost-of-living issues and the costs of volunteering are below:

- volunteers can no longer afford the out-of-pocket expenses incurred to volunteer - such as fuel, parking, uniforms, training, and technology
- for regional volunteers who may need to travel long distances to volunteer, and do not have access to public transport, the transport costs of fuel and vehicle wear and tear are a major barrier
- many organisations struggle to reimburse their volunteers for their expenses
- some VIOs highlighted their costs in having volunteers.

Volunteering Gold Coast said, 'Volunteers are consistently reporting that cost of living pressures are increasingly becoming a barrier to volunteering.'¹²⁹

A submitter with a volunteering career spanning 40 years in emergency services said:

*Volunteering has become harder for individuals, with increasing cost of living meaning people having to work more paid hours to get by, reducing their availability to volunteer.*¹³⁰

One submitter noted the 'cost of living and decline in real wages crisis', and said, 'The majority of my colleagues now have to work 10-12 hours per day and weekends. There is just simply no time left in the day.'¹³¹

Margaret McGrath, a volunteer for over 30 years added, 'with the current cost of living crisis families have to have both parents working in order to live, and younger people will not work if they are not paid'.¹³²

Joan Kennedy said:

*In my regular volunteering roles, I am required to provide my own transport and fuel, pay for parking from time to time, and to purchase various resources. I am also required to have access to a phone and the internet. In addition, I must absorb the cost of laundry where a uniform is provided. My volunteer roles require me to maintain and regularly upgrade my skill set often at my own cost.*¹³³

430, 431, 435, 437, 438, 443, 449, 458, 482, 488, 496, 511, 520, 525, 530, 532, 533, 536, 544, 555, 558, 559, 560, 562, 567 and 568.

¹²⁸ Volunteering Queensland, State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report, p 75.

¹²⁹ Submission 430, p 12.

¹³⁰ Submission 21

¹³¹ Submission 3

¹³² Submission 92

¹³³ Submission 150, pp 2-3.

Australian Red Cross advised:

*Increased cost-of-living pressures, competing demands on time, inflexible arrangements to volunteer and a lack of understanding about opportunities all complicate the volunteering experience.*¹³⁴

The Leukaemia Foundation said:

*Cost of living pressures have hindered the time people have to volunteer, i.e. greater shift toward dual-income families and more individuals working past the age of retirement. Due to these financial and housing pressures, capacity to volunteer is significantly reduced as more attention shifts to financial security. This then leads to the decrease in volunteer recruitment which has been seen nationally over the past three years. With lower volunteer retention, heavier reliance on existing volunteers can lead to volunteer fatigue and burnout.*¹³⁵

Geoff Smith, a Justice of the Peace for almost 25 years, said ‘the cost of volunteering has become expensive for many people’. He noted, ‘the purchase of stamps, logbooks and attend[ing] constant training workshops at our own expense. Also meetings for improving our skills is an extra expense. The cost of travel is another worry for volunteers’.¹³⁶

Stanthorpe Training Centre Inc. said:

*Volunteers are doing it tough. The current cost of living has meant many volunteers have found it hard to afford the cost of fuel to actually get to our worksite. Others have had to return to paid work to be able to cover their living costs.*¹³⁷

The Pyjama Foundation advised:

*The rising cost of living, particularly the increasing expense of petrol, has become a significant deterrent to volunteering, often cited as a reason for individuals discontinuing their commitment.*¹³⁸

Cycling Without Age Australia Inc - Gold Coast Chapter said:

*Cost of living pressures have multiple effects upon the volunteer workforce, both directly and indirectly whereby they are providing child-minding for their extended families because parents cannot afford the costs of childcare. This reduces a volunteer’s energy levels and availability to serve their community.*¹³⁹

FNQ Volunteers Inc. said:

*People are time poor, and cost of living pressures regulate people’s ability to volunteer. Increasingly, because of the downturn in volunteer numbers, many of those who do volunteer are overworked and suffer volunteer fatigue.*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Submission 224, p 4.

¹³⁵ Submission 248, p 5.

¹³⁶ Submission 301

¹³⁷ Submission 207

¹³⁸ Submission 340, p 3.

¹³⁹ Submission 91, p 4.

¹⁴⁰ Submission 369, p 11.

National Council of Women of Queensland Inc. said:

*Many people want to volunteer but cannot, as the cost of living requires both parents to work. This impacts on grandparents who want to volunteer, but are tasked to pick children up from school, take them to music lessons or swimming and many more childcare responsibilities.*¹⁴¹

Maroochy River Rowing Club said:

*Many potential volunteers are forced to work multiple jobs, or in dual-income households, both parents must work to cover the high cost of living, leaving little time for volunteer commitments.*¹⁴²

Mackay Conservation Group said:

*We have observed a decline in volunteer numbers, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis. This has had a direct impact on our ability to sustain operations at the level we have historically maintained. When people are facing financial difficulties and struggling to meet basic needs, there is far less capacity to volunteer, even if the passion for the cause remains strong.*¹⁴³

Frog Safe, Inc. said:

*... the biggest barrier to our potential volunteers is that they can no longer afford to volunteer because of the cost of living, unchecked housing costs, and the petrol required to cover distances.*¹⁴⁴

A volunteer of over 50 years said:

*It is a costly exercise to be a volunteer. Travelling cost -bus, car, parking - petrol and service costs of the running a car. ... With the general household budget stretched to the limit some retirees cannot afford these costs.*¹⁴⁵

Other individual submitters added:

- 'We are having to work longer hours to survive during cost [sic] a cost-of-living crisis, it can be hard to find the time or energy to volunteer to help the community no matter how passionate you are.'¹⁴⁶
- 'Increasing cost-of-living pressures are particularly acute for younger people who may be studying or early in their careers.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Submission 389, p 3.

¹⁴² Submission 264, p 1.

¹⁴³ Submission 234, pp 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ Submission 152, p 3.

¹⁴⁵ Submission 386, p 2.

¹⁴⁶ Submission 4.

¹⁴⁷ Submission 224, p 13.

Committee comment

Research has found that volunteers in Queensland reported spending an average of \$15.57 per hour that they volunteered. In 2023, this amounted to approximately \$4,000 in annual expenses, per volunteer.

During difficult economic times, this financial barrier to volunteering is clearly too much for some dedicated and potential volunteers to afford.

While volunteering is defined as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, this definition does not also imply that volunteers should be financially worse off for their invaluable efforts.

It is imperative that the costs to volunteers be acknowledged by non-volunteers and the government. Numerous volunteers recommended that there be mechanisms available for their direct costs to be offset.

Research has found that for every dollar invested in volunteering, \$4.70 was returned (the benefit-to-cost ratio).

The committee believes that the creation of options for volunteer costs to be able to be reduced or re-imbursed, should be viewed as a well-deserved investment in volunteers and in the Queensland economy as a whole.

3.3 Insurance and liability concerns

The committee heard that insurance-related concerns were considered the third most significant barrier currently facing volunteers. This included that insurance requirements have become overly complex and that significant increases in the costs of insurance premiums now threaten the viability of numerous volunteering activities. Over 10% of submissions included discussion of insurance as having a negative impact on volunteering.¹⁴⁸

Additionally, stakeholders noted that a fear of litigation and personal liability deters some people from taking higher roles in VIOs. A selection of stakeholders' views about insurance issues is presented below.

Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) said:

*Insurance for volunteers is often complex, and many community organisations struggle to understand the nuance of their insurance cover and how it applies. In addition, the cost and availability of insurance cover for volunteers has also impacted many volunteer organisations and is an area of concern for local governments who may seek to partner with community organisations.*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ See for example submissions 3, 15, 59, 74, 83, 91, 101, 106, 124, 165, 168, 188, 192, 203, 211, 213, 215, 243, 248, 251, 260, 262, 264, 271, 277, 293, 310, 323, 325, 333, 360, 379, 384, 385, 386, 389, 394, 402, 406, 408, 412, 413, 426, 437, 438, 451, 453, 455, 462, 478, 481, 487, 501, 502, 524, 526, 528, 534, 536, 538, 546 and 557.

¹⁴⁹ Submission 534, p 16.

Clubs Queensland said:

*Queensland clubs have reported that significant increases in insurance costs have also contributed to them seeing a reduction in volunteers, or not calling for volunteers in certain areas.*¹⁵⁰

A submitter with over 25 years of employment and volunteerism in the sport industry advised:

The cost burden on organisations and individuals in maintaining insurance is out of control. I have personally stopped volunteering because insurance increased to an extortionate level. We are chronically over insured with organisations and individuals needing to hold all or some of the following; public liability, professional indemnity, player protection, affiliation, event, building, contents, child protection, commercial vehicle, business continuity, income protection, death and disablement, and health insurance.

*I have personally observed a small sized sporting organisation audit the insurance expense of the organisation, its committee members and volunteer coaches and determine that over \$60,000 per annum was the cumulative insurance cost directly related to providing a sporting environment for 200 children.*¹⁵¹

William Boyd said:

*Across the nation, all sorts of little clubs and associations spend an inordinate amount of time and effort in fund-raising through raffles, lamington drives and the ubiquitous sausage sizzles. Watching that hard-earned money being diverted from club activities and sucked away by ever-increasing insurance premiums is demoralising such that volunteers walk away.*¹⁵²

Southern Downs Steam Railway Association Inc. said, 'Rising insurance costs threaten the viability of volunteer organisations.'¹⁵³

Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Users Assoc Inc. advised, 'The biggest obstacle to our volunteer work is the high cost of insurance for sporting events and lack of competition in the marketplace'.¹⁵⁴

Royal Australian Corps of Transport (RACT) Association Qld Inc. said that their liability insurance had tripled in the last two years.¹⁵⁵

Meals on Wheels Queensland advised, 'Insurance premiums in Meals on Wheels' group scheme have on average increased by 225% over the past 2 years.'¹⁵⁶

Bellvista and Bells Reach Community Association noted, 'Insurance costs represent more than 50% of the operating costs of our Association. The primary cost is public liability insurance plus Association Insurance.'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Submission 533, p 4.

¹⁵¹ Submission 3

¹⁵² Submission 74

¹⁵³ Submission 83, p 1.

¹⁵⁴ Submission 124

¹⁵⁵ Submission 168

¹⁵⁶ Submission 482, p 9.

¹⁵⁷ Submission 188, p 2.

Maroochy River Rowing Club said that small organisations are often overwhelmed by regulatory and insurance obligations, detracting from our core community-building activities.¹⁵⁸

Valdora Community Hall Assoc Inc. said:

*Understanding the insurance policies is also a big problem. They are complicated and confusing no matter who you insure with so you really have to spend more money to get legal advice to make sure you have the correct insurance.*¹⁵⁹

Queensland Country Women's Association noted that their 'Increasing insurance costs have led to increased demand on volunteers to raise the necessary funds'.¹⁶⁰

Lockyer Valley Regional Council said:

*The increasing cost of insurance is a major challenge, particularly for rural halls and other community facilities. Community organisations that manage these spaces struggle to afford premiums, which are exacerbated by natural disaster risks in certain areas. Higher insurance costs deter new volunteers from taking on leadership roles, as they fear personal liability or financial responsibility for unforeseen issues.*¹⁶¹

Mary-Lou Gittins OAM, a volunteer for over 50 years advised:

*Insurance costs these days take a considerable amount of group's finances before they can reinvest in activities and volunteers. Finding the right insurance is also a challenge.*¹⁶²

Queensland Music Network Incorporated (QMusic) said, 'Insurance and liability concerns can deter event organisers from expanding volunteer programmes.'¹⁶³

The Scout Association of Australia, Queensland Branch Inc. advised that insurance:

*... remains an extremely high financial burden for Scouting (and volunteer organisations). Under Legislation we are required to hold to Public Liability Insurance and through our Property Portfolio ISR Insurance. This represents our largest cost outlay within our operating expenses and falls directly on volunteers to fundraise. It also impacts on our cost of membership.*¹⁶⁴

In regard to insurance matters impacting on specific volunteer demographics, Volunteering Gold Coast said, 'Insurance costs preclude many VIOs from engaging with volunteers under the age of 16, dousing the optimism that the future of volunteering must come through our youth.'¹⁶⁵

Rotary International Districts 9620, 9640, 9560 said:

Many members join Rotary to leverage their commitment to supporting young people. The onerous insurance regulations around young people joining us for volunteering at

¹⁵⁸ Submission 264, p 1.

¹⁵⁹ Submission 277

¹⁶⁰ Submission 333, p 4.

¹⁶¹ Submission 361, p 1.

¹⁶² Submission 551, p 1.

¹⁶³ Submission 453, p 2.

¹⁶⁴ Submission 455, p 4.

¹⁶⁵ Submission 430, p 11.

*events in the community are extremely unhelpful in giving young people opportunities to volunteer, build their confidence, develop and understanding of community. The rules are making it tenuous.*¹⁶⁶

In regard to elderly volunteers, National Council of Women of Queensland Inc. stated that current insurances do not include people over the age of 80. They said:

*... people are still volunteering after they turn age 80. The decisions by Insurance companies have an impact on people's health and wellbeing and there is a significant loss of corporate knowledge when senior volunteers leave.*¹⁶⁷

3.3.1 Insurance Council of Australia's views

The Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) advised the committee that the average cost of public liability insurance has increased by 55% to 60% since 2019. ICA noted that some 'not-for-profit and community organisations, have experienced even higher increases.'¹⁶⁸

ICA said that this significant increase in public liability insurance premiums 'has been driven by increasing claims severity, growing legal and litigation expenses, social inflation and resulting changes in the assessment or risk in some industries.'¹⁶⁹

The ICA also advised that state-based insurance taxes and levies can add 20–40% on top of the cost of an insurance premium and called for the removal of these taxes and levies.¹⁷⁰ However, the Queensland Revenue Office (QRO) specifically provides 'Insurance duty exemptions' for charitable institutions and community organisations in Queensland. QRO's advice on this is below:

An exemption (under an administrative arrangement) applies to public liability insurance taken out by a non-profit community organisation for a risk relating to the organisation's community purpose activities, such as:

- public liability insurance cover
- product liability insurance, including legal liability connected with goods or their containers sold or supplied by the insured
- insurance for directors' and officers' liabilities, including legal liability connected with the performance of these roles for the insured.

An organisation can claim a public liability insurance duty exemption if:

- it is an incorporated or unincorporated grassroots community non-profit organisation that
 - does not operate for the profit or gain of its members
 - uses its income and property solely for its principal community purpose and not for distribution to its members
 - has rules that state that if the organisation is disbanded, any surplus assets are to be transferred to another community non-profit organisation, or applied to a charitable purpose

¹⁶⁶ Submission 379, p 3.

¹⁶⁷ Submission 389, p 3.

¹⁶⁸ Submission 569, p 2.

¹⁶⁹ Submission 569, p 1.

¹⁷⁰ Submission 569, p 1.

- it has an organisational and administrative structure and controls its own affairs (trusts are not exempt)
- membership is open to the public
- members give their time voluntarily
- it is formed, and carried on, mainly for a lawful community purpose.¹⁷¹

3.3.1.1 Data requested from the Insurance Council of Australia

To better understand the insurance landscape that VIOs are encountering in Queensland, the committee requested data from ICA relevant to Queensland-based volunteer organisations, community groups, not-for-profits and volunteer organisations, in relation to their civil liability and public liability insurance claims. Specifically, the committee sought the following insights about these groups:

- the number of policies taken out
- the number of insurance claims made against these policies
- insurance payments to these groups following claims, and
- whether there are any particular fields of volunteering that are more likely to make an insurance claim.¹⁷²

Unfortunately, ICA did not provide any of these requested details, instead advising that their 'Members are not able to provide data at the level of granularity requested by the Committee'.¹⁷³

3.3.2 Fear of personal liability

As noted above, the committee heard that the complexities of insurance matters within the volunteering sector have resulted in people being less likely to get involved, in particular with leadership roles.

Lockyer Valley Regional Council stated:

*Higher insurance costs deter new volunteers from taking on leadership roles, as they fear personal liability or financial responsibility for unforeseen issues.*¹⁷⁴

Gin Gin Agricultural, Industrial and Pastoral Show Society Inc. said:

*Many people are reluctant to volunteer, particularly in committee and leadership roles, due to fears of personal liability and legal exposure. Events have become overly risk-averse, with traditional activities cancelled not because of genuine safety concerns but due to insurance and liability fears. Volunteers worry about being held personally responsible for financial or compliance issues within organisations.*¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Queensland Government, Insurance duty exemptions, <https://qro.qld.gov.au/duties/insurance-duty/exemptions/>

¹⁷² Public hearing transcript, Gold Coast, 4 August 2025, pp 1-5.

¹⁷³ Insurance Council of Australia, correspondence, 20 August 2025, <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/LGSBCSC-AACA/IVQ-1A2A/Taken%20on%20Notice%20and%20responses%20-%20Insurance%20Council%20of%20Australia.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ Submission 361, p 1.

¹⁷⁵ Submission 408, p 1.

A submitter noted the ‘complex and onerous compliance required under the Incorporated Association Act and the Work Safety Act,’ and added, ‘The risks to board, committee and general volunteers is far too great.’¹⁷⁶

Matthew Turnour stated:

*One of the more significant reasons for a decline in volunteering is a fear of personal liability. This fear is particularly relevant for volunteers serving through unincorporated associations.*¹⁷⁷

Queensland Law Society (QLS) provided a significant submission which also documented the current lack of legal protections provided for unincorporated associations under the *Civil Liability Act 2003 (Qld)*. QLS noted that particular groups at risk include, ‘neighbourhood and grassroots community groups, sporting clubs and local recreation groups that are not incorporated and cultural and environmental volunteer initiatives that operate informally’.¹⁷⁸

QLS state, ‘liability may attach to individual volunteers or committee members, rather than being transferred to the organisation, which creates potential liability risks for volunteers in unincorporated associations.’ QLS propose that provisions be introduced in order to provide better protections for volunteers in these unincorporated associations from personal liability, and ensure that legal claims are directed to the group as a whole, rather than individuals acting in good faith.¹⁷⁹

The issue of legal protections for volunteers is further discussed in the following chapter.

3.3.3 Proposal for Statewide insurance coverage for volunteers

Some submitters proposed and requested that the government initiate a volunteer insurance scheme. For example, Stanthorpe & Granite Belt Community Radio said:

*The introduction of a clear and consistent framework for volunteer insurance and legal protections is essential. This could include a state-wide insurance scheme that covers volunteers across different sectors, ensuring they feel protected while contributing their time.*¹⁸⁰

FNQ Volunteers Inc. recommended a:

*Statewide Volunteer Insurance Fund be initiated and made available to VIOs to ensure volunteers have protection during their deployment during disaster/emergency response and recovery.*¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Submission 3

¹⁷⁷ Submission 457, p 1.

¹⁷⁸ Submission 549, pp 3-7.

¹⁷⁹ Submission 549, pp 3-7.

¹⁸⁰ Submission 402, p 2.

¹⁸¹ Submission 369, p 3.

Committee comment

The committee heard that insurance concerns are one of the major barriers to volunteering in Queensland. The cost of insurance premiums and the complexity of insurance policies is a major issue for Queensland's volunteering sector.

The committee was therefore disappointed in the response from the Insurance Council of Australia, when details relevant to this inquiry were sought, but not able to be provided.

Several experienced stakeholders advised the committee that their volunteer involving groups had never made an insurance claim and that they were personally unaware of any other volunteer related group that had submitted an insurance claim. The committee sought details regarding this but were advised that insurance companies were not able to provide this data.

The committee was also dismayed by the Insurance Council of Australia's submission which focussed on calling for the removal of state-based insurance taxes and levies on charitable institutions and community organisations. The Queensland Revenue Office (QRO) specifically provides 'Insurance duty exemptions' for charitable institutions and community organisations who apply for this exemption.

The committee encourages all charitable institutions and community organisations to ensure that they are aware of this exemption and claim it.

The committee heard from several stakeholders that the government should initiate a state insurance scheme to provide coverage to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

The feasibility of this proposal is certainly worthy of investigation and consideration. If the government can assist in reducing insurance-related barriers from the volunteer sector, then this investment should again be seen through the perspective that investing in volunteers produces benefits for the community well in excess of that investment.

3.4 Time pressures and work commitments

The committee heard that Australia's busy modern lifestyles mean that many people have less time to volunteer. Full-time work, dual-income households, and increased caring responsibilities have all contributed to a reduced capacity for volunteering.¹⁸²

Additionally, businesses are often unable or unwilling to provide support for staff who want to volunteer during work-hours. Volunteers and prospective volunteers highlighted to the committee that they have had to use personal leave or go unpaid if they wish to take time off to assist during emergencies.¹⁸³

¹⁸² See for example, submissions 27, 64, 90, 100, 138, 142, 165, 170, 209, 212, 225, 331, 352, 408, 415, 421, 431, 487, 511 and 560.

¹⁸³ See for example, submission 320.

A selection of stakeholder views in relation to the impact that time pressures are having on volunteering is below.

The Archdiocese of Brisbane said:

*A significant barrier to recruitment is a lack of time, with over 40% of Queenslanders citing 'no time' as a reason for not volunteering more. Many potential volunteers, particularly those balancing work, family, and study commitments, struggle to find opportunities that align with their availability.*¹⁸⁴

Roma Show Society said:

*Every very year it is getting harder and harder to find volunteers to help run the various sections and on the general committee. It seems people are getting very time poor and unfortunately local committees suffer.*¹⁸⁵

Another submitter said:

*Many families are dual income families just to make ends meet and this means both parents are time poor as well as suffering financial pressures. The current model is not sustainable and is well and truly beginning to fail. We have an ageing demographic of Volunteers as these people are often not in the financial hardship of the younger Volunteers and most no longer have the family time constraints of our younger Volunteers.*¹⁸⁶

Freddy Bear Foundation advised 'volunteer participation rates have been declining, particularly among young people and time-poor professionals.'¹⁸⁷

The Rotary Club of Gladstone Sunrise said:

*Work schedules heavily impede available time for volunteering, especially in industrial areas. Many rosters are incompatible with volunteer time. Many potential volunteers are time poor, as they try to balance shift, days off, travel, family time and rest, exercise and well being.*¹⁸⁸

Croquet Association of Queensland added:

*Modern life often means individuals have less discretionary time. Volunteering roles, particularly those requiring significant or inflexible time commitments, can be challenging to fill. We observe potential volunteers are often hesitant to commit to roles perceived as overly time-intensive.*¹⁸⁹

Play Matters Australia said, 'Many First Nations Elders and community leaders are already stretched and time poor from offering support to their communities.'¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Submission 536, p 36.

¹⁸⁵ Submission 46.

¹⁸⁶ Submission 22.

¹⁸⁷ Submission 136, p 2.

¹⁸⁸ Submission 211

¹⁸⁹ Submission 557, p 2.

¹⁹⁰ Submission 427, p 11.

Atherton Tableland Agricultural Society said, 'Many of our younger volunteers are time-poor due to work and family commitments. This limits their ability to contribute consistently.'¹⁹¹

Council on the Ageing Queensland said, 'Potential volunteers feel time-poor due to work, family responsibilities, and busy schedules, making it difficult to commit.'¹⁹²

Committee comment



The committee acknowledges the overwhelming reaction that so many Queenslanders are now so busy and so time-poor that there seems like there is no time left in the day to volunteer.

This should make us all appreciate the efforts of those who do volunteer even more.

It should also make us firm in our commitment to improve the volunteer experience for those who may also be genuinely busy with work and family commitments but somehow do make the time to also include volunteering into their schedules.

The committee again thanks all volunteers for the time and energy that they dedicate to help improving the lives of others.

3.5 Volunteer recruitment, retention and burn-out challenges

The committee also heard about the difficulties faced by some VIOs in recruiting and retaining volunteers.¹⁹³ Stakeholders noted that traditional volunteer bases are ageing, with limited participation from younger people raising sustainability concerns. These views are summarised below:

- as volunteering numbers have fallen, those remaining within a group have been expected to do too much to keep those organisations afloat
- repeated reliance on the same small group of people is of particular concern in Queensland's regional and smaller communities
- some volunteers are experiencing fatigue and burn out from the demanding requirements and expectations of their roles.¹⁹⁴

Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) said:

*Recruitment and retention of volunteers has been cited as a significant issue for Queensland councils and particularly, rural and regional areas with smaller population centres where volunteers face competing priorities or risk burnout due to taking on multiple roles.*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Submission 451, p 1.

¹⁹² Submission 487, p 29.

¹⁹³ See for example, submissions 2, 40, 50, 69, 91, 136, 176, 248, 264, 270, 280, 291, 294, 298, 315, 317, 319, 391, 413, 415, 427, 438, 454, 491, 503, 525, 534, 536, 554, 559, 560 and 566.

¹⁹⁴ See for example, submissions 6, 63, 108, 141, 151, 154, 170, 181, 185, 197, 206, 207, 212, 230, 235, 248, 260, 277, 295, 296, 307, 317, 319, 357, 363, 365, 373, 378, 379, 391, 393, 394, 399, 402, 408, 413, 415, 416, 424, 430, 434, 439, 444, 448, 451, 453, 464, 470, 478, 482, 487, 503, 540 and 547.

¹⁹⁵ Submission 248, p 4.

The Leukaemia Foundation said:

*In Queensland, the top three important issues and challenges were identified as volunteer retention, volunteer health and safety, and volunteer recruitment. Without proper investment into volunteer management positions by organisations, burden then falls onto volunteers leading to poor clarity and expectations about their volunteering role, increased administrative workload, no dedicated point of contact, and difficulty with onboarding and training, ultimately leading to stress, burnout, and low retention and recruitment rates.*¹⁹⁶

South East Queensland Catchment Members Association said:

*One of the most problematic issues faced by this sector is the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Many environmental conservation groups rely on an increasingly older cohort of community volunteers for leading/coordinating the on-ground and community education activities and also the group management functions. With the increased focus now on ESG, many of these community-based groups really struggle with the more onerous requirements for good administration, reporting and governance essential for those groups.*¹⁹⁷

Play Matters Australia said:

*The main free advertising platform to recruit volunteers is Seek Volunteer which is not a user-friendly system. Seek Volunteer does not allow for URL's to be included in advertisements, which limits how an organisation can ensure a good culture fit with potential new volunteers, as website are an easy way for potential volunteers to understand an organisation's values and objectives.*¹⁹⁸

Little Athletics Queensland said:

*The rising costs of running local sporting events mean volunteers are now responsible for far more than just helping on the field. They're handling everything from marketing and grant writing to legal matters, insurance, and conflict resolution. They are also seeking fundraising opportunities and scouting for sponsors - which in turn means more time given up volunteering.*¹⁹⁹

As noted above, many stakeholders raised the issue of volunteer burnout as being prevalent through the sector. Volunteers and VIOs noted that burn out results in dedicated volunteers leaving and others deciding either not to volunteer at all, or not to take on leadership roles out of fear of becoming burned out themselves. Some comments that were presented to the committee in regard to these issues are below.

Welcoming Australia said:

Many organisations reported a sharp decline in volunteer participation, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which created a 'lost generation' of volunteers who have

¹⁹⁶ Submission 534, p 17.

¹⁹⁷ Submission 491

¹⁹⁸ Submission 427, p 6.

¹⁹⁹ Submission 478, p 20.

*not returned. The shrinking pool of volunteers has increased the burden on those who remain, leading to burnout, especially in sectors with high administrative demands.*²⁰⁰

Rotary International Districts 9620, 9640, 9560 said:

*... volunteers often face physical and emotional burnout. Rotary volunteers partner with other organisations in times of disaster relief. The challenge of appealing to and attracting new members means the same volunteers are continually being called upon.*²⁰¹

Lockyer Valley Regional Council said:

*Volunteers frequently report burnout due to high workloads and limited support from organisations. This is particularly true for smaller community groups that rely heavily on a handful of committed individuals.*²⁰²

Logan City Council stated that 'burn out is occurring frequently due to low recruitment of new volunteer carers'.²⁰³

Serving Our People Inc. said:

*Volunteers are at risk of fatigue and burnout, especially those involved in consecutive disaster responses. Without proper support or training, many experience physical and emotional exhaustion, which can lead to high turnover and diminished long-term engagement.*²⁰⁴

Business Chamber Queensland said the limited number of volunteers joining their chambers had meant:

*... individuals can't step down when they need to and cannot fulfill the projects that they know will benefit their community. In this case, volunteer committees risk burnout, stress, mental health issues, resignations, and chamber closures.*²⁰⁵

Surf Life Saving Queensland said:

*High turnover rates make it increasingly difficult to maintain a strong and experienced volunteer base. Burnout is a major factor, as volunteers juggle patrolling, training, administrative duties, and fund raising, all while balancing personal and professional commitments. Without proper support, this workload becomes overwhelming, leading to disengagement.*²⁰⁶

The Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games advised:

*Long-serving volunteers, especially at the grassroots level, often face burnout due to the heavy demands of their roles, compounded by a lack of recognition and support.*²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ Submission 393, p 10.

²⁰¹ Submission 379, p 3.

²⁰² Submission 361, p 1.

²⁰³ Submission 503, p 3.

²⁰⁴ Submission 413, p 6.

²⁰⁵ Submission 434, p 2.

²⁰⁶ Submission 416, p 19.

²⁰⁷ Submission 317, p 2.

The Australian Sports Commission added:

*The estimated number of Australian's aged 15+ who volunteered in sport declined between 2019 and 2021, and the proportion of remaining volunteers doing three or more roles increased, leading to an increased risk of volunteer burnout.*²⁰⁸

Brisbane Jets Swimming Club Inc. said:

*For those who do step forward, volunteer burnout is a significant issue. Volunteers who regularly commit their time to club activities express growing frustration with those who do not contribute, leading to disengagement and a dwindling core of active volunteers. This cycle not only affects morale but also impacts the sustainability of the club, as we continually struggle to replace those who step away due to exhaustion.*²⁰⁹

The Boys' Brigade Queensland said, 'Many long-term volunteers experience burnout, and recruiting younger volunteers remains a challenge.'²¹⁰

Andrew Clegg said, 'If volunteers are overcommitted, burn out or partners pressuring the person to reduce their commitment can then cause people to leave the team.'²¹¹

commonkind said:

*Long-term volunteers are experiencing increased burnout due to high expectations, lack of support, and the growing complexity of roles. Without adequate recognition and structured support systems, volunteer retention remains a significant challenge.*²¹²

Samantha Bryan said, 'the reduced availability of volunteers means some people are doing way too much to keep the organisation afloat, which leads to burnout. It's not sustainable.'²¹³

Volunteering Gold Coast said:

*The shortage of volunteers places pressure on the existing, shrinking volunteer workforce to repeatedly step up to fill gaps in ways that cannot be sustained. The result is volunteer burnout.*²¹⁴

Committee comment



The committee acknowledges that the decreasing rate of volunteer participation in recent years has significantly impacted on those volunteers that have continued to volunteer.

The committee has heard that they have been expected to keep giving and achieving more, often with decreased resources.

²⁰⁸ Submission 424, p 1.

²⁰⁹ Submission 170, p 1.

²¹⁰ Submission 185, p 2.

²¹¹ Submission 206, p 2.

²¹² Submission 260, p 4.

²¹³ Submission 307

²¹⁴ Submission 430, p 10.

It is inevitable that anyone in this circumstance will be liable for becoming disillusioned and burned out. Sadly, this has already happened to too many Queensland volunteers.

The committee urges all Queenslanders who have capacity to contribute their time, energy and skills to a volunteering endeavour, to find a local group or cause of interest and to take the step of trying to get involved in assisting.

The committee re-affirms its appreciation of all volunteers for their efforts and sacrifices.

3.6 Training, technology and support gaps

The committee heard that burdensome training requirements for volunteers can deter their participation.²¹⁵ Other training related views from stakeholders can be summarised as:

- online-only registration processes exclude older volunteers who are not computer literate
- a lack of investment in information technology systems has made administration tasks more difficult and increased volunteer workload within VIOs
- volunteers can be required to undertake complex roles without adequate access to affordable training or professional development, and
- an absence of mentorship and succession planning is reducing opportunities for skill transfer and discouraging new entrants.

Wade Hart said:

*Excessive training requirements represent another significant barrier to volunteering. When volunteers must complete extensive training to perform basic functions, their enthusiasm often wanes before they can contribute meaningfully.*²¹⁶

Tobias Kennett said:

*... volunteers face significant barriers to volunteering in the form of overly burdensome and time-consuming training, standards and screening requirements. Such training, standards and screening is often more extensive and/or burdensome than the level of training apply in regular office jobs. Such things act as a disincentive to start volunteering, take away from the time a volunteer can spend actively volunteering, and add to the 'mental load' volunteers face.*²¹⁷

Taryn Powell said:

*I personally have had to do child safe training for all 4 organisations I work and volunteer with. Surely some recognition of prior learning could be implemented here.*²¹⁸

²¹⁵ See for example, submission 33, 43, 44, 45, 50, 66, 67, 69, 70, 73, 78, 97, 109, 116, 119, 140, 145, 170, 172, 203, 216, 220, 227, 237, 248, 280, 294, 303, 311, 333, 482, 509, 519, 521, 535, 539 and 547.

²¹⁶ Submission 509, p 9.

²¹⁷ Submission 145, p 11.

²¹⁸ Submission 172

Meals on Wheels Queensland stated, 'compliance training for volunteers represents a significant challenge.' They added:

*Many volunteers lack the technological resources or digital capabilities to complete training online. Meals on Wheels in Queensland have made a concerted effort to make training available in various formats, including paper-based, online and face-to-face group training. Another factor contributing to volunteer disengagement is the necessity to complete training that mirrors training they may have previously undertaken for their workplace or other volunteer roles e.g., antidiscrimination training. The duplication of training efforts is often met with resistance from volunteers. Members cite compliance training as one of the most difficult barriers to overcome in our volunteering experience.*²¹⁹

Jill Cutting said, 'Unnecessary training is another thing that puts prospective volunteers off. Who needs manual lifting training to serve refreshments?'²²⁰

Another volunteer advised that they are required to complete online training modules that 'are irreverent to my duties within the club ... I'm leaving the club in June because of this overregulation.'²²¹

Lockyer Cricket Association said, 'We don't need any guidelines, or KPI's or training. We've just done it for 100 years without issues.'²²²

Jamshed Bulsara said:

*More and more time is being asked for volunteers for training over multiple weekends. eg. Previously First Aid & CPR was done within few hours, now a full weekend is required ... and on top of that there is online module to be completed before hand which are a few additional hours.*²²³

Jonathan Carman said, 'Volunteer training needs to be highly relevant, not onerous, able to be delivered by flexible delivery methods and recognise individual current expertise.'²²⁴

A church volunteer said:

*I find the mandatory regulatory requirement for all volunteers to undertake on an annual basis OH&S training to be excessive. Having done it once I do not need to do it again.*²²⁵

Another submitter said:

The amount of training and upskilling is becoming more intense and time consuming. Whilst I understand that this is important to remain current in roles and to keep people

²¹⁹ Submission 482, p 8.

²²⁰ Submission 203

²²¹ Submission 109

²²² Submission 119

²²³ Submission 140

²²⁴ Submission 89

²²⁵ Submission 216

*safe, when is it enough? We can't claim the expenses incurred as tax deductions, as these are unpaid roles.*²²⁶

Karen Williams said:

*... the onboarding and training that has to be done can be over the top this may be due to the insurance and risk assessments that need to be done. For example, you may only volunteer for 2-3 hours per week but have to do 8 hours of online training.*²²⁷

Committee comment



The committee also acknowledges the views of stakeholders in regard to the increasingly complex and time-consuming levels of training that may be required of them as part of volunteer onboarding and development processes.

It appears that some of this training is connected to insurance requirements. Unfortunately, some of these complexities may be unavoidable in the short-term. However, where repetitious and non-beneficial training routines are in place, the committee urges volunteer involving organisations to take a more common-sense approach with their experienced and talented volunteers.

3.7 Other barriers to volunteering

In addition to the 6 key themes detailed above, the committee also heard of some other specific barriers that volunteers now increasingly face. These included concerns about the declining number of banks in rural and regional areas of Queensland and the impacts that this has on the financial operations of VIOs.²²⁸

As well, in regard to fundraising events, the committee heard that with less banking outlets, access to cash has become increasingly difficult and costly. Some ramifications of this were explained by Lane Buffington at the committee's public hearing in Emerald. Ms Buffington said:

Flynn and Central Highlands are very resourceful at hosting really successful functions and raising large sums of money. Three weekends ago I visited a community where they have a biannual fundraiser for their school and they raised \$40,000 over a one-day event. The parents have to have a float to accommodate that, but then someone has to hold that money from Saturday night until Monday. In that community they would have to drive two hours in either direction to get it banked. Some of our people will take the money home. As our community ages or if you have a race club with an aging committee, they are not prepared to take that home. They are not prepared to put themselves or their families at risk. With banking there is that issue.

There is also a problem with getting floats. The individuals have to travel a 100-kilometres or a 200-kilometres round trip or, in some instances, a 300-kilometre or 400-kilometre round trip. The volunteer has to use their own fuel and their own resources to get there. Again, there is risk being on the road if they have an accident or if they

²²⁶ Submission 547

²²⁷ Submission 303

²²⁸ See for example, submissions 199, 359, 389, 446 and public hearing transcript, Emerald, 11 August 2025, p 12.

*come across someone untoward. I think there is a demographic that is not prepared at the moment to put themselves out and risk their lives to carry that float that distance, so they have it in the house sometimes for a week at a time.*²²⁹

While purchases and transactions are now increasingly by electronic means, this relies on mobile coverage being available. For some rural and regional areas of Queensland, this service may not be able to be relied upon, hence the need for access to and use of cash. Ms Buffington added:

*We have a couple of race meetings in the area which can attract up to 5,000 people for that one-day event. The system just crashes. There are too many phones in the area so, even if you do have a Square the system crashes.*²³⁰

Committee comment



The above story about how banking issues directly impede on the positive motivations of volunteers and their fund-raising efforts is again an eye-opening insight into how complex and difficult volunteering has become.

It can sometimes appear that the barriers volunteers face are more like roadblocks. In this instance, potential solutions such as re-opening banks across rural Australia and providing significantly improved mobile coverage to all are well beyond the scope of this inquiry.

The committee can only restate that improving the experience of volunteers will require a whole-of-government approach, across each level of government.

There must also be a renewed commitment to improve services and access to services for all Queenslanders, wherever they live and volunteer.



Recommendation 2

The government should commit to working with volunteer stakeholders to find genuine options to reduce and remove barriers to volunteering. This includes:

- establishing a dedicated Ministerial Advisory Panel for volunteering
- removing any excessive legislative or regulatory burdens that are imposed on volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations
- establishing a dedicated task force comprised of constituent departments and agencies to develop and monitor a plan for Government Volunteering Organisations to ensure they remain model volunteer-involving organisations

²²⁹ Public hearing transcript, Emerald, 11 August 2025, p 14.

²³⁰ Public hearing transcript, Emerald, 11 August 2025, p 16.

- investigating which state government charges or fees can be provided at a discounted rate, or reimbursed entirely, to volunteers who incur genuine volunteer-related expenses in relation to these charges or fees
- collaborating with the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) and local governments to identify opportunities to reduce red tape for volunteer organisations in the local government space, as well as opportunities to provide recognition for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations through local services
- determining the feasibility of providing any such discounts or reimbursements and the criteria by which they could be provided to volunteers
- reviewing the *Civil Liability Act 2003* (Qld) to consider amending the Act to provide further protections for volunteers in line with other Australian jurisdictions
- investigating mechanisms to drive down insurance costs for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in order to lessen the costs, burdens and complexities that now appear inherent in the commercial insurance options available to the volunteer sector
- adopting a whole-of-government approach to better support and respect volunteers.

4. Terms of Reference part 3

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 3 of the terms of reference:

The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience

The committee heard that current volunteering experiences in Queensland are significantly varied. Stakeholder experiences ranged from those who feel that their volunteering is a rewarding endeavour to those who have ceased their volunteering journeys in despair.

An overview of the more positive aspects of volunteering, along with the general motivations of Queensland volunteers was presented in Chapter 2. Other perspectives of the current volunteering landscape were then detailed in Chapter 3, with stakeholders discussing the barriers that volunteers and VIOs face.

This chapter will firstly focus on the volunteering experiences, motivations, challenges and recommendations of 3 specific Queensland volunteer cohorts whose stories were not covered in the previous chapters. These selected groups are:

- Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ)
- State Emergency Service (SES), and
- Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs).

Their individual sections below can be viewed as case studies that contain wider relevance to the situations that many other volunteers and VIOs may also face.

Following these 3 case studies, this chapter then notes some other volunteering issues, and recommendations to improve the volunteering experience that were proposed by other stakeholders.

4.1 Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers - Case study 1

The Queensland Fire Department (QFD)²³¹ provided the following overview of the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) which it oversees:

RFSQ is a community-based, volunteer emergency service and the lead service for the control and prevention of bush and grass fires in Queensland. RFSQ operates in rural, semi-rural and urban fringe areas, providing bush and grass fire prevention, mitigation and response capabilities, community engagement services, assistance during other emergencies and disasters, and, in some instances, road crash rescue.

*Approximately 1,400 rural fire brigades operate across Queensland. The largest proportion of brigades are primary producer brigades which account for almost 60 percent of all brigades, with other brigade types including rural, izone, village and special brigades.*²³²

²³¹ It is noted that QFD was established on 1 July 2024 and was previously named Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES).

²³² Submission 530, p 1.

Approximately 10 per cent of submissions received during the inquiry were from current and former RFSQ volunteers.²³³ The committee also heard from numerous witnesses about rural fire issues at its public hearings across Queensland.

From the evidence received, it is clear that rural firefighters in Queensland are deeply proud but increasingly disillusioned with their conditions. While rural fire volunteers remain committed to community safety, many have cautioned that without urgent reforms, recruitment and retention in their ranks will collapse.

Gregory Lincoln, a rural fire volunteer since 2009 said:

*When I originally joined there were 44,000 firefighters, in 2025 there are now about 27,000, this is a loss of 17,000 over a 15-year period, a 38% loss, in all reality we should have 60,000 plus firefighters.*²³⁴

QFD provided the committee with the following table of year-to-year figures of Queensland fire service volunteers from 2019-20 to 2023-24.²³⁵

Year	Number of Queensland fire service volunteers
2019-20	31,104
2020-21	30,267
2021-22	28,435
2022-23	26,525
2023-24	27,382

QFD updated this table, noting 'As at 30 April 2025, there are 27,619 rural fire volunteer members.'²³⁶ From the above figures, there was a loss of 3,485 fire service volunteers from 2019-20 to April 2025. This represented an 11% decrease over that 5-year period. It is noted that rural fire volunteers are tasked with protecting approximately 93% of the area of Queensland.²³⁷

Rural fire volunteers were generally of the view that the decrease in their membership was a direct reaction to the significant concerns that they highlighted throughout the inquiry.

²³³ See for example, submissions 5, 8, 12, 21, 22, 44, 50, 60, 62, 67, 72, 73, 77, 79, 80, 81, 85, 93, 97, 115, 116, 133, 134, 143, 153, 159, 178, 199, 220, 237, 265, 280, 289, 306, 322, 329, 355, 364, 371, 409, 469, 504, 516, 517, 518, 523, 535, 537, 539 and 563.

²³⁴ Submission 72, p 7.

²³⁵ Queensland Fire Department, Correspondence, dated 30 May 2025, p. 2. QFD noted that 'Volunteer data includes Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteer members (firefighters and support staff) and Auxiliary Support Officers within Queensland Fire and Rescue. The total number of Auxiliary Support Officers has ranged between 31 and 34 over the last five financial years.'

²³⁶ Queensland Fire Department, Correspondence, dated 30 May 2025, p 2.

²³⁷ Submissions 79 and 270.

They told the committee that their current experiences are overwhelmingly shaped by:

- burdensome bureaucracy
- cultural toxicity and lack of respect
- inadequate and unsafe equipment
- poor training and accreditation systems, and
- generational and cultural disconnect.

Each of these 5 main points is expanded upon below.

4.1.1 Burdensome bureaucracy

Rural fire stakeholders frequently raised their concerns about QFD's bureaucratic processes. In particular, slow onboarding processes, the Blue Card requirement, delays in construction of local infrastructure and QFD's recent acquisition of local brigade finances were highlighted. These matters are outlined below.

4.1.1.1 Slow onboarding processes

Stakeholders advised the committee that prospective members can face lengthy application and onboarding processes of up to 9 months before new members receive a Volunteer ID.²³⁸ This included applicants who were experienced firefighters moving to Queensland from other states.²³⁹

During the application period, prospective members are barred from participating in training or firefighting.²⁴⁰ Mount Mee Rural Fire Brigade said that 'The onboarding process for new members is a sad, slow pathetic joke.'²⁴¹

Mr Ian Pike AFSM, First Officer of the Federal Rural Fire Brigade said:

*With an onboarding system, the new member comes along and I will sit down with him and fill out all the paperwork to make sure it is correct. We then send that to area office. It may sit there for months.*²⁴²

A contributor to the onboarding delays is the criminal history check and Blue Card process.

4.1.1.2 Blue Card requirement

A Blue Card is a crime prevention, risk management and monitoring system for people working with children. The Blue Card system is designed to prevent a person running a child-regulated business or working or volunteering with children until their Blue Card application has been approved.²⁴³

²³⁸ See for example, submissions 44, 72, 280, 504 and public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 1.

²³⁹ Submissions 409, p 2.

²⁴⁰ See for example, submissions 44 and 67.

²⁴¹ Submission 220, p 5.

²⁴² Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 2.

²⁴³ Submission 534, p 15.

From 2020, rules were amended to also apply to all paid and volunteer firefighters and rural fire brigade members, including brigade support members. In short, they must now hold a Blue Card or leave the organisation.²⁴⁴

Numerous submitters stated that because of the Blue Card requirement, the services lost thousands of vital volunteers. Rural firefighters repeatedly raised strong concerns about Blue Cards and the manner in which the requirement was introduced.

Brigades argue that requiring a Blue Card was irrelevant to rural firefighting, since they rarely interact with children and always work in teams. They stressed that rural firefighters have little to no unsupervised interaction with minors.

Some found the requirement personally offensive, particularly long-serving members with decades of experience who refused to apply.²⁴⁵ Others noted that old and minor drug offences had excluded otherwise willing and rehabilitated individuals from volunteering.²⁴⁶

In remote areas such as Cook Shire and Laura, brigades were left critically understaffed because First Nations volunteers either did not want to apply for Blue Cards or were deemed ineligible.²⁴⁷

Ms Robyn Holmes, Mayor of the Cook Shire Council advised:

*... the Laura Rural Fire Brigade for example, they have one current registered volunteer who is also their first officer and their fire warden. He is roughly 80 years old. He is unable to attract volunteers because most of the Indigenous people who did support the rural fire brigade are unable to get blue cards, which immediately makes them unable to assist.*²⁴⁸

In response to whether the Blue Card requirement had impacted on RFSQ volunteer numbers, QFD stated:

*The Department is aware that concerns have been raised that implementation of the blue card requirements caused a subsequent drop in RFSQ membership. While reductions in membership were recorded at the time of implementation, this largely reflected the outcome of data refreshing and record cleansing activities.*²⁴⁹

Some rural fire volunteers challenged this statement. For example, Mark McLachlan told the committee that the official explanation was ‘totally disingenuous’ and ‘demonstrable swill.’ He added:

I was chair of my brigade when that was going on, and I had members who were - pardon me - flipping the bird. They were gone. I had to spend time with each of them to convince them to stay. The only thing that convinced them was a very decent letter

²⁴⁴ Submission 534, p 15.

²⁴⁵ Submission 469

²⁴⁶ See for example, submissions 8 and 44.

²⁴⁷ Submission 469 and public hearing transcript, Cooktown, 15 July 2025, pp. 1-4.

²⁴⁸ Public hearing transcript, Cooktown, 15 July 2025, p 2.

²⁴⁹ Submission 530, p 7.

*written by an assistant commissioner who put the proposition of a blue card in an entirely different way.*²⁵⁰

Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland Inc. (RFBAQ) said of the Blue Card requirement:

*... whether you support the policy position or not, it was rolled out in the most dictatorial and adversarial way by the fire service, against repeated advice that there is a more volunteer friendly way of achieving the outcome. Then when the disaster unfolded and volunteers left in their thousands the fire service just doubled down on making volunteers comply.*²⁵¹

Mr Justin Choveaux, General Manager of RFBAQ added:

*One of the greatest instant demises we saw of brigade membership was through the blue card - the reaction to that. ... I believe the numbers we lost through blue card would be in the region of 9,000 people. ... Then in 2023 when we saw the renewal of the three-year blue card we saw another spike of people leaving.*²⁵²

David Taylor, who was in a rural fire brigade for ten years said:

*They wanted blue cards. Identity cards. It was like you were in the military with 50,000 rules and the paperwork to go with it. News for you guys. We are volunteers. When I got told you have to do something. That is not true. I was not obligated to be there. I was not paid to be there. And all I wanted to do was what I started with. Help my local community by putting out bush fires. ... I left and so did many more. Now every organisation is desperate for volunteers and asking why. Because people don't mind volunteering but hate being treated as full time free employees.*²⁵³

One submitter who has been a volunteer rural firefighter and office bearer for 25 years said, 'At least 15 long-serving firefighters in the area were lost after the blue-card debacle, either banned from firefighting by RFSQ or quitting in disgust.'²⁵⁴

Lorraine Heyes said:

*I have been a member of Winfield Rural Fire Brigade for over 20 years and have yet to meet a child on the fireground. I fully support the protection of children and where brigade members work one on one with junior members, I fully endorse that member holding a Blue Card. However for the majority of members this is just not the case. The blanket rule covering all brigade members is discriminatory, costly and totally unnecessary.*²⁵⁵

Biddaddaba Rural Fire Brigade said:

A number of older more experienced fire fighters did not wish to apply for the Blue Cards and hence took the opportunity to walk away from volunteering. It should be

²⁵⁰ Public hearing transcript, Rockhampton, 12 August 2025, p 26.

²⁵¹ Submission 79, p 7.

²⁵² Public hearing transcript, Gympie, 25 March 2025, pp 3-4.

²⁵³ Submission 62

²⁵⁴ Submission 116, p 1.

²⁵⁵ Submission 133

*noted that in over 100 call out to fires in the last 5 years we have never had dealings with unsupervised children or vulnerable persons.*²⁵⁶

Ian Swadling said:

*The whole Blue Card introduction was probably the worst program ever introduced to a volunteer organisation in the bullying way it was presented, 'Apply or else you will be sacked' was the approach from the senior executive officers. As an example, an 80 year old Grandmother that had been serving a Brigade for over 30 years was told she would be sacked, after giving her services for free as a Brigade Secretary over that length of time.*²⁵⁷

Mount Mee Rural Fire Brigade said:

*The blue card requirement for RFSQ volunteers should be removed immediately. It diverts child safety resources and does not apply to primary producer brigade members. All brigades wear the same uniform but don't have the same basic requirements to go fight a fire. The reasoning given for blue cards is that as RFSQ volunteers could be required to provide, at any level, medical assistance to children is ridiculous and insulting.*²⁵⁸

4.1.1.3 Delays in construction of local brigade infrastructure

Also highlighted under the theme of QFD's 'slow bureaucracy' was the issue of new station builds. Previously, these builds were managed by brigades using local suppliers. They are now organised by QBuild, which the committee heard has led to 'cost blow outs, extended construction time and difficulty finding suppliers who want to work with QBuild.'²⁵⁹

Ian Swadling provided the following example:

*My own brigade had our shed bulldozed in March 2017 to make way for a new highway and we are still squatting in a tin shed with a crusher dust floor and a porta potty. We have 3 trucks, are very active and have multiple female firefighters all using the one porta potty. The fire service has been studiously working for 8 years next month on a solution.*²⁶⁰

The Biddaddaba Rural Fire Brigade advised that they have been attempting to build a fire station for more than 3 years. They say that in this time, cost estimates increased from \$100,000 to \$700,000 and when 'QBuild became involved ... the cost increased further to \$1.23 million.'²⁶¹ They noted that the Brigade has provided a recent quote from a local builder who has quoted a build price of \$365,000. They added:

This process has had a significant effect on the ability of the brigade to maintain a motivated working group of volunteers. As we have a new \$350,000 fire truck which

²⁵⁶ Submission 237, p 4.

²⁵⁷ Submission 280, p 5.

²⁵⁸ Submission 220, p 5.

²⁵⁹ Submission 280

²⁶⁰ Submission 280

²⁶¹ Submission 237

*we are having to park under a lean-to with open front and back on a farm where rats and birds can get to it this is unacceptable.*²⁶²

The circumstances of Whetstone Rural Fire Brigade were also raised. Committee Chair, James Lister MP advised:

As volunteers have often done, the volunteers there have expressed difficulties with red tape, compliance and so forth. Their beef has been particularly with the procurement method that has been mandated for their fire shed, which I understand is a fairly modest structure. We are now three years in and \$700,000, and the shed has not been opened yet.

...

*I certainly recall that my own rural fire brigade shed at Severnlea West was put up in a couple of weeks with some people helping and friendly local builders. It was all done very cheaply and expeditiously.*²⁶³

Robert Zigterman, Treasurer of Bunya Mountains Rural Fire Brigade (BMRFB), wrote that the Bunya Mountains Brigade has been without a proper toilet for the last 7 years. 'The Brigade has raised this matter numerous times with QFD', he said.

Over that time the brigade has had to make do with an outside builder's toilet, which is pumped out as required. This facility is not suitable for fire fighters in general and is not suitable for people with a disability and does not have a shower.

*... as volunteers the BMRFB has been treated extremely poorly, but there is an expectation that volunteers are still available to fight fires to save our rural communities.*²⁶⁴

Traveston Rural Fire Brigade advised:

*... it can take decades to get expansion to the building or a new building, we are forced to apply for grants to slowly develop our sites bit by bit, mainly grappling with the poor response from HQ. ... it can take 15 years to get a building replacement, absolutely no support for expanding and getting facilities, we have no facilities for women and no washing facilities or toilets but have a very active brigade.*²⁶⁵

Chris Drake, a recently resigned rural fire volunteer of over 16 years' service said:

*I personally spent months preparing paperwork for a new station to house our larger fire engine, only to be denied permission to file it because 'all grant applications must go through head office.' After submitting the ready-to-file paperwork through official channels five years ago, nothing has happened. I sent fifty follow-up emails between February 2020 and October 2022 before giving up. Meanwhile, construction costs have tripled, making the project 300% more expensive than our original proposal.*²⁶⁶

²⁶² Submission 237

²⁶³ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane 21 May 2025, pp 5-6.

²⁶⁴ Submission 329, p 2.

²⁶⁵ Submission 409, p 2.

²⁶⁶ Submission 67, p 2.

4.1.1.4 Brigade finances

It was explained to the committee that local brigades had previously generally operated as unincorporated associations. This status allowed financial independence for the brigades with bank accounts, the ability to seek financial support from their local governments through a rural fire levy and to raise money from their community to buy equipment and fund their operations. In short, brigade bank accounts were administered by the unincorporated association for the benefit of the local community.²⁶⁷

However, it was advised that QFD had taken control of these finances when it was established in 2024.²⁶⁸ Biddaddaba Rural Fire Brigade said:

*... the process put in place by QFD takes the ability of the brigade to runs its own business away from the brigade and gives over-sight to administrators who are paid employees of QFD. This process has effectively demonstrated that QFD do not trust volunteers to run their own business.*²⁶⁹

Mr Justin Choveaux, General Manager of Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland added that QFD:

*... asserts that now all this equipment that was owned by the members of the unincorporated association and was funded by local government, donated community money or gifted to the brigade by the RFBAQ is now owned by the state. This was not the agreed contract as entered into by local government or donors. The QFD also asserts that the 1,400 unincorporated associations are no more and that brigade bank accounts cannot have funds deposited into them and the brigade accounts are now the responsibility of the signatories and not the brigades as the association has been dissolved.*²⁷⁰

Ian Swadling said that the changes had:

*... resulted in confusion, mismanagement, appropriation of Brigade funds into the QFD bank account. All the while vastly increasing the workload of volunteer treasurers that have to comply with the same provisions of accountancy as full time staff without any remuneration to compensate for their own time while doing so. And creating extreme difficulty for public donations to be given to a Brigade ...*²⁷¹

Another submitter said that as part of the changes, their brigade had been advised:

... that we would have a 'sub-account' under the main RFSQ primary bank account whereby we would retain complete control and autonomy over our finances. ... The sub-account is not a bank account but a 'file' within the accounting software - this subterfuge shows the lack of respect that HQ has for volunteers. Brigades cannot transfer funds (unless via a Headquarters managed process) which is one of the core

²⁶⁷ Public hearing transcript, Gympie, 25 March 2025, pp 1-2.

²⁶⁸ See for example submissions 159, 199, 237, 280, 563 and public hearing transcript, Gympie, 25 March 2025, pp 1-2.

²⁶⁹ Submission 237

²⁷⁰ Public hearing transcript, Gympie, 25 March 2025, pp 1-2.

²⁷¹ Submission 280

*needs not recognised by HQ. The financial aspect of this 'uplift' has been a total failure from a brigade and volunteer perspective.*²⁷²

Robert Zigterman said:

*I was told at a public meeting that the new financial system would reduce the workload on the Treasurer and the brigade in general. This has not been the case. ... The new system has caused a lot of frustration and costs more time for both the treasurer and other officers in the BMRFB.*²⁷³

4.1.2 Cultural toxicity and lack of respect

Rural firefighters described the culture in which they operate in terms of toxic management, disrespect, excessive bureaucracy and suppression of volunteer voices.²⁷⁴

Several rural firefighters described bullying and harassment as being widespread within RFSQ and QFD.²⁷⁵ The reasons for this were not just about inappropriate individual behaviour, but also deeper structural, cultural, and leadership problems.

Submissions describe a cycle where poor leadership and lack of recognition create disillusionment among volunteers.²⁷⁶ One submission referenced the 2021 Independent Review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Prepared for Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, conducted by KPMG. They highlighted that 'Of the 602 sentences in that report discussing QFES issues, a whopping 343 of those are dedicated to toxic culture issues.'²⁷⁷

Many lamented that volunteering has shifted from community-driven firefighting to a highly regulated, 'military-style' operation heavy with paperwork and rules.²⁷⁸ Volunteers also reported that complaint processes are ineffective and attempts to raise safety or misconduct concerns have been met with retaliation or victimisation.²⁷⁹

It was also reported that new RFSQ rules effective January 2025, have imposed obligations similar to employees but without granting any employee rights such as joining a union, reimbursement or legal protections.²⁸⁰

Some volunteers said that they feel treated as second-class citizens compared to paid firefighters, despite providing equivalent frontline services.²⁸¹

Volunteers said that there has been a lack of recognition for their efforts.²⁸² For example, one submitter claimed that volunteers deployed to major fires in 2019-20 are still waiting for medals, while paid staff received theirs promptly.²⁸³

²⁷² Submission 159

²⁷³ Submission 329, pp 1-2.

²⁷⁴ See for example, submissions 67, 178 and 563.

²⁷⁵ See for example, submissions 72, 472, 516 and 563.

²⁷⁶ See for example, submissions 72 and 116.

²⁷⁷ Submission 67, p 1.

²⁷⁸ See for example, submissions 62, 79, 85, 178, 220 and 563.

²⁷⁹ See for example, submissions 72, 116, 220 and 472.

²⁸⁰ Submission 67, p 3.

²⁸¹ See for example, submissions 50, 329, 516 and 517.

²⁸² See for example, submissions 67, 80 and 537.

²⁸³ Submission 50, p 10.

A submitter with an emergency services volunteering career spanning 40 years summed up their frustrations, saying:

*While local, state and commonwealth governments enjoy the benefit of millions of dollars of free labour that emergency service volunteers provide, they have failed to fund and support those volunteers properly for decades, exploiting the good will of volunteers remaining dedicated to supporting their communities, despite those governments not adequately supporting them.*²⁸⁴

4.1.3 Inadequate and unsafe equipment

Some rural firefighters raised concerns about aging and unsuitable appliances.²⁸⁵ For example, Mount Mee Rural Fire Brigade said, 'RFSQ vehicles currently being provided are not fit for purpose, are over-weight and with less water than their predecessors.'²⁸⁶

Ian Swadling added:

*The latest round of Medium Attack appliances being issued to Brigades is probably the most complained about vehicles in the history of vehicle builds. This is mostly because there was no consultation by the responsible persons on the vehicle production team in Kedron.*²⁸⁷

A submitter with over 40 years' service in Queensland community-based volunteer bushfire brigades said:

*... the vehicle fleet and build is again a serious cause for concern in the way RFSQ design and build the yellow fleet. Also RFSQ victimises members who bring to their attention concerns over fleet safety such as the recent GVM debacle of the older medium attack appliances.*²⁸⁸

James Mackland said:

RFBs operate an eclectic series of medium fire attack appliances, Iveco, Mitsubishi, Isuzu etc all with different characteristics and pump operating systems - none are universal, and all require some form of hands on training to operate. Our light attack appliances are the same most based on Ford, Nissan, Toyota and Mercedes platforms, again the operating systems for the vehicles differ, including some having low pressure hoses and pumps, some using diesel and some using petrol engines and pumps.

Some of the more modern appliances have been fitted with a roof mounted deluge system, which could spray the truck if fire effected, but the majority of medium appliances and all light attacks are not.

*All of the medium attack fleet is equipped with standard road tires, which makes little sense as we operate 90% of the time off road.*²⁸⁹

²⁸⁴ Submission 21, p 1.

²⁸⁵ See for example, submissions 12, 22, 67, 280 and 516.

²⁸⁶ Submission 220, p 7.

²⁸⁷ Submission 280, p 7.

²⁸⁸ Submission 516

²⁸⁹ Submission 12

Mount Mee Rural Fire Brigade advised that they had:

*... recently replaced its 2014 RFSQ dual cab Ford Ranger with a 2002 Nissan Patrol Utility that it refurbished through the Brigade's own detailed works program. The grossly overweight 2014 Ford Ranger cost \$2 in repairs per kilometre travelled and became a dangerous liability before finally suffering a catastrophic engine failure. We battled on with this liability even though we knew it was illegal to be on the road with an overloaded rear axle.*²⁹⁰

Communication systems were also described as inadequate. John Stalker, a rural fire volunteer with twenty years of service, said:

*Our Brigade had raised safety issues with QFES in previous years that have still not been addressed. For example, the lack of radio interoperability between Brigades and partner agencies has been an ongoing safety concern. Radio interoperability is a long-standing issue as evidenced by the 1994 Queensland Bushfire Strategy Report.*²⁹¹

James Mackland added:

*All rural appliances have VHF and UHF radio systems. VHF can talk with regional Fire Communications staff and UHF is used on the fireground to talk to incident control and neighbouring appliances. However, this communication is reliant on terrain and rebroadcasting services and the majority of the time our appliances are unable to speak with each other or even the local incident commander. This is a paramount safety concern for all crews on a wide fire front.*²⁹²

4.1.4 Poor training and accreditation systems

Current training systems were described as being bureaucratic and impractical.²⁹³ For example, Chris Drake said:

*New recruits are immediately treated like criminals, forced to undergo police checks and obtain blue-cards, processes that can take months. They're forbidden from touching equipment until completing absurd classroom training requiring multiple sacrificed weekends. Training features disinterested, unprofessional lecturers conducting sham exams where everyone is told exactly what to write to pass.*²⁹⁴

The removal of local trainers in 2024 was also criticised. Mr Ian Pike, AFSM, First Officer of the Federal Rural Fire Brigade explained:

*Each region was allowed a permanent position amount of money to distribute with the volunteer trainers. They came from within each brigade area and they had to have a cert IV in training. They were all sacked.*²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ Submission 220, p 7.

²⁹¹ Submission 178, p 10. The report referenced is Queensland Emergency Services, 'Queensland Bushfire Strategy Report,' 1994.

²⁹² Submission 12, p 1.

²⁹³ See for example, submissions 12, 67, 220, 280, 504 and public hearing transcript, Rockhampton, 12 August 2025, p 24.

²⁹⁴ Submission 67, p 1.

²⁹⁵ Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 3., and Submission 60.

Mount Mee Rural Fire Brigade advised:

*Our brigade has not been able to assess new members for their Firefighter Minimum Skills (FMS) qualification for over three years since the introduction of the new training system. Our brigade is far from alone here. We need to be able to train and have assessed our new members. We have identified training of new members as the highest risk to delivering our Brigade's strategic objectives and existence.*²⁹⁶

Johnny Muscat, a Rural Fire Service volunteer for 35 years, is based in Emerald. He advised the committee:

*... if we want to do training, we have to go to Townsville. It is just not on. We are volunteers. For a young person to join my brigade, he has to do extensive training. We used to be able to do it on a weekend, whereas now it is several weekends long. All it is doing is chasing more and more volunteers away, and nobody is replacing them.*²⁹⁷

Simon O'Donnell of the Traveston Rural Fire Brigade spoke about the difficulties in more senior ranking volunteers accessing advanced training. He said, 'We are not seeing those courses for the advanced firefighting skills. That also affects our ability to handle natural disasters.'²⁹⁸ Mr O'Donnell elaborated on his frustrating attempt to source advanced training:

*I am currently a level 2 planner, which is national planning capability, and I wanted to go into an incident commander role, but I did not have a prerequisite. I applied for that prerequisite so I could move into the command and it just got lost. I tried to follow up, saying, 'What has happened to it?', and they said, 'We can't even find your application.' That particular course probably only comes up every few years.*²⁹⁹

4.1.5 Generational and cultural disconnect

QFD stated that the average age of RFSQ volunteers is 54 years and that just 5 percent of these volunteers are aged 16 to 24 years.³⁰⁰

Stakeholders advised that younger people, already time-poor and financially stretched, are not joining in sufficient numbers. This has left brigades reliant on older volunteers.³⁰¹

4.1.6 Volunteering for Queensland Survey 2025 and other engagement strategies

Ms Kaylene Jones, Chief Officer, Rural Fire Service Queensland, advised the committee of the various mechanisms that QFD uses to engage with RFSQ volunteers in order to better understand needs. These methods included:

- the 2025 Volunteering for Queensland Survey which received 1,200 responses
- additional training surveys
- engagement via the recently established Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee, and

²⁹⁶ Submission 220, p 4.

²⁹⁷ Public hearing transcript, Rockhampton, 12 August 2025, p 24.

²⁹⁸ Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 3.

²⁹⁹ Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 3.

³⁰⁰ Submission 530.

³⁰¹ See for example, submissions 12, 22, 93, 178, 265 and 289.

- regular meetings with the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland who provide additional information from the membership perspective.³⁰²

The Chief Officer agreed to provide the committee with a thematic summary of the 2025 Volunteering for Queensland Survey responses. In addition, the committee sought a copy of the deidentified responses that were made by survey respondents in the final ‘free text’ section of the survey. This was where additional comments were able to be provided by RFSQ volunteers.

The committee has published the QFD correspondence in regard to this, including overall results from the 2025 survey and a document titled ‘Thematic Analysis of RFSQ’s free text responses’.³⁰³

However, QFD repeatedly objected to the committee’s intention to publish the deidentified free text responses as part of this inquiry. That 169-page document contained perspectives and comments of a consistent nature to what the committee heard from RFSQ stakeholders throughout this inquiry.

4.1.7 Recommendations from rural fire fighting stakeholders

The general recommendations made by rural firefighters have been summarised below:

Faster onboarding

- volunteers want streamlined criminal history checks, including an end to the Blue Card requirement
- historic, non-violent offences unrelated to children would not disqualify people, allowing more community members to serve
- volunteers want brigades to exercise local discretion so new members can participate in training and support activities while waiting for approvals.

Less bureaucracy

- volunteers consistently criticised increasing red tape and a centralised bureaucracy that undermines their morale and responsiveness
- a cultural reset, more local decision-making, and genuine consultation with brigades
- an end to the toxic cultures that they experience within RFSQ and QFD.

Respect, inclusion and fairness

- volunteers want to feel respected rather than feeling treated as ‘second-class citizens’ when compared with paid staff
- long-serving volunteers dislike being over-managed and mistrusted, saying they just want to help their communities without being treated like unpaid employees
- introduction of a ‘Queensland Emergency Volunteer Respect Act’ to formally recognise the work of emergency service volunteers.

³⁰² Public hearing transcript, Brisbane 21 May 2025, p 7.

³⁰³ Queensland Fire Department, correspondence, dated 30 May 2025, see-
<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/LGSBCSC-AACA/IVQ-1A2A/Taken%20on%20Notice%20and%20responses,%20Queensland%20Fire%20Department.pdf>

Better equipment and safer vehicles

- standardised, modernised vehicles and equipment to ensure safety and effectiveness.

Training

- a return to practical, hands-on training that gets them on the ground sooner, with options for accredited courses if desired.

Financial support, incentives and recognition

- suggestions included: tax rebates, subsidies such as reduced rates, household insurance, or vehicle registration for active volunteers and proper reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses
- timely recognition, such as medals for interstate deployments, and appropriate acknowledgement of their sacrifices.

Recruitment and retention

- incentives for younger recruits and stronger community education and youth involvement (e.g., partnerships with Scouts, schools, and cadet programs) to build resilience and encourage volunteering from a younger age.

Committee comment

It is no secret that relations between Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers and the Queensland Fire Department (formerly Queensland Fire and Emergency Services) have historically been strained.

However, the committee was disappointed by the level of distrust and animosity that appears to continue within this relationship.

The highest level of interest in this inquiry came from disgruntled RFSQ members and former members who collectively provided the committee with significant detailed concerns about their experiences, challenges and the barriers that they face in their efforts to protect 93% of Queensland's landmass from fires.

The level of disrespect and disfunction that RFSQ volunteers described as being part of their standard operating environment was concerning.

While Queensland Fire Department representatives sought to portray to the committee that its relationships with RFSQ volunteers are improving due to recent reforms, it would appear difficult to find any RFSQ submitters who would agree with that sentiment.

The committee heard the following consistent views from RFSQ stakeholders:

- the 'Blue Card requirement' has been a significant failure and the manner in which it was introduced contributed to several thousand volunteers leaving RFSQ

- prospective volunteers should be welcomed and provided with introductory training while their applications are being processed
- general bureaucratic delays by the Queensland Fire Department are unacceptable and hinder RFSQ's abilities to undertake their functions
- the Queensland Fire Department have failed to facilitate approvals and construction of certain local brigade infrastructure in a timely manner
- the construction options of local brigade infrastructure should return to the control of individual brigades
- problems associated with the recent take-over of brigade finances and assets by the Queensland Fire Department need to be resolved as soon as is practical
- local brigades and their volunteers need to be better consulted, especially about significant issues such as firefighting equipment and ongoing safety concerns
- training and accreditation options and systems need significant improvement, and
- the lack of respect that volunteers and brigades state that they experience from paid departmental staff needs to end.



Recommendation 3

That the Queensland Government urgently consider and implement changes to the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) to address cultural and organisational issues surrounding volunteers. This includes but is not limited to:

- investigating ways to improve the application process and onboarding system for prospective RFSQ volunteers
- empowering local brigades with regard to training for their volunteer applicants
- standardising recognition of obtainable accreditation that could be transferable to other education outcomes, where possible
- improving the training systems for volunteers, including recognition of relevant prior service, skills and experience
- returning options for the delivery of brigade infrastructure to local brigades where local brigades seek to do so
- encouraging local input and knowledge in disaster events

- adaptive consultation processes and local decision making to better reflect and address the evolving demands and experiences of RFSQ volunteers whilst working towards stronger retention rates through volunteer satisfaction.

4.2 State Emergency Service volunteers - Case study 2

The State Emergency Service (SES) is a volunteer-based emergency and rescue service dedicated to assisting the Queensland community. Their role is to prepare for and respond to emergencies across Queensland.³⁰⁴

As noted in Chapter 3, as of 30 June 2024, there were approximately 5,000 SES volunteers across 76 units and 298 groups in Queensland.³⁰⁵

Each of the 76 SES units is supported by their respective local government, who typically provide facilities, vehicles, ongoing equipment and fleet maintenance and additional support relevant to the local unit. The state government provides organisational infrastructure, flood boats, trailers, and uniforms and equipment, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Training is developed at the state level and delivered locally by both staff and volunteers with the aim of providing SES volunteers with the skills and knowledge required during emergencies, and throughout life.³⁰⁶

In short, the SES provides support for non-life-threatening emergency situations during floods, storms or other similar events. It also provides community education and supports community events and activities, such as football events, open days, fetes, agricultural and royal shows.³⁰⁷

Management of the SES is the responsibility of the Queensland Police Service. QPS added:

*SES volunteers are currently supported by 194 FTE SES staff members, along with additional corporate support services provided by QPS, and various roles in local governments across disaster, fleet and facilities management.*³⁰⁸

QPS noted that the value to the community of volunteers within the SES was demonstrated through the delivery of a broad range of services to the community. From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, SES volunteers completed 136,083 operational hours, more than 333,356 hours in preparation and training and received 16,133 requests for assistance, or one request for every 910 Queensland residents.³⁰⁹

A submitter with experience and insight into emergency services volunteering advised the committee that:

It is crucial to stress that the RFSQ is not the State Emergency Service (SES). Emergency service volunteering is a universal term, but the two services differ in many

³⁰⁴ State Emergency Service, Who we are, <https://www.ses.qld.gov.au/who-we-are>

³⁰⁵ Submission 567, p 6.

³⁰⁶ State Emergency Service, Who we are, <https://www.ses.qld.gov.au/who-we-are>

³⁰⁷ State Emergency Service, What we do, <https://www.ses.qld.gov.au/what-we-do>

³⁰⁸ Submission 567, p 6.

³⁰⁹ Submission 567, p 7.

*ways, notably in culture, ethos, and approach to problem-solving. Any volunteering solution from this inquiry must reflect that the two services differ.*³¹⁰

Approximately 4 per cent of submissions received as part of the inquiry contained information related to the SES.³¹¹ The majority of these submissions were from current and former SES volunteers. The key themes from these submissions were:

- increasing workloads
- bureaucracy and governance issues
- respect and treatment of volunteers
- training and resource limitations
- safety and injury concerns
- financial costs of volunteering.

Each of these 6 main points is expanded upon below.

4.2.1 Increasing workloads

Volunteers reported that they are dealing with increasing workloads due to more frequent climate-related emergency events and fewer active members.³¹²

QPS advised that requests for SES assistance from 2015-16 to 2023-24 increased by 376%. However, the SES volunteer workforce declined from 6,200 to 5,000 members during this 8-year period.³¹³ Qld State Emergency Service Volunteers Association Inc. highlighted that SES volunteer numbers had fallen consistently since 1992 when there were over 19,000 SES volunteers recorded at that time.³¹⁴

A former SES Group Leader in charge of 8 local volunteers noted the demands involved in their role. They advised that they spent:

... approximately 18 hours per week volunteering. That work included bureaucratic / administrative tasks, developing and delivering training, managing personnel, as well as operational activities. So half a full-time job doing this for a small SES Group.

*SES leadership roles are effectively a part-time job with heavy administrative, training, and operational responsibilities. This workload can discourage people from taking on or staying in these leadership positions.*³¹⁵

4.2.2 Bureaucracy and governance issues

Volunteers noted issues with the SES recruitment process, including months-long delays, limited intake periods, repeated paperwork, and inconsistent recognition of prior training or interstate qualifications.³¹⁶

A submitter who has been involved with the SES for approximately 28 years said:

³¹⁰ Submission 270, p 5.

³¹¹ See for example, submissions 21, 23, 24, 32, 56, 82, 153, 190, 228, 270, 289, 294, 297, 309, 364, 372, 475, 511, 514, 519, 534, 539 and 567.

³¹² Submission 21

³¹³ Submission 567, pp 7-8.

³¹⁴ Submission 519, p 1.

³¹⁵ Submission 21

³¹⁶ See for example, submissions 56, 228, 294, 519.

*New volunteers are disillusioned with the application process and the time it takes for this process to be completed. Volunteers attend because they want to be involved in something positive and give something back to their community. When they first attend, they are required to fill out a myriad of paperwork and then advised it will take some time for this to be processed. They are virtually told to go home and they will be contacted in a few weeks. In the majority of cases we have lost them from day one.*³¹⁷

Qld State Emergency Service Volunteers Association Inc. said:

*... it can take them upwards of 6 months from when they start the application process to do the basic training and qualify themselves to 'fill a sandbag' or pick up a branch on a driveway and cut it with a small handsaw.*³¹⁸

Edward Cowie, State President, Queensland State Emergency Service Volunteer Association Inc. told the committee that there was 'onerous red-tape' and that 'Members and, in particular, our volunteer trainers and our local executive volunteer members all struggle with this red tape.'³¹⁹

In regard to criminal history checks, one submitter advised:

*I have personally seen that highly skilled and volunteer-ready persons from our community has been denied the opportunity to join SES because of minor drug convictions from their youth or early years in life. This has prevented them from joining when their CHC (Criminal History Check) came back with a negative result.*³²⁰

Local government inconsistencies, referred to by one submitter as the 'tyranny of local government' were also noted. This means that some SES units differ widely in the quality of equipment, facilities, and support they receive.³²¹

Spontaneous volunteering was said to be poorly integrated into SES systems, even though communities show willingness to assist during disasters. Some volunteers suggested that this represents a missed opportunity to grow membership and engage communities.³²²

One submitter said that retention rates are low in some SES groups with only approximately 25% of recruits active after 16 months.³²³

4.2.3 Respect and treatment of volunteers

Some submissions described bullying, favouritism, and poor handling of complaints, which they said damaged morale and retention.³²⁴

As well, it was said that internal disciplinary and performance management processes treat unpaid volunteers the same as paid staff, including use of personnel files, performance improvement plans, and investigations, without adequate protections.³²⁵ Some volunteers

³¹⁷ Submission 294, p 3.

³¹⁸ Submission 519, p 2.

³¹⁹ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 2 April 2025, p 1.

³²⁰ Submission 309, p 5.

³²¹ See for example, submissions 21, 153, 294 and 372.

³²² See for example, submissions 21, 56 and 309.

³²³ Submission 228

³²⁴ See for example, submissions 228, 475 and 519.

³²⁵ Submission 228.

describe an unsupportive environment when they got injured, with denial of responsibility, and workers' compensation claims contested.³²⁶

4.2.4 Training and resource limitations

Stakeholders reported that recognition of prior learning from equivalent interstate services is often denied, frustrating skilled volunteers who are required to retrain from scratch.

Access to advanced or high-demand training, such as flood boat, vertical rescue and 4x4 driving can take years of waiting, often with quotas that leave volunteers feeling overlooked.³²⁷ Paid staff may be prioritised for training opportunities over volunteers, creating resentment.³²⁸

Len Mitcham said, 'Training is the most important issue to be addressed. My training experience in SES has generally been terrible.'³²⁹

Another SES volunteer elaborated on these concerns:

*Training within the SES has become farcical. Despite repeated advice and reminders, the SES as an organisation is likely to lose its training accreditation. The appropriate procedures during the transition to QPS were not followed. What this also means for the volunteers is that a considerable amount of training they have undertaken cannot be accredited and they may have to re-do the training. This is an onerous burden on people who are giving up their time to gain skills to assist their communities and then finding out they are unable to utilise those skills.'*³³⁰

In regard to the limited training opportunities available to SES volunteers, Edward Cowie said:

*The disillusion often happens with volunteers believing that they will be out there doing things that are really good, but ultimately they find that they become a professional sandbagger.'*³³¹

4.2.5 Safety and injury concerns

Some volunteers reported injuries occurring on duty, followed by poor organisational support or denial of workers' compensation claims.³³² Others criticised the organisational response to the death of SES volunteer Merryl Dray in 2022.³³³ There were also concerns about outdated and unsafe equipment.³³⁴

4.2.6 Financial costs of volunteering

SES volunteers reported that their service often comes with out-of-pocket expenses such as fuel, uniforms, phone, cleaning protective clothing, with little or no reimbursement.³³⁵

³²⁶ Submission 24.

³²⁷ See for example, submissions 228 and 539

³²⁸ Submission 228

³²⁹ Submission 33

³³⁰ Submission 294, p 2.

³³¹ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 2 April 2025, p 1.

³³² Submission 24

³³³ See for example, submissions 21 and 67

³³⁴ See for example, submissions 153, 372 and 539

³³⁵ See for example, submissions 21, 289 and 514

4.2.7 SES retention data

QPS noted that the 2023 Volunteering for Queensland survey identified that 17% of SES volunteers intended to leave within the following 12 months, while 67% were intending to volunteer for at least the next few years. Of those members looking to leave the SES, the following experiences were cited as their primary reasons:

- too much red tape (44%)
- lack of leadership / direction (38%)
- don't like the culture (35%)
- lack of communication (31%), and
- lack of training (25%).³³⁶

4.2.8 Recommendations from SES stakeholders

SES volunteers proposed a wide range of recommendations to improve their experiences. Their suggestions are summarised into the 3 general areas below:

Recognition and support

- compensation linked to attendance and activation hours to acknowledge the time and financial sacrifices volunteers make
- financial incentives such as tax rebates, rates or vehicle registration reductions
- reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses such as fuel, uniforms, equipment cleaning.

Training, skills, and recognition of experience

- standardised emergency driving training so volunteers can legally and safely respond under emergency driving conditions
- recognition of prior learning for experienced volunteers transferring from interstate
- expand access to specialist courses and remove unnecessary delays
- allow experienced members to pass on knowledge without requiring formal Cert IV qualifications
- establish a formal leadership development program for SES leaders

Recruitment, retention and flexibility

- a faster and simpler recruitment process which allows new recruits to attend training while they wait for admission approval
- utilise willing community members for certain tasks during disasters even if they cannot commit to long-term SES membership
- more flexible training times to accommodate work and family commitments, including later start times and online options

³³⁶ Submission 567, p 11.

Committee comment

The committee acknowledges the hard work and dedication of Queensland's 5,000 State Emergency Service volunteers.

It is particularly noted that the level of assistance provided by SES volunteers has increased significantly in recent years while the number of volunteers has fallen.

SES volunteers play crucial roles in the areas of emergency prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. They often do so in less than ideal conditions.

The committee heard concerns about the support that is provided to SES volunteers. In particular, levels of bureaucracy appear to be too high, and opportunities for training too low. As a result, morale and retention rates have been impacted.

Queenslanders call on the State Emergency Service in their times of need. It is time that we improve our support and respect for all State Emergency Service volunteers.

**Recommendation 4**

That the government commit its determination to improve the volunteer experience for State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers across Queensland. This includes:

- improving the recognition and support that is provided to SES volunteers
- improving the training systems for SES volunteers, including recognition of relevant prior service, skills and experience, but also the recognition of obtainable accreditation that could be transferable to other education outcomes, where possible.
- improving the application and onboarding process for new volunteers, including options to commence training while applications are being processed
- consider any other engagement and recruitment strategies that may assist in increasing SES volunteer numbers and retention rates.

4.3 Volunteer Resource Centres - Case study 3

Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) are hubs for volunteer recruitment, referral, placement, and support. Their primary role is to match volunteers to roles based on their interests and skills, aiming to provide a fit for both the volunteer and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs).

The following 5 VRCs operate in Queensland:

- Volunteering Queensland, established in 1983 and located in Brisbane³³⁷
- Volunteering North Queensland, established in 1987 and located in Townsville³³⁸
- Volunteering Gold Coast, established in 1998³³⁹
- FNQ Volunteers, established in 1999³⁴⁰ and located in Cairns, and
- Volunteering Sunshine Coast, established in 2004.³⁴¹

Other important roles played by VRCs include building community capacity through the provision of information, support, services and mentoring to individuals, organisations and communities about all aspects of volunteering.³⁴²

Volunteering Gold Coast delivers programs such as community transport, aged care visiting, and disability beach access, alongside its general VRC functions.³⁴³ Volunteering Sunshine Coast noted that its office is valued as a hub for connection.³⁴⁴ FNQ Volunteers co-ordinates the Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme (ACVVS) in Far North Queensland. For this, they recruit, vet and train more than 100 volunteers who regularly visit people in Residential Aged Care facilities or in their homes.³⁴⁵

Queensland's 5 VRCs all provided written submissions to the inquiry and representatives from each group also appeared as witnesses at public hearings that the committee held across the state.³⁴⁶ Their experiences, motivations, challenges and recommendations, as advised to the committee, are outlined below. In summary, the 4 key issues raised by VRCs were:

- funding instability and unsustainability
- operational challenges
- structural and governance issues, and
- disaster and emergency response volunteering.

Each of these 4 main themes is discussed below.

³³⁷ Volunteering Queensland, Volunteering Queensland History Timeline, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/volunteering-queensland-history-timeline/#:~:text=1983,1995/96>

³³⁸ Submission 542

³³⁹ Volunteering Gold Coast, About Volunteering Gold Coast, <https://volunteeringgc.org.au/about-volunteering-gold-coast-charity/>

³⁴⁰ FNQ Volunteers, About Us, <https://fnqvunteers.org.au/about-us/>

³⁴¹ Volunteering Sunshine Coast, About, <https://www.volunteeringsc.org.au/about/>

³⁴² National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres, <https://www.nnvrc.org.au/>

³⁴³ Submission 430, p 5.

³⁴⁴ Submission 449, p 2.

³⁴⁵ Submission 369, p 4.

³⁴⁶ See submissions 369, 430, 449, 542 and 544.

4.3.1 Funding instability and unsustainability

Queensland's 4 regionally based VRCs - Volunteering Sunshine Coast, FNQ Volunteers, Volunteering North Queensland and Volunteering Gold Coast - reported that they receive little to no recurrent funding from the state or Commonwealth governments.³⁴⁷

Significantly, Commonwealth government funding that had historically been directed to support regional VRCs ceased in 2021. The federal Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) program was then redesigned with funding provided only to the relevant state peak for volunteering in a particular VRC's region. In Queensland, this meant that commonwealth funding for VRCs was all redirected to Volunteering Queensland.³⁴⁸ The peak body in each state was then made responsible for channelling their funding to meet the needs and priorities across their jurisdiction.³⁴⁹

Queensland's regional VRCs advised that this change had threatened their viability. Volunteering Sunshine Coast and Volunteering North Queensland, in particular, stated that they each face imminent closure as a result.³⁵⁰ Volunteering North Queensland reported a 60% decline in placements since the loss of their operational funding in 2021.³⁵¹

FNQ Volunteers noted their current reliance on short-term project grants, that are now distributed by Volunteering Queensland. This model leaves them unsure if they can continue core services like recruitment, placement, and VIO support beyond the current financial year.³⁵² Without a secure model of funding, it is difficult for regional VRCs to plan strategically or retain staff.

Volunteering Sunshine Coast described the current VRC system as 'broken' and called for a 'a major rethink and rebuild'.³⁵³

Volunteering North Queensland added:

*The current funding model provided by federal and state governments has not worked. It is broken. We need to do volunteering differently and there need to be volunteer hubs all over Queensland to combat this issue.*³⁵⁴

Volunteering Gold Coast said:

... we have received no Commonwealth or state funding for our volunteer matching activity for the past four years. Still, just last year, 2,100 people turned to us for help to get involved in volunteering. Just over 40 per cent of those people, just over 800 people

³⁴⁷ See for example, public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 5, and submissions 369, 430, 449, 542.

³⁴⁸ Submission 430, p 5.

³⁴⁹ Australian Government, Department of Social Services, Volunteer Management Activity, 2022, <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/volunteer-management-summary-frequently-asked-questions.pdf>

³⁵⁰ See submission 449 and 542.

³⁵¹ Submission 542, p 1.

³⁵² Submission 369, p 4.

³⁵³ Submission 449, p 2.

³⁵⁴ Public hearing transcript, Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 1.

*in that group, required in-person support and came into our service to navigate their way through the volunteering system.*³⁵⁵

Volunteering Queensland said, 'Funding must be long-term. Ad hoc funding has been applied to this previously and 1-2 years is not enough time to build a function that a community can then self-sustain.'³⁵⁶

4.3.2 Operational challenges

VRCs also reported a range of operational challenges that they face. As noted above, without secure funding, VRCs generally run on minimal or volunteer-only staffing. This means they lack capacity to expand services or maintain systematic processes.

The statewide decline in volunteering rates has resulted in VRCs struggling to match community demand with available volunteers. Regional areas are especially impacted, as they lack the resources to provide tailored recruitment and training.

In regard to volunteer matching processes, Volunteering North Queensland said:

*While many people are eager to volunteer, they require tailored, face-to-face support to find roles that match their skills and interests. Community organisations need one-on-one mentoring and practical tools to implement volunteer management systems - not just online resources.*³⁵⁷

Volunteering Sunshine Coast said that current recruitment systems can miss engaging with groups such as multicultural communities and highly skilled retirees because recruitment is driven by VIOs' position descriptions rather than volunteer interests.³⁵⁸

Volunteering Queensland said, 'We need a long-term, well-funded volunteer matching and resourcing network across all regions of Queensland'.³⁵⁹

4.3.3 Structural and governance issues

VRCs said that there is no statewide framework that formally mandates their role in volunteer recruitment, training, and placement, leaving them operating in a fragmented and ad hoc way. As well, duplication can occur across local councils, community groups, and other bodies that run separate volunteer programs, diluting resources and confusing volunteers.³⁶⁰

Volunteering Sunshine Coast criticised the current peak body arrangement, where Volunteering Queensland acts as both a peak body and, in practice, a competitor VRC.³⁶¹

Calls were made for VRCs to be given a clear mandate, with well-defined roles. For example, Volunteering Sunshine Coast said:

... we need a mandate to operate. Because we are a voluntary organisation we just exist and we do what we do. There is no mandate from anyone for us to do what we

³⁵⁵ Public hearing transcript, Gold Coast, 4 August 2025, p 9.

³⁵⁶ Sub 544, p 10.

³⁵⁷ Submission 542, p 2.

³⁵⁸ Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 6.

³⁵⁹ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 2 April 2025, p 6.

³⁶⁰ For example, see public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 7.

³⁶¹ Submission 449, p 3.

do; we just do it. If there were a mandate, we would then have some legitimacy in the process, particularly with VIOs.

I believe that the volunteers should be registered, which we do, but there should be a charter for the volunteer that says, 'Here are your rights and responsibilities if there's a particular issue then you come back to us if there's a particular point of reference,' because I think if people have a bad experience they have nowhere to go so they just leave and we do not learn from that, so the mandate is very important.³⁶²

4.3.4 Disaster and emergency response volunteering

Each VRC highlighted their motivation to be more involved in coordinating spontaneous volunteers during disaster events. Spontaneous volunteers are individuals, groups or organisations (including staff time offered by corporate and professional entities) that offer to assist a community affected by a disaster.³⁶³

FNQ Volunteers noted that local councils are required to have plans in place for the management of spontaneous volunteers as per the Queensland Disaster Management arrangements.³⁶⁴ VRCs advised of their potential to contribute further in this role but that without sustainable funding they will inevitably struggle to manage volunteer surges effectively.

VRCs advocated for a statewide standardised framework for disaster volunteer management, in order to increase the number of volunteer managers and improve training systems for large-scale emergency responses.³⁶⁵

Examples of recent VRC involvement in disaster volunteering includes:

- FNQ Volunteers successfully coordinated 7,000 Care Army volunteers in Cairns during Covid³⁶⁶
- Volunteering North Queensland played a major role during Townsville's 2019 floods and the 2024 ex-Cyclone Kirrily floods³⁶⁷
- VRCs on the Gold Coast, Cairns, and Townsville collaborated closely to support each other during a series of severe natural disasters in the summer of 2023-24³⁶⁸
- Volunteering Sunshine Coast have a memorandum of understanding with the Sunshine Coast Council to provide spontaneous volunteers for disaster recovery.³⁶⁹

4.3.5 Recommendations proposed by Volunteer Resource Centres

Queensland's VRCs each made recommendations to the committee. Those that related to their operations and improving volunteering experiences are noted below:

Volunteering Gold Coast's recommendations included:

- act with urgency to protect the base capability across Queensland by making an urgent and strategic investment into regional volunteering infrastructure

³⁶² Public hearing transcript, Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025, p 7.

³⁶³ Submission 369, p 8.

³⁶⁴ Submission 369, p 8.

³⁶⁵ See for example, submission 542.

³⁶⁶ Submission 369, p 8.

³⁶⁷ Submission 542, p 2.

³⁶⁸ Submission 430, pp 22-23.

³⁶⁹ Submission 449, p 5.

- the Gambling Community Benefit Fund be applied as a source of funds able to stimulate and support core volunteering infrastructure
- use co-design principles to define and implement solutions supported by the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Panel
- support the monitoring of the status of volunteering and utilise the data to inform policy
- allow for the reasonable inclusion of organisational overheads for VRCs and VIOs
- frame policy, planning and funding within a place-based approach to ensure diversity and inclusion are addressed
- invest in a public campaign highlighting the benefits of volunteering, and showcasing how it strengthens communities, improves mental health outcomes, and creates pathways to employment
- further collaborate with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that all parts of the community are empowered to participate in volunteering, regardless of demographic or socioeconomic status
- create quicker safeguards and vetting processes for stand-up programs.³⁷⁰

FNQ Volunteers Inc. recommendations included:

- consider a pilot project for Volunteer Hubs that are regionally based and provide volunteer recruitment, placement, training and support for volunteer involving organisations
 - that the Volunteer Hubs build on the existing structures and provide scaffolding which supports resilience and flexibility in strengthening local, place-based initiatives and a universal platform for volunteering across the general population.
- develop a standardised framework for emergent/spontaneous volunteers that can be reoriented to local conditions for disaster response and recovery, and that appropriate funding be allocated for planning and implementation
- allocate substantial funding to ensure that volunteer participation is made a priority through the funding of the recruitment, training and placement of volunteers, and the support and training of VIOs in volunteer management and governance.³⁷¹

Volunteering North Queensland recommended:

- establish a regional volunteer hub model with sustainable operational funding
- develop a performance framework for the volunteer hub network
- provide gap funding to maintain VNQ's operations
- implement a uniform spontaneous/disaster volunteer management system
- prioritise operational funding for VRCs
- support place-based, face-to-face volunteer engagement models.³⁷²

Volunteering Sunshine Coast Inc. recommended, 'functions such as planning, funding and evaluation of volunteering should be undertaken by the recently established Volunteering Unit in the Department.'³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Submission 430, pp 2-3.

³⁷¹ Submission 369, p 12.

³⁷² Submission 542

³⁷³ Submission 449, p 2.

Volunteering Queensland identified the following 'priority areas' around which recommendations should be framed as:

- embed a strong, connected, and supported statewide volunteering ecosystem
- remove the barriers to entry for volunteering
- protect and value the work of volunteers
- promote best-practice volunteer management
- improve the volunteer experience.³⁷⁴

Committee comment



Volunteer Resource Centres are motivated by the belief that volunteering is not just unpaid labour, but a cornerstone of resilient, inclusive communities. Their role is to provide the infrastructure, advocacy, and support to ensure that volunteering is meaningful and accessible for Queenslanders.

However, regional VRCs are experiencing a 'perfect storm' of lack of funding, declining participation rates and fragmented infrastructure. Without urgent investment in these regionally led volunteer hubs, Queensland risks losing critical local infrastructure and the capacity to better mobilise volunteers during emergencies.

Queensland's regional VRCs want stronger, regionally led volunteer infrastructure with a fairer funding model.



Recommendation 5

That the government commit its determination to improve the operating conditions for existing Volunteer Resource Centres in Queensland.

This includes by:

- provision of emergency funding to each of the four (4) existing regional Volunteer Resource Centres as appropriate in order to best ensure their ongoing operations whilst appropriate corporate and industry support is established
- develop and fund a new Volunteer Resource Centre model to establish a network of volunteering hubs across Queensland (ideally in major regional centres) so as to support place-based volunteering, connect volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) with potential volunteers, and to build capacity within local volunteer networks
- identifying and implementing preferred options for existing and future Volunteer Resource Centres to become better involved in the co-ordination of spontaneous and disaster volunteer management systems.

³⁷⁴ Submission 544, p 8.

4.4 Other volunteer experiences, challenges and stakeholder recommendations

In addition to the numerous volunteer experiences, challenges and recommendations that are detailed above in Chapters 2 and 3, the committee also received other information of note. Some of these stakeholder views and related discussions are included below.

4.4.1 Bullying and harassment concerns

Several stakeholders raised bullying and harassment issues. This included individuals detailing allegations of being bullied or harassed while they volunteered, as well as general concerns of a culture of bullying existing in some volunteering environments.³⁷⁵

For example, Lou Shipway, a volunteer for over 20 years said, 'I find that volunteers are often easy targets to be bullied and, in my experience, regularly bear the brunt of disempowering behaviour and misogyny.'³⁷⁶

Of the submissions that referenced incidents of bullying, the most frequently named area where volunteers reported these experiences occurring was within emergency services groups. Other stakeholders complained of experiencing exploitative or abusive conditions while volunteering.³⁷⁷

Numerous stakeholders called for improvements in the legal protections provided to volunteers who faced these and other concerning volunteering situations.³⁷⁸ Legislative protections provided for volunteers in Queensland are outlined below.³⁷⁹

4.4.2 Legal protections for volunteers and potential gaps in these provisions

Queensland Law Society (QLS) advised, 'Queensland lacks a clear legislative acknowledgement of the importance of volunteers and the need to protect them from legal liability.'³⁸⁰ Queensland's legal protections for volunteers were further described as 'fragmented and unclear, creating uncertainty for both volunteers and the organisations that rely on them'.³⁸¹ QLS stated that this situation 'may discourage individuals from volunteering'.³⁸² Some of Queensland's specific workplace protections for volunteers are noted below alongside concerns about potential gaps for certain types of volunteers.

4.4.2.1 Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)

A key objective of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld) (WHS Act) is to provide a framework to secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces. This includes imposing a legal duty on a 'Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking' (PCBUs) to do what is reasonably practicable to eliminate or minimise risks to the health and safety of workers.

³⁷⁵ See for example, submissions 19, 53, 54, 72, 73, 134, 279, 280, 309, 391, 398, 472, 475, 516, 549, 563 and public hearing transcript, Rockhampton, 12 August 2025, p 18.

³⁷⁶ Public hearing transcript, Rockhampton, 12 August 2025, p 18.

³⁷⁷ Submissions 19, 37, 94, 104, 123, 452 and public hearing transcript, Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 25.

³⁷⁸ See for example, submissions 79, 91, 178, 297, 371, 457, 402, 516, 549 and public hearing transcripts, Gympie, 25 March 2025, p. 18, Brisbane, 2 April 2025, p. 6, and Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 25.

³⁷⁹ See submissions 423, 549, 297 and public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 21 May 2025, pp 13-16.

³⁸⁰ Submission 549, p 2.

³⁸¹ Submission 549, p 2.

³⁸² Submission 549, p 2.

The WHS Act defines a volunteer as ‘a person who is acting on a voluntary basis (irrespective of whether the person receives out-of-pocket expenses)’.³⁸³ A PCBU is defined as a person conducting a business or undertaking alone or with others, and whether or not for profit or gain.³⁸⁴ A PCBU can be a:

- sole trader (e.g. a self-employed person)
- a partnership
- company
- a not-for-profit organisation
- unincorporated association, or
- government department (including a local government).³⁸⁵

PCBUs, including not-for-profit organisations that rely on volunteers, have duties to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of their volunteers. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) advised:

A volunteer that carries out work in any capacity for a PCBU is considered a worker for the purposes of the WHS Act. A not-for-profit organisation that employs at least one paid staff member is likely to be a PCBU e.g. a charity shop that employs a manager but is staffed by volunteers.

Examples may also include local library volunteers, tourism or heritage preservation guides, and government volunteers, such as the Queensland State Emergency Service (SES).³⁸⁶

Volunteers who carry out work for PCBUs are required to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and not to create risks to others.³⁸⁷

The WHS Act makes a distinction between PCBUs and a group categorised as a ‘volunteer association’. A volunteer association’ is defined as:

... a group of volunteers working together for 1 or more community purposes where none of the volunteers, whether alone or jointly with any other volunteers, employs any person to carry out work for the volunteer association.³⁸⁸

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland advised:

If a volunteer engages with a volunteer association, they are not considered a worker under the WHS Act.

This immunity from prosecution is designed to ensure that voluntary participation at the officer level is not discouraged.³⁸⁹

³⁸³ Schedule 5, *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)

³⁸⁴ Schedule 5, *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)

³⁸⁵ Division 3, section 5, *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)

³⁸⁶ Submission 423, pp 6-7.

³⁸⁷ Submission 423, p 7.

³⁸⁸ Division 3, section 5 (8), *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)

³⁸⁹ Submission 423, p 7.

4.4.2.2 Bullying protections

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) volunteers can access 'stop bullying' orders if their organisation is defined under the WHS Act as a PCBU.³⁹⁰ However, volunteers in volunteer-only organisations have no such legal recourse for work health safety matters.³⁹¹

4.4.2.3 Sexual Harassment Protections

The *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) also provides workers and volunteers with 'stop sexual harassment orders'. However, again this only applies for persons in a PCBU and not for volunteer-only organisations. Volunteers who experience sexual harassment in these organisations must rely on state human rights and anti-discrimination laws to seek compensation.³⁹²

4.4.2.4 Civil liability protections

The *Civil Liability Act 2003* (CLA (Qld)), provides protection from liability for food donors and volunteers performing 'community work'.³⁹³ However, QLS advised that the definition of 'community work' lacks explicit coverage for the following areas:

- environmental conservation - which could exclude volunteers engaged in landcare, national parks, conservation, and climate action initiatives
- health-related or disability support volunteering - which could create uncertainty for volunteers supporting aged care, disability services, or mental health programs
- heritage preservation or conservation - which could cause uncertainty for heritage volunteers working in areas such as museums, archives, and historical restoration projects, and
- volunteers engaged in community centres, neighbourhood programs, community development and social enterprises.³⁹⁴

QLS added that CLA (Qld) 'does not provide a mechanism for expansion of the definition of community work through a specific regulation-making power. This lack of flexibility means new and emerging forms of volunteering (e.g., digital volunteering) are not automatically included.'³⁹⁵

QLS recommended that the CLA (Qld) be amended to 'explicitly ensure comprehensive protection for all volunteers'.³⁹⁶

The Insurance Council of Australia also recommended a review of Queensland's 'current civil liability settings to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose and promote insurance affordability and availability for the community, not-for-profit and volunteer-based organisations.'³⁹⁷

4.4.2.5 'Good Samaritan' protections

The term 'Good Samaritan' has been used to describe a person who assists of their own initiative and is not a registered volunteer. They may be unknown to the person/persons they

³⁹⁰ Section 5, *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)

³⁹¹ Submission 549, p 8.

³⁹² Submission 549, p 8.

³⁹³ Part 3, Division 2, *Civil Liability Act 2003*

³⁹⁴ Submission 549, p 4.

³⁹⁵ Submission 549, p 4.

³⁹⁶ Submission 549, p 5.

³⁹⁷ Submission 569, p 4.

are assisting. They may also be known as ‘casual volunteers’, ‘community volunteers’ and ‘spontaneous volunteers’.³⁹⁸

HopgoodGanim Lawyers advised:

*Good Samaritans responding to environmental disasters in Queensland are not afforded statutory protections from risk of liability. Consequently, they risk personal liability for the acts they do in response to environmental disasters where Authorised Persons and/or Authorised Volunteers are not available to respond.*³⁹⁹

HopgoodGanim Lawyers noted, ‘Other jurisdictions in Australia have enacted statutory provisions providing protection against civil liability for Good Samaritans who act in emergency situations in good faith and without recklessness.’⁴⁰⁰ HopgoodGanim Lawyers made the following 3 recommendations to address concerns about the protection of Good Samaritans in Queensland:

- The *Civil Liability Act (2003)* (Qld) be amended to include a Good Samaritan protection, consistent with other States and Territories in Australia and to clear up current confusion in Queensland about Good Samaritan protections
- The Queensland disaster legislation (such as the *Disaster Management Act 2003* (Qld) and the *Fire Services Act 1990* (Qld) and *State Emergency Services Act 2024* (Qld)) be reviewed and amended to include protections for Good Samaritans by, for example, including a statutory immunity provision like section 59 of the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (NSW), and
- Queensland Government volunteering policies and planning documents, acknowledge the important role of Good Samaritans and better plan for their assistance in the face of increased environmental disasters and declining formal volunteerism.⁴⁰¹

4.4.2.6 Coverage for non-emergency government volunteers

Queensland has strong protections for emergency service volunteers, but non-emergency government volunteers, such as those in government agencies, conservation, and cultural institutions are not explicitly covered under the *Public Sector Act 2022* or the *Civil Liability Regulation 2014*.⁴⁰² QLS state ‘This creates uncertainty about whether these volunteers are personally liable for their actions while volunteering for the government.’⁴⁰³

QLS recommend:

This ambiguity would be resolved if it was made clear that the Public Sector Act 2022, the CLA (Qld) and Civil Liability Regulation 2014 included all non-emergency government volunteers.

³⁹⁸ Submission 297, p 1.

³⁹⁹ Submission 297, p 1.

⁴⁰⁰ Submission 297, p 2.

⁴⁰¹ Submission 297, p 1.

⁴⁰² Submission 549, p 7.

⁴⁰³ Submission 549, p 7.

*In addition, WorkCover arrangements for these volunteers are also unclear, leaving them potentially unprotected in case of injury. A review of the WorkCover coverage for all government volunteers would provide clarity around this issue.*⁴⁰⁴

4.4.2.7 Industry Sector Standing Committees

The WHS establishes Industry Sector Standing Committees (ISSCs) in order to provide strategic advice to the Minister on workplace health and safety matters across various sectors.⁴⁰⁵ However, QLS note that no volunteer representatives are included on these committees. QLS state that ‘volunteer perspectives should be formally recognised within workplace health and safety discussions’ and propose the Health and Community Services ISSC:

*... is the most appropriate committee to include a volunteer representative, as it aligns with the sectors where volunteers are most engaged, including aged care, disability services, community health, and social services.*⁴⁰⁶

4.4.3 Corporate volunteering

Some submissions identified opportunities to enhance corporate volunteering in order to better foster a workforce that is engaged in community service.⁴⁰⁷ It was noted that corporate volunteering can produce a range of benefits, including supporting volunteer recruitment, encouraging skill-based volunteering, collaboration and mutual capability building. Proposals included that corporations could be further encouraged to administer their own volunteering initiatives, or partner with existing VIOs to support their employees to volunteer.

4.4.4 Volunteering Passport

The concept of a ‘volunteer passport’ was proposed by a range of stakeholders.⁴⁰⁸ It is noted that the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033 includes a commitment to develop a national volunteer passport and volunteer management platform. A potential online passport platform could:

- assist with onboarding requirements
- be a central point for volunteer training
- reduce administrative duplications for persons who volunteer with more than one VIO
- provide a national approach to support cross-border volunteer mobility through recognition of qualifications and registrations
- share volunteer information such as calls within a geographic area or for volunteers with specific skills
- include a rewards and incentives program to recognise and encourage volunteer efforts.

⁴⁰⁴ Submission 549, pp 7-8.

⁴⁰⁵ Schedule 2, Division 5, *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)

⁴⁰⁶ Submission 549, p 9.

⁴⁰⁷ See for example, submissions 63, 102, 136, 145, 179, 182, 260, 291, 413, 416, 417, 427, 479, 482, 491 and public hearing transcripts, Toowoomba, 24 March 2025, p 6 and Brisbane, 16 June 2025, p 14.

⁴⁰⁸ See for example, submissions 194, 224, 268, 278, 291, 428, 441, 482 and 544.

4.4.5 Rewards and incentive programs to better recognise and encourage volunteer efforts

The submission from the Co.As.It. Community Services Ltd included a range of international initiatives that have served to increase volunteer participation in those countries. Co.As.It. Community Services Ltd noted that these and other ideas are worthy of consideration for use in Queensland.⁴⁰⁹ These initiatives are noted below.

Digital Micro-volunteering Platforms

Several European countries have embraced digital platforms that break down volunteer work into small, manageable tasks that can be done remotely. For example, Sweden's 'Volunteer Match' system allows people to contribute as little as 15-30 minutes at a time, making volunteering more accessible for busy professionals.

Skills-Based Matching

Singapore has implemented an innovative 'Skills Passport' program where volunteers' professional skills are matched with specific community needs, e.g. IT professionals might help local charities with their digital infrastructure, while marketing professionals assist with campaign strategies.

Intergenerational Partnerships

Japan has developed programs that pair retired seniors with young volunteers, combining the seniors' experience with younger volunteers' energy and tech-savvy. This approach has been particularly successful in addressing social isolation while providing meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Corporate Integration

New Zealand has pioneered 'Volunteer Time-Banking' where companies allow employees to bank their volunteer hours and use them as flexible time off. This has significantly increased corporate volunteer participation rates.

Gamification and Recognition

South Korea has implemented a national volunteer points system where participants earn points for their service that can be used for cultural events, public transportation, or continuing education courses. This has created a tangible reward structure while keeping the focus on community service.

⁴⁰⁹ Submission 278

Committee comment



The committee supports the creation of a volunteering passport as well as other initiatives aimed at improving volunteer participation and recognition.

Potentially this is a system that could be introduced and adopted nationally, which would help foster a culture of volunteering and allow for important functions such as recording and recognising volunteer contributions across Australia.

This would be of particular benefit to persons who live in cross-border communities and those who move inter-state and wish to build on their volunteer journeys in different jurisdictions.

The committee encourages the Queensland government to play its part in promoting and progressing the volunteer passport concept nationally.



Recommendation 6

That the government investigate:

- the creation of a dedicated volunteer passport, which enhances the portability of skills and experience for volunteers between different organisations and for career recognition, with a phased model to ensure scalability and expansion
- the development of a streamlined national Working with Children Checks through inter-jurisdictional advocacy
- the development of nationally accredited, standardised training where possible
- review and reform the government grant applications system
- avenues to allow for dispute resolution and mediation within VIO's for administrative matters.

The Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers further engages with government organisations, peak volunteer organisations and VIOs representing diverse groups to explore solutions raised during the conduct of this inquiry, including the feasibility of corporate volunteering options.

5. Terms of Reference part 4

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 4 of the terms of reference:

The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups

The Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032 includes a goal to ensure ‘that volunteering reflects the diversity and vibrancy of our communities’. The strategy further states that ‘our opportunities to fully participate in volunteering shouldn’t be impacted by our differences, our incomes, our education or our postcodes.’⁴¹⁰

Volunteering Gold Coast added:

*Volunteering is a vital part of Queensland’s social fabric, with people contributing their time to strengthen communities. However, participation is not always equitable, particularly for diverse populations such as migrants, refugees, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, First Nations Australians, and people with disabilities. While Queensland has one of the highest rates of volunteering in Australia, barriers still prevent many from fully engaging.*⁴¹¹

The numerous barriers to volunteering that were detailed in Chapter 3 may be generally applicable to many Queensland volunteers and prospective volunteers. Some Queenslanders, however, face additional and unique challenges to becoming volunteers. These issues are discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds

Diversity barriers have resulted in certain community members being underrepresented in volunteering. For example, the committee heard that members of Queensland’s Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities can face difficulties with language and cultural adjustment which may affect their ability to volunteer.

Multicultural Australia noted cost-of-living issues and added:

*For diverse, multicultural communities, however, these barriers are compounded when individuals may lack existing networks in the broader community or confidence in their English proficiency. Experiences of racism or bias in community, and structural barriers to accessing services (including, volunteering services) may further compound issues.*⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Queensland Government, Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032, p 24., https://www.dwatsipm.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/queensland-volunteering-strategy/volunteering-strategy-2024-2032.pdf

⁴¹¹ Submission 430, p 14.

⁴¹² Submission 358, p 11.

Polonia Polish Association of Qld Inc (trading as The Polish Club Milton) said:

*While all volunteer-driven organisations face recruitment and retention challenges, ethnic and cultural groups encounter unique barriers related to cultural expectations, language and organisational characteristics.*⁴¹³

Mater Group noted that ‘Some prospective Mater Volunteers face language barriers, lack local work experience, or struggle to have their skills recognised in Australia.’⁴¹⁴

Volunteering Gold Coast added:

*A major challenge is language proficiency. Many volunteering roles require strong English skills, which can exclude those who are still developing their language abilities. Additionally, cultural perceptions of volunteering differ - some communities may not see formal volunteering as a typical way of giving back, instead prioritising family or community-based support structures.*⁴¹⁵

Welcoming Australia said:

*While many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities engage in high levels of informal volunteering, they remain underrepresented in formal volunteering roles. Many individuals do not feel welcomed into structured volunteering programs despite a willingness to participate.*⁴¹⁶

Multicultural Social Network Inc. said:

*Many CALD individuals are unaware of volunteering opportunities due to language barriers, limited outreach efforts, and lack of culturally appropriate promotional materials. Some CALD community members may feel excluded or hesitant to participate due to past experiences of discrimination, lack of inclusivity in volunteer organisations, or cultural misunderstandings.*⁴¹⁷

Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc. advised:

Cultural diversity among our volunteers is both a strength and an ongoing challenge. Many of our volunteers are new migrants for whom English is not their first language, which can create communication barriers and impact their ability to integrate smoothly into the team.

*One significant issue is the attitude of some long-standing Caucasian members toward these volunteers, particularly newcomers. Unfortunately, this lack of inclusivity leads to a high attrition rate among migrant volunteers, as they often do not feel welcomed or adequately supported.*⁴¹⁸

Damini Women's Association of Qld Inc. said:

Some of these challenges are easily avoided if people support the diversification of culture and involve them in their community with open arms. Secondly it is important

⁴¹³ Submission 522, p 2.

⁴¹⁴ Submission 485

⁴¹⁵ Submission 430, p 14.

⁴¹⁶ Submission 393, p 10.

⁴¹⁷ Submission 129, p 3.

⁴¹⁸ Submission 102, p 3.

*to be aware of cultural differences and respecting different values and beliefs. Finally, building relationship based on trust and mutual respect.*⁴¹⁹

5.1.1 Opportunities to improve volunteering participation for people from diverse backgrounds

Stakeholders advised the committee of a variety of ways by which volunteers from diverse communities can be better encouraged to participate. For example, Volunteering Gold Coast said:

To make volunteering more accessible, organisations must take proactive steps. Providing translated materials, multilingual support, and cultural awareness training can help create a more welcoming environment. Community partnerships are crucial: collaborating with multicultural organisations, Indigenous groups, and disability advocacy networks can improve trust and engagement.

*Flexible volunteering models are also key. Remote and virtual volunteering can support those in rural areas or with mobility challenges. One-off and short-term roles provide opportunities for people who may not be able to commit to regular volunteering.*⁴²⁰

Communitify Qld added:

The experience of volunteering should be available to all and with the right supports in place can be an experience available to people with mental illness or psychosocial disability. To realise this vision, it is essential to invest in the infrastructure that supports volunteering, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, can contribute meaningfully to their communities.

*Investing in volunteer coordination is not just an administrative necessity - it is an investment in the strength and resilience of Australian communities. By providing financial support for volunteer involving organisations, government can empower volunteers to contribute more effectively, enhance service delivery, and ensure the sustainability of volunteering across the country. Additionally, supporting volunteers with disabilities or mental ill-health can help combat social isolation and stigma while providing pathways to training and employment.*⁴²¹

Hussain Baba, founder & CEO of Multicultural Social Network Inc. said that the 60,000 members of Queensland Islamic communities were a 'vast and untapped pool of potential volunteers'. Mr Baba noted:

*Muslims carry a profound sense of responsibility to engage in voluntary acts of goodness or worship. This responsibility is not just a duty, but a commitment to the community, driven by the principle of seeking no personal gain. Consequently, volunteerism is a core aspect of Islamic ethics and practice, forming an integral part of the identity of practising Muslims.*⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Submission 53, pp 2-3.

⁴²⁰ Submission 430, p 14.

⁴²¹ Submission 315, p 3.

⁴²² Submission 129, p 2.

To harness this untapped potential, Mr Baba recommended:

Tailoring recruitment efforts to address the specific needs and preferences of CALD communities, including multilingual outreach and community engagement, can significantly improve participation.

*Collaborating with CALD community leaders, faith-based organisations, and ethnic groups to promote volunteering in a culturally sensitive manner will help bridge the gap. Additionally, offering language support, cultural competency training, and mentorship programs can empower CALD individuals to navigate volunteering roles effectively.*⁴²³

Multicultural Australia advised the committee:

*A key issue we often flag with our multicultural communities is that doing printed written documents does not work; no-one reads them. Word of mouth and giving people the authority to spread the word is how you get that information out to get people to then connect with you so you can get the information and let them know how they can then engage in a volunteering piece.*⁴²⁴

Charis Mullen MP, Member for Jordan said:

*Many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities will actively volunteer their time for cultural events and community festivals yet are not supported or encouraged to use those honed skills for further volunteering opportunities and especially in natural disaster situations, where language and cultural understanding could be better utilised and considered an asset.*⁴²⁵

Nick Attam, an organiser of Townsville's volunteer-run India Fest event said:

*The benefits of migrants, especially from India, is that they are skilled migrants. The community can get more benefit out of them. They are happy to volunteer but they do not know how. I use my media communication. At the same time, it is not a closed community. It has to be wider. They do not have to help Indians; they can go out and help in aged care or other areas. Information and motivation need to be given to them.*⁴²⁶

5.2 Unique challenges experienced by gender

Research conducted by Welcoming Australia found:

*Women consistently volunteer at higher rates than men, regardless of whether they are Australian-born or overseas-born. Australian-born women report the highest levels of participation, followed closely by overseas-born women, while men - particularly those born overseas - volunteer at lower rates.*⁴²⁷

⁴²³ Submission 129, pp 1-3.

⁴²⁴ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 30 April 2025, p 7.

⁴²⁵ Submission 336, p 4.

⁴²⁶ Public hearing transcript, Townsville, 16 July 2025, p 22.

⁴²⁷ Submission 393, pp 6-7.

Welcoming Australia stated that this research:

*... suggests that social and structural factors may influence men's engagement in community volunteering, potentially linked to workplace demands, differing social expectations, or a lack of targeted outreach and opportunities that align with their interests and availability.*⁴²⁸

In relation to women's participation as sporting volunteers, the Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games said that Queensland specific data from AusPlay:

*... showed that more than twice as many men had volunteered as coaches, instructors, trainers or teachers at sporting clubs during this period than women. More broadly, this data showed that men were volunteering more at sporting clubs, with 13.3 per cent of male respondents indicating they volunteered compared to 8.8 per cent of women.*⁴²⁹

Guide Dogs Queensland suggested that volunteering applications and onboarding processes often don't take into account gender identities, and gender-based stereotyping or discrimination can create a lack of inclusive spaces for people of all gender identities to feel comfortable or welcome in volunteering roles.⁴³⁰

5.2.1 Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by gender

Welcoming Australia noted that the disparities in volunteering by gender statistics 'have important implications for policy and support strategies.' They proposed:

*Addressing the gender disparity in male volunteer engagement may involve workplace-based volunteering initiatives, mentorship programs, and leveraging sports, business, and professional networks to create more accessible and appealing opportunities.*⁴³¹

The Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games advised that recommendations from the Office for Women to address barriers to female volunteer participation in sport and recreation included:

- developing specific strategies to increase the number of women in volunteer roles
- having policies to support women in leadership roles in the club
- supporting younger women and girls to build their confidence and capability in taking up roles other than those traditionally occupied by women
- creating a welcoming and inclusive club culture.⁴³²

5.3 Unique challenges experienced by age groups

Stakeholders noted that older and younger volunteers each faced their own specific age-related challenges. Issues for some older volunteers included:

- health issues and difficulties with transport⁴³³
- COVID-19 discouraged some from returning to volunteering

⁴²⁸ Submission 393, p 7.

⁴²⁹ Submission 317, p 2.

⁴³⁰ Submission 525

⁴³¹ Submission 393, p 7.

⁴³² Submission 317, p 2.

⁴³³ Submission 487

- digital platforms such as online registrations, digital communication and compliance systems can discourage some, especially those with low digital literacy.
- retirees may feel that their skills and experience are underutilised, with organisations restricting them due to liability or insurance concerns. This can create frustration and even entrench age-bias against older people who want to contribute meaningfully

Rotary EClub Australia Nomads said, 'Some events and organisations apply arbitrary limits on the age of volunteers which is galling to active volunteers who have been giving to the communities of Queensland for decades.'⁴³⁴

National Seniors Australia said:

*... bullying and ageism within organisations are never acceptable. Agencies who set age limits to WHS coverage irrespective of a person's health or ability should also be aware that this is ageism and reconsider it.*⁴³⁵

Issues for some young volunteers included:

- time pressures from study, work or sport reduces availability for volunteering
- a lack of structured entry points and mentorship opportunities can make it difficult for younger volunteers to get involved and feel supported.

Queensland Youth Policy Collective said that nearly half of organisations in Queensland with volunteer programs have no one aged under 25 volunteering with them.⁴³⁶

5.3.1 Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by age groups

To increase youth volunteering, numerous submissions proposed that volunteering programs be included within state school curricula.⁴³⁷

The Queensland Youth Policy Collective (QYPC) recommended that governments could offer free training and resources to empower organisations to:

- establish formal mentoring programs between members of the organisation and young volunteers
- develop, strengthen and/or expand their platforms for online volunteering; and
- increase their presence on social media to engage more directly with young people on platforms they frequently access.

QYPC further suggested:

*... governments should develop an official system where young people can formally record their volunteering hours and experience against their USI education number. They can then present this record to a prospective employer, demonstrating a reliable record of volunteering experience.*⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Submission 462, p 6.

⁴³⁵ Submission 446, p 19.

⁴³⁶ Submission 205, p 4.

⁴³⁷ See for example, submissions 35, 50, 260, 278, 333, 364, 406, 416, 470, 482, 501, 525, 526, 533, 536, 538 and 555.

⁴³⁸ Submission 205, p 5.

5.4 Unique challenges experienced by ability

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) said, ‘people with disability may encounter physical and attitudinal barriers, as well as a lack of accessible volunteering opportunities.’⁴³⁹

QDN and Volunteering Queensland have developed a resource called ‘Successfully Engaging Volunteers with Disability’. This guide was created to strengthen inclusion and diversity with the aim to encourage organisations to develop greater awareness of how to work with people who have a disability. The guide provides recommendations for organisations to reflect on whether they have an inclusive approach to volunteering and provides strategies on how to attract and recruit volunteers, induction and onboarding of volunteers.⁴⁴⁰

Lance Mergard said:

*People with disabilities also face significant accessibility challenges, including physical infrastructure limitations, lack of adaptive equipment, and limited flexible roles that accommodate diverse needs. Even when organisations express a willingness to include volunteers with disabilities, a lack of training and understanding often results in unintentional exclusion.*⁴⁴¹

OzHarvest Queensland elaborated on their efforts to support disabled volunteers. They said:

Supporting volunteers with disabilities can be challenging as we are not experts in disability. It has been a learning process to work out how best to assess volunteer’s abilities and needs, and there was not as many resources available to learn how to support volunteers with disability as there are resources on how to volunteer for people with disability.

*A big barrier to volunteers with disability is our risk/compliance obligations and ensuring the safety of volunteers with disability, noting we are not a disability support service ourselves, so our team is not trained and resourced accordingly, and also that the nature of our work is in person and quite physical.*⁴⁴²

5.4.1 Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by ability

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) made the following recommendations to address the unique challenges experienced by volunteers with disability:

- ensure volunteer roles and environments are accessible and inclusive with appropriate communication formats, training, and adjustments
- utilise inclusive resources such as the Successfully Engaging Volunteers with Disability guide to attract, recruit, and support volunteers with disability
- offer remote volunteering opportunities to accommodate diverse needs
- implement strategies to retain volunteers with disability, addressing the challenges identified in recent reports

⁴³⁹ Submission 550, p 8.

⁴⁴⁰ Queenslanders with Disability Network, Successfully Engaging Volunteers with Disability, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Resource-Guide-Successfully-Engaging-Volunteers-with-Disability.pdf>

⁴⁴¹ Submission 526, p 9.

⁴⁴² Submission 520, pp 2-3.

- regularly evaluate and improve approaches to volunteering based on feedback from volunteers with disability.⁴⁴³

Woodfordia Inc. noted that they provide mental health support and training for their volunteers and volunteer managers. They said:

*While it is well established that volunteering improves mental health by reducing loneliness and fostering a sense of community and purpose, it is also true that many volunteers bring their own mental health challenges with them to their volunteering roles. Volunteer managers, often working with limited resources and training, are increasingly required to support individuals experiencing mental health issues. We currently employ volunteers to provide mental health support to their fellow volunteers both during the Build period and during the Festival itself. There is a team of 18 volunteers with this as their mission.*⁴⁴⁴

5.5 Unique challenges experienced by location

The committee heard that specific challenges for volunteers in rural and regional locations include:

- higher travel costs, fewer local opportunities and limited infrastructure⁴⁴⁵
- smaller communities can rely heavily on a small pool of older volunteers, which makes sustaining services and community events difficult
- compliance burdens can fall heavily on smaller, rural-based organisations who may not have people available to assist with these administrative requirements
- in remote First Nations communities, volunteers are often the only providers of critical services, such as radio broadcasting and disaster response, but can receive minimal structural support or recognition.

Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (RRR) said:

*There are numerous existing barriers to engaging younger volunteers in RRR communities. Young people in RRR areas are often forced to look to larger centres for further education, careers and life experiences. This uprooting can be countered through volunteering, as it provides a sense of belonging and wellbeing, strengthening ties to place and potentially anchoring youth more deeply to their RRR communities as they explore a broader range of possibilities offered in the community sector.*⁴⁴⁶

5.5.1 Opportunities to improve volunteering participation by location

Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland called for:

*Increased funding and incentives for the provision of services in rural and remote areas is required to ensure equitable access to services for these communities just as they are available for their urban counterparts.*⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴³ Submission 550, p 9.

⁴⁴⁴ Submission 435

⁴⁴⁵ See for example, submissions 430, 440, 451, 487, 488, 525, 526 and 546.

⁴⁴⁶ Submission 235

⁴⁴⁷ Submission 394, p 2.

Lockyer Valley Regional Council recommended funding enhanced digital access and training in order ‘to improve digital infrastructure in rural areas, ensuring equitable access to online tools.’⁴⁴⁸

Similar to calls for better consultation with diverse groups, Western Downs Regional Council recommended increased engagements with peoples and groups in rural Queensland. They said:

*Reaching out to community leaders to understand how best to engage their networks will ensure an inclusive model is developed. There’s also an opportunity to work more closely with First Nations communities - not just inviting participation, but genuinely engaging with, understanding, and integrating their knowledge, strengths, while valuing their leadership qualities. Creating spaces where different cultural perspectives are valued and embedded in our approach will only strengthen our ability to respond effectively as a community.*⁴⁴⁹

Committee comment



This inquiry has heard that volunteering has become increasingly difficult for many Queenslanders for a wide range of reasons.

The committee acknowledges that for some Queenslanders and Queensland communities, these difficulties and barriers to volunteering are even more pronounced.

The committee appreciates the dedication and efforts of those who are working to increase volunteer participation rates among under-represented peoples and groups.

Again, the committee encourages a whole-of-government approach to improve the experiences and conditions of all volunteers.

⁴⁴⁸ Submission 361, p 2.

⁴⁴⁹ Submission 406, p 8.

6. Terms of Reference part 5

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 5 of the terms of reference:

The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement

Evidence provided throughout the inquiry identified limitations to the effectiveness and extent of support provided by Queensland Government agencies, particularly in relation to funding, strategic planning, and specific programs.

The following 5 key themes have been identified by the committee:

- fragmentation and lack of coordination
- administrative complexity and a lack of streamlined processes
- inadequate financial support and grant programs
- need for modernisation and a centralised digital infrastructure
- lack of awareness and visibility of available support.

6.1 Fragmentation and lack of coordination

A consistent and dominant theme throughout the submissions is the pervasive sense of fragmentation and a lack of coordination in government support for the volunteering sector.

The system has been described as minimal and fragmented. Another submission highlighted that current financial support lacks a level of coordination and scrutiny that would ensure the community is getting the best value. This sentiment is echoed by the Council on the Ageing Queensland, which found that 26% of providers and organisations surveyed perceived government support as ‘ineffective’.⁴⁵⁰ The fragmentation is particularly pronounced at the local government level, where support can vary significantly.

The lack of a unified strategy can create an uneven playing field. Larger, more professionalised organisations with dedicated administrative staff are often better equipped to navigate the complex and disparate funding and regulatory landscapes of different government agencies. In contrast, smaller, community-driven, or entirely volunteer-run groups are at a distinct disadvantage. For example, Frog Safe Inc details its struggle to secure funding for ‘essential ongoing or our forced relocations’, a challenge made more difficult by the fact that ‘large lumps of funding’ are provided to larger organisations.⁴⁵¹ This structural imbalance suggests that the current system’s fragmentation inadvertently favours professional non-profits over grassroots initiatives, potentially leading to the loss of unique and highly localised services that are vital to their communities.

As noted in The Smith Family submission a potential solution, which is detailed in the National Volunteering Strategy 2023-2033, would be the adoption of a unified, cross-portfolio strategy

⁴⁵⁰ Submission 487, p 21.

⁴⁵¹ Submission 152, p 6.

for volunteering.⁴⁵² The Smith Family submission recommends making volunteering a 'cross-portfolio issue' with comprehensive policy and investment at every level of government.⁴⁵³ One submission specifically calls for a formal, cross-government volunteering strategy that incorporates support at the local, state, and national levels and helps to identify and address gaps in support and reduce fragmentation. To make this strategy actionable, DV Safe Phone suggests establishing a 'centralised point of contact or framework that harmonises state, local, and community-level efforts'.⁴⁵⁴

A submitter suggested in their submission that a review of the relationship between the State Organisation (SES) and Local Governments is needed to achieve a 'more substantive arrangement'.⁴⁵⁵ This recommendation directly addresses the points highlighted by organisations like Play Matters Australia and individuals such as Nicole Lobegeier⁴⁵⁶, demonstrating that a key lever for systemic improvement lies in formalising and standardising inter-governmental policies rather than leaving them to diverse, local interpretation. The lack of a coordinated framework implies a lack of shared responsibility for the health of the volunteering ecosystem.

In their submission Professor Sarah Baker and Dr Zelmarie Cantillon urge the 'Queensland Government to adopt a holistic strategy that includes streamlined regulation, sustainable funding, and targeted programs to enhance volunteering experiences and retention'.⁴⁵⁷

6.2 Administrative complexity and lack of streamlined processes

As noted in Chapter 3 (Terms of Reference 2) another prominent theme raised by submitters, and at public hearings, is the frustration expressed by stakeholders regarding 'red tape' and 'administrative overhead'.⁴⁵⁸ This burden manifests in various ways, from the challenges of recruiting and onboarding volunteers to meeting complex governance requirements and managing grant application processes.⁴⁵⁹ In some cases, government's own tendering processes are viewed as having 'a limited understanding and lack of support for volunteer models of service provision'.⁴⁶⁰

A specific and recurring 'pain point' highlighted across submissions is the lack of transferability of Working with Children Checks (WWCC). The Smith Family submission notes that the lack of transferability between states 'creates additional costs for volunteers and not-for-profit organisations, takes unnecessary time, creates delays in services and leads to frustrations which impact volunteers' engagement'.⁴⁶¹ This administrative hurdle is not a minor inconvenience; it can be a direct inhibitor of volunteerism. The submissions reveal a clear cause-and-effect relationship: burdensome procedures lead to increased administrative time and costs, which in turn cause heightened frustration and disengagement, ultimately

⁴⁵² National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, p 56-57.

⁴⁵³ Submission 331, p 6.

⁴⁵⁴ Submission 245, p 3.

⁴⁵⁵ Submission 294, p 3.

⁴⁵⁶ See for example Submissions 293 and 427

⁴⁵⁷ Submission 373, p 6.

⁴⁵⁸ See for example Submissions 136, 251 and 469

⁴⁵⁹ Submission 415, pp 4-5.

⁴⁶⁰ Submission 442, p 3.

⁴⁶¹ Submission 331, p 6.

contributing to a decline in volunteer numbers and a loss of potential volunteers. This dynamic suggests that some of the very processes intended to ensure good governance may be undermining the sector they are designed to regulate.

A number of submitters, including Bundaberg Street Law Inc, have called for a reduction in 'red tape' to allow VIOs to focus more resources on service delivery and volunteer engagement.⁴⁶² This includes streamlining grant processes and, as proposed by Volunteering Sunshine Coast, developing a 'consolidated single agreement' for grant funding to remove a 'significant administrative overhead'.⁴⁶³ The current system's design risks alienating the very people it relies upon, revealing a profound disconnect between policy and the on-the-ground reality of volunteering.

6.3 Inadequate financial support and grant programs

While government support is acknowledged, a central critique is that existing financial models are inadequate and unsustainable. Funding is often described as short-term and project-based, which limits 'long-term sustainability' for organisations.⁴⁶⁴ This approach fails to cover oncosts such as rent, utilities, and core staff, forcing VIOs into a perpetual state of financial uncertainty.⁴⁶⁵ Organisations like the Damini Women's Association of Qld Inc report being repeatedly 'knocked down' each time an application has been lodged.⁴⁶⁶ This short-term funding approach diverts resources from service delivery to the time-consuming processes of fundraising and grant writing.

Leanne Evans, representing the Gold Coast Mid-Week Ladies Tennis Association Inc, suggested the Queensland Government 'examine the feasibility of a state-wide grants search tool' for use by not-for-profits and unincorporated groups 'which search all kinds of grants from different funders'.⁴⁶⁷ This tool would serve as a centralised resource to help VIOs navigate the complex funding landscape.

Other suggestions focus on direct incentives for individual volunteers, such as subsidies or reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses, free travel, and discounts on training for courses like the Justice of the Peace program.⁴⁶⁸ These proposals directly address financial barriers to individual participation. Furthermore, commonkind's submission suggests that the government could 'encourage philanthropy for Queensland causes, to make funding the not-for-profit sector more sustainable'.⁴⁶⁹

Support Groups Queensland Inc. notes, a volunteer model is one of the 'only models that will lead to a project continuing beyond its funding life', and yet government tendering processes have shown a 'limited understanding and lack of support' for this approach.⁴⁷⁰ This reveals a misalignment between the government's funding strategy and the operational reality of VIOs.

⁴⁶² Submission 251, p 5

⁴⁶³ Submission 449, p 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Submission 373, p 5.

⁴⁶⁵ Submission 152, p 5.

⁴⁶⁶ Submission 53, p 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Submission 428, p 12.

⁴⁶⁸ See for example, Submission 229, p 2., and Submission 331, p 7.

⁴⁶⁹ Submission 260, p 5.

⁴⁷⁰ Submission 442, p 3.

As VIOs take on more responsibility for public services in the local government areas their costs increase, a trend noted by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal⁴⁷¹.

6.4 Need for modernisation and a centralised digital infrastructure

The National Volunteering Strategy 2023-2033 has identified a critical need for investment in technology and ‘common enabling infrastructure’ to improve capability and capacity across the volunteering ecosystem.⁴⁷² This is framed not as a desire for new gadgets, but as a strategic solution to systemic problems. The Freddy Bear Foundation specifically calls for ‘digital volunteer management solutions’ and the creation of a ‘statewide volunteer database that integrates existing platforms for streamlined recruitment and reporting’⁴⁷³ and DV Safe Phone recommends grant funding for ‘technological upgrades’ to support initiatives.⁴⁷⁴

The insight that technology can serve as a solution to fragmentation is critical. A statewide volunteer database would help to address the scattered nature of recruitment and training resources, while a centralised grants search tool would help organisations overcome a complex funding environment. The suggestion from the Freddy Bear Foundation to prioritise ‘locally developed, community-driven technology solutions rather than outsourcing to large-scale platforms that are not tailored to Queensland’s volunteering landscape’⁴⁷⁵ is particularly significant. It reveals a clear concern among stakeholders that a one-size-fits-all, top-down technological solution may not be effective.

Based on feedback provided to the committee by the volunteering sector there is desire for a system that is flexible and tailored to the diverse needs of the Queensland volunteering landscape, from a local meals-on-wheels service to a large-scale VIO. This highlights a tension between the need for centralisation and the desire for grassroots autonomy, a balance that a digital strategy may well support.

6.5 Lack of awareness and visibility of support

A significant challenge is the lack of awareness and visibility of available government support. Samantha Bryan states, ‘I am not aware of any. If there is support available, that would be good to make more widely known’.⁴⁷⁶ This is supported by Guide Dogs Queensland, which notes that many organisations are unaware of existing state-funded initiatives, highlighting a challenge in their visibility and reach.⁴⁷⁷

The submissions collectively portray a crisis of perception. While volunteering is consistently ‘valued in government reports, publications, across social media posts, and in political campaigning,’ it is ‘undervalued in policy settings and realistic funding’.⁴⁷⁸ The disconnect between rhetoric and action is a major source of frustration. The underlying issue appears to be a systemic failure to recognise and celebrate the unique, often informal, and human-centric nature of the volunteering sector.

⁴⁷¹ Submission 235, p 3.

⁴⁷² National Volunteering Strategy 2023-2033, pp 8-11., p 39.

⁴⁷³ Submission 136, pp 3-4.

⁴⁷⁴ Submission 245, p x3.

⁴⁷⁵ Submission 136, p 1.

⁴⁷⁶ Submission 307, p 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Submission 525, p 5.

⁴⁷⁸ Submission 430, p 16.

In response, submitters call for a shift from token gestures like an annual volunteer breakfast to 'genuine engagement, respect, and recognition' of the effort volunteers put into their communities.⁴⁷⁹ The National Strategy for Volunteering: Action Plan 2024-2027 also proposes government-led 'advocacy and public campaigns' to highlight the importance of all types of volunteering and encourage participation.⁴⁸⁰ This call for public campaigns is a direct response to both the lack of awareness and the perceived lack of respect. By highlighting the value of volunteering, the government can not only increase volunteer numbers but also signal to its own agencies that this sector is a strategic priority worthy of genuine respect and investment. This connects the public-facing image of government support with the internal policy and procedural changes required to make that support meaningful.

Committee comment



The committee acknowledges that the submissions collectively paint a picture of a vital and dedicated sector that, despite its critical role in Queensland's social infrastructure, feels undervalued and misunderstood by various levels of government.

The current system design risks alienating the very people it relies upon, revealing a disconnect between policy and the on-the-ground reality of volunteering.

The challenges identified are not incidental; they are systemic, born from fragmented policies, an overly bureaucratic and impersonal approach, and a profound disconnect between the government's procedural requirements and the human-centric nature of volunteering.

Submitters and participants at public hearings suggest that the current model of government support is not adequately keeping pace or equipped to address the complex needs of VIOs in a rapidly changing environment.



Recommendation 7

That the government investigate:

- conducting a review of background checks and Blue Card requirements for emergency service volunteers to ensure that processes and interfaces are more volunteer-friendly and timely
- additional structural changes to achieve a better alignment between organisational management, operational capability and volunteer experience, particularly in regional and remote areas
- amending the current training and induction models to ensure it is timely, manageable, relevant and support volunteers.

⁴⁷⁹ Submission 293, p 2.

⁴⁸⁰ National Strategy for Volunteering: Action Plan 2024-2027, p 31.

7. Terms of Reference part 6

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 6 of the terms of reference:

Opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games represent a monumental opportunity for Queensland, extending far beyond the realm of sport to serve as a powerful catalyst for social and economic development. A central pillar of this potential is the revitalisation and long-term sustainability of the state's volunteer sector.

The following 4 key themes have been identified by the committee:

- cultivating a positive, human-centric volunteer experience
- modernisation of the volunteer environment
- fostering inclusivity and diverse participation
- mitigating risks to the grassroots volunteering sector.

7.1 Cultivating a positive, human-centric volunteer experience

A successful volunteer program for Brisbane 2032 must be built on more than just a massive recruitment drive; it should also be founded on a profound understanding of the volunteer experience itself. This involves addressing both the operational mechanics and the psychological underpinnings that motivate individuals to donate their time.

7.1.1 Valuing Volunteer Contributions

The psychological contract between a volunteer and an organisation is built on a foundation of respect and recognition. The submission from Joan Kenndy regarding her experiences as a volunteer at the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games is particularly illuminating, as she describes how last-minute changes to shift times made volunteers feel 'undervalued' and 'treated poorly as though their time was not important'. This perception of being disposable was compounded by operational issues, such as poor alignment of rosters with public transport schedules, which led to 'long and circuitous journeys' for volunteers.⁴⁸¹

However, the most profound failure of the 2018 Games from Joan's point of view was the perceived lack of recognition. While paid employees were treated to a party with food, beverages, and entertainment, volunteers were not. This omission led many volunteers to feel 'very undervalued' and 'just tossed on the scrapheap'.⁴⁸² This feedback is not merely a logistical critique; it represents a fundamental breach of the psychological contract, transforming a fulfilling act of service into an emotionally draining experience. A key lesson is that the intrinsic reward of volunteering is not transactional; it is deeply emotional. Kennedy's hope for the 2032 organisers is that they will learn from this and leave volunteers 'feeling warm

⁴⁸¹ Submission 150, p 3.

⁴⁸² Submission 150, p 4.

and fuzzy,' suggesting tangible solutions like a public volunteer's parade or a party as a demonstration of appreciation.⁴⁸³

7.1.2 Operational Excellence: From Delegation to Integration

Operational shortcomings from past events also provide a clear roadmap for improvement. Timothy Powell's submission, drawing from the local SES experience at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, details a crucial failure in the integration of existing volunteer groups. While SES volunteers were effective in their assigned task of crowd surveillance, they were often required to perform roles they were 'minimally trained' for, such as crowd control and lost person assistance. Despite receiving commendations, they were considered 'outsiders supporting the games' rather than a fully integrated part of the organising body.⁴⁸⁴

This experience highlights a distinction between simple delegation and true integration. Powell's recommendations are a blueprint for a more cohesive operational model, which include providing specific Olympic IDs, using volunteers alongside paid staff in operational centres, and providing specialised training for specific roles. Such measures would foster a sense of belonging, making volunteers feel like a 'cohesive team' and part of the 'social fabric of the games community'.⁴⁸⁵ This enhanced integration would not only improve operational efficiency but also serve as a powerful recruitment tool for the organising committee, as it would provide social reinforcement and a tangible benefit for volunteers who participate. Similarly, one submitter suggested that RFSQ volunteers be given priority and a 'fast track' approach, given their training, as a way to demonstrate the value of their existing volunteerism.⁴⁸⁶

7.2 Modernisation of the volunteer environment

A key component of a statewide strategy is the modernisation of volunteer management systems. Serving Our People Inc. underscored the need for a 'well-structured and scalable volunteer management system' with shared resources like 'centralised databases, coordinated scheduling platforms, and standardised training modules'. They said that this would reduce duplication and create a 'seamless experience for volunteers across multiple organisations'.⁴⁸⁷ Volunteering GC reinforces this point, calling for the government to address 'long-standing structural issues—such as fragmented volunteer databases' to build a more sustainable system.⁴⁸⁸

The Gold Coast Mid-Week Ladies Tennis Association provides a clear model for this modernisation with a case study on the registration website (VOLWeb.ca) used for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. This free online tool was a 'major success' because it helped recruit and communicate with volunteers across a range of events. Critically, it was designed with a legacy in mind, allowing the 25,000 Games volunteers to be transferred to the platform post-event, creating a 'Canada-wide legacy of experienced volunteers'.⁴⁸⁹ This example

⁴⁸³ Submission 150, p 4.

⁴⁸⁴ Submission 228, p 8.

⁴⁸⁵ Submission 228, p 9.

⁴⁸⁶ Submission 270, p 12.

⁴⁸⁷ Submission 413, p 14.

⁴⁸⁸ Submission 430, p 20.

⁴⁸⁹ Submission 428, pp 13-14.

demonstrates that a centralised, accessible digital platform is not only an operational convenience but a crucial mechanism for translating short-term event interest into long-term civic engagement.

The following table, which provides a comparative analysis of volunteer legacy strategies from previous major sporting events, has been prepared using information provided in the Cancer Council Queensland submission and research by Professor Leonie Lockstone-Binney.⁴⁹⁰ The analysis reinforces the need for Brisbane 2032 to adopt a strategic and integrated approach from the outset.

Table 1 **Comparative Analysis of Volunteer Legacy Strategies**

Host City / Event	Key Strategy / Approach	Outcome	Lessons for Brisbane 2032
Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games	Lack of a formal volunteer legacy strategy	Post-Games volunteer engagement was left to develop organically, with limited long-term impact	A formal, well-structured volunteer legacy strategy is essential from the beginning.
Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games	Implemented VolWeb.ca, a centralised online registration too	Created a 'Canada-wide legacy of experienced volunteers' by providing a pathway for continued engagement post-Games.	A scalable, centralised, and accessible digital platform is a key mechanism for ensuring a long-term legacy.
London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games	Attempted a structured legacy but bypassed existing volunteer infrastructure	Limited knowledge transfer and integration into long-term community engagement. A survey indicated increased awareness and interest in volunteering.	Collaboration with existing volunteering stakeholders is crucial to avoid fragmentation and ensure knowledge transfer.
Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games	Saw a surge in major event volunteering	Engagement did not translate into long-term growth in club-based and community volunteering. Some local clubs reported a decline post-Games.	A strategic plan should be in place to prevent a post-Games decline and support grassroots organisations.

Note: Based on information from *Evaluating the volunteering infrastructure legacy of the Olympic Games: Sydney 2000 and London 2012*, by Professor Leonie Lockstone-Binney, 2016.

⁴⁹⁰ Submission 441, p 9., and *Evaluating the volunteering infrastructure legacy of the Olympic Games: Sydney 2000 and London 2012*, Professor Leonie Lockstone-Binney, 2016.

7.3 Fostering inclusivity and diverse participation

Beyond the operational and systemic improvements, the Brisbane 2032 Games are viewed as a profound opportunity to address social inequities and foster a more inclusive volunteer culture. The Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)⁴⁹¹ and the Australian Sporting Alliance for People with a Disability⁴⁹² emphasise that the Games should serve as a catalyst for creating accessible opportunities for people with a disability.

The Game Changers Report, a key resource developed by QDN and Urbis, provides a critical blueprint for this social imperative. The report advocates for ‘clear and measurable targets’ for 2032 volunteering and the development of a formal ‘disability employment and volunteering plan’.⁴⁹³ This elevates the goal of inclusivity from a broad aspiration to a specific, actionable mandate with defined metrics. QDN views the Games as a unique opportunity for people with a disability to gain ‘volunteer and employment opportunities that could lead to greater confidence and feelings of inclusion’. The submission cites the London 2012 Games as a precedent, noting they were the first to focus on creating a lasting impact through programs that promoted equality and diversity.⁴⁹⁴

The Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research is also working to envision legacies for the Games that address ‘intersectional inequities in sport participation for girls, women and non-binary people’.⁴⁹⁵ Dr. Caroline Riot reinforces the need for an inclusive approach, noting that a mechanism to safely and securely support online volunteer participation would help ‘boost the sector’ and ‘fill gaps where volunteers can volunteer virtually’.⁴⁹⁶

The collective perspective is that a successful volunteer legacy is not just about numbers, but about building a more ‘inclusive, accepting, and accessible society’ for all Queenslanders.⁴⁹⁷

7.4 Mitigating risks to the grassroots volunteering sector

A critical, often-overlooked dimension of leveraging the Games for volunteering is the potential for a negative impact on the existing grassroots sector - the influx of Games-specific volunteers could inadvertently harm the community organisations that rely on a stable volunteer base.

The most direct concerns come from essential service providers. Meals on Wheels Queensland raises the possibility that many of their existing volunteers may become unavailable due to the allure of volunteering at the Olympics and urges the government to consider ‘how to fill these gaps so that essential services like Meals on Wheels can continue to operate’.⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland expresses concern that the Brisbane 2032 Olympics should not ‘negatively impact existing community volunteer programs’.⁴⁹⁹ These submissions point to the fallacy of viewing volunteer numbers as a zero-

⁴⁹¹ Submission 550, pp 12-13.

⁴⁹² Submission 246, pp 1-2.

⁴⁹³ Game Changers Report, April 2024, Urbis and QDN, pp 6 and 53.

⁴⁹⁴ Submission 550, p 11.

⁴⁹⁵ Submission 268, p 1.

⁴⁹⁶ Submission 445, p 2.

⁴⁹⁷ Submission 550, p 11.

⁴⁹⁸ Submission 482, p 18.

⁴⁹⁹ Submission 438, p 12.

sum game. An event-specific surge does not necessarily compensate for the loss of a trained, committed, and long-standing volunteer base from essential services.

The potential for a post-Games decline in grassroots volunteering is also a serious risk, as demonstrated by the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. The Cancer Council Queensland notes that while the event saw a 'surge in major sporting event volunteering,' this engagement 'did not translate into long-term growth in club-based and community volunteering'. In fact, some local sporting clubs reported a decline in volunteer participation post-Games. This outcome is attributed to a lack of a structured legacy plan, with resources and attention remaining concentrated on elite sporting events rather than grassroots engagement. The lesson from research by Professor Leonie Lockstone-Binney, cited in the Cancer Council's submission, is that a lack of formal strategy, as seen in Sydney 2000, or a strategy that bypasses existing infrastructure, as seen in London 2012, limits long-term impact and knowledge transfer.⁵⁰⁰ The solution appears to lie in collaboration between Games organisers and the third sector, a unified approach that ensures the surge of Games volunteers is supported to remain engaged in Queensland's broader volunteer ecosystem.

Committee comment



The committee acknowledges that the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games represent a monumental opportunity for Queensland, extending far beyond the realm of sport to serve as a powerful catalyst for social and economic development.

A central pillar of this potential is the revitalisation and long-term sustainability of the state's volunteer sector.

While the Games can galvanise a new era of volunteering, it could also be accompanied by the potential for a temporary drain on existing community volunteer programs and a dissipation of interest after the Games have finished.

⁵⁰⁰ Submission 441, p 9.

8. Terms of Reference part 7

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 7 of the terms of reference:

Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery

The committee heard that emergency service volunteers are facing a growing workload due to more frequent climate-induced disasters and a decline in volunteer numbers. The foundation of Queensland's disaster management framework is built upon a collaborative, partnership-based approach that is demonstrably dependent on the critical contributions of volunteers.⁵⁰¹ The Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA) formally recognise two primary types of volunteers: trained volunteers, who are associated with established organisations such as the State Emergency Service (SES); and spontaneous volunteers, who are often untrained but highly motivated community members⁵⁰², such as the Mud Army.

Established volunteer organisations, particularly the SES, provide a diverse and essential range of services that are integral to community safety and resilience. A submitter noted that the 'Townsville Units undertake activities' working with the QPS for 'land, river, and coastal marine searches for missing people', to storm damage and flooding response, chainsaw operations, evacuation / rescue, road crash rescue aerial surveillance, traffic management and incident management'.⁵⁰³ These professional and multi-faceted capabilities are the bedrock of the state's emergency response system.

The committee have identified that the most prevalent challenges, as identified by submitters to the inquiry, can be categorised under the following 4 general themes:

- increased demand and strained capacity
- navigating the spontaneous volunteer paradigm
- systemic and governance barriers
- socio-economic and employment related impediments.

8.1 Increased demand and strained capacity

The Australian Red Cross notes that demands on volunteer workforces are increasing, particularly in Queensland, which is identified as the most disaster-prone state in the country.⁵⁰⁴ The data from the 2023-24 IGEM Report confirms this trend, highlighting that 12 disaster events occurred in a mere seven-month period, with 66 of the state's 77 local

⁵⁰¹ Submission 567, p 16.

⁵⁰² Interim Queensland Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery Disaster Management Guideline 2024-2, pp 29 and 31.

⁵⁰³ Submission 153, p 2.

⁵⁰⁴ Submission 224, p 6.

government areas activated for disaster recovery funding.⁵⁰⁵ This unprecedented frequency and severity of events have placed an immense strain on existing volunteer organisations.

The central challenge facing emergency volunteering in Queensland appears to be a self-perpetuating cycle of increasing demands, declining numbers, and subsequent volunteer burnout. The confluence of more climate-induced disasters and a gradual decline in volunteer numbers has also led to a proportional increase in the workload for remaining volunteers in organisations like the SES, Rural Fire Service (RFS), and Australian Rescue and Communications Emergency Services (ARCES).⁵⁰⁶ The sheer volume of this workload is substantial; from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, SES volunteers completed 136,083 operational hours, more than 333,356 hours in preparation and training, and responded to more than 16,133 requests for assistance.⁵⁰⁷ This level of commitment illustrates that emergency volunteering is no longer just a periodic commitment but a significant, sustained demand that challenges the traditional concept of volunteering as a part-time, ad-hoc activity. The volunteer workforce is thus operating at an unprecedented and increasingly high operational tempo, a dynamic that is at the heart of the challenges facing the system.

One submitter with extensive SES volunteer experience, highlighted a significant problem of post-event burnout of existing volunteers after major disaster events. This burnout could be masked by a sudden, post-event surge of new members who wish to assist, as seen after the 2011 and 2022 floods. The issue with this influx is that it can place a further workload on existing, and often exhausted, volunteer trainers, who are then responsible for the rapid onboarding and training of a large cohort in a very short time. The system's inability to efficiently manage this surge means a major recruitment opportunity can inadvertently add to the burden on its most critical assets: the long-serving, experienced volunteers who are responsible for training the next generation. The gradual decline of approximately 5,000 SES volunteers over the past decade is a direct consequence of this unsustainable operational model.⁵⁰⁸

8.2 Navigating the spontaneous volunteer paradigm

The spontaneous volunteer phenomenon presents a complex challenge. While submissions laud their 'from the heart' assistance and acknowledge their essential role in response and recovery⁵⁰⁹, their management presents a host of logistical and legal challenges. Submissions from Mayor Amy Eden from Cairns Regional Council and the Logan City Council identify significant hurdles in managing emergent volunteers, including issues with insurance, coordination, logistics, and safety.⁵¹⁰

A primary barrier is the fact that spontaneous volunteers are often an 'unskilled/untrained workforce'. This lack of training makes obtaining insurance coverage for them 'extremely difficult' and can lead to significant delays in the activation of community recovery efforts.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁵ Submission 224, p 8.

⁵⁰⁶ Submission 21, p 1.

⁵⁰⁷ Submission 567, p 7.

⁵⁰⁸ Submission 567, p 6.

⁵⁰⁹ Submission 2, p 2.

⁵¹⁰ Submission 325, p 1., and Submission 503, p 3.

⁵¹¹ Submission 503, p 4.

The submission from Cairns' Mayor Eden highlight that the absence of capable Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs) and the limitations of the current EV CREW model place an 'excessive burden' on local governments.⁵¹² The EV CREW stands for Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather and was created by Volunteering Queensland in response to the unprecedented outpouring of volunteer support in the wake of extreme weather in 2008 and was used again during the 2010-11 Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi disasters.⁵¹³ This analysis points to a significant policy gap: while the QDMA acknowledges the existence of both trained and spontaneous volunteers, the state-level framework to support the safe, legal, and efficient management of the latter is insufficient, leaving local governments to bear the full weight of the liability and logistical complexities.

8.3 Systemic and governance barriers

Beyond the immediate operational issues, deeper systemic and governance challenges impede the effectiveness and sustainability of the volunteer workforce. The Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland, for example, advocates for a fully independent Rural Fire Service, expressing a fundamental disconnect between their volunteer community-based organisation and their administration by a paid, paramilitary based, response orientated city centric organisation. This sentiment reflects a broader issue of cultural and governance misalignment.

The existing framework is often seen as a one size does not fit all model that fails to recognise the unique needs and risk profiles of different Queensland regions. This top-down approach can undermine local expertise and autonomy. A specific example of this is the concern that out-of-state crews are sometimes brought in when local volunteers are available. This practice not only fails to make better use of local expertise but can also signal a lack of respect and appreciation for the commitment of Queensland's own volunteers, creating friction and undermining morale. A similar legislative issue is raised by Ethan Barr, who advocates for aligning Queensland's legislation to enable SES volunteers to receive standardised emergency driving training, a move that would not only enhance operational efficiency but also serve as a form of critical recognition and support.⁵¹⁴ The need for streamlined communication channels and formal integration of volunteer organisations into emergency management plans further highlights the current lack of a cohesive, partnered governance structure.

8.4 Socio-economic and employment related impediments

Economic and employment-related factors present significant barriers to volunteer recruitment and retention. A submitter points out that while many working-age individuals would like to volunteer, they are unable to due to financial constraints' stemming from unstable employment and high living costs. This creates a direct competition between emergency volunteering and paying employers, particularly as the cost-of-living pressures increase.⁵¹⁵

For businesses, particularly private enterprise, the disincentives are equally potent. Brian Marfleet's submission notes that the loss of an employee to an emergency response leaves a business at a disadvantage, especially where 'efficacy is of primary concern'. There is

⁵¹² Submission 326, p 6.

⁵¹³ Emergency Volunteering, <https://emergencyvolunteering.com.au>

⁵¹⁴ Submission 23, p 1.

⁵¹⁵ Submission 567, pp 9-10.

currently 'little incentive' for businesses to support volunteer emergency services, a dynamic that challenges the traditional social contract where individuals contribute their time and employers support that commitment.⁵¹⁶ This breakdown of the socio-economic foundation of volunteering is a major contributor to the decline in participation and is not a problem that can be solved with traditional recruitment campaigns alone. It requires a policy-level intervention that redefines the relationship between an individual's employment, their civic duty, and the state's emergency preparedness.

Committee comment



The committee acknowledges that the Queensland Government emergency and disaster response services have been the subject of a number of independent reviews and reform processes in recent years.

It is important that the government consider all submissions that relate to SES and RFSQ volunteering, in the context of the previous reform processes, and support a coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing volunteer concerns.

Submitters have indicated a desire for greater autonomy and flexibility and a move away from a current centralised bureaucracy that has led to communication lags, delays in decision-making and responsiveness to local RFSQ and SES unit requirements.

⁵¹⁶ Submission 50, p 9.

9. Terms of Reference part 8

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 8 of the terms of reference:

First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap

The following 3 key themes have been identified by the committee:

- deficiencies in recruitment and cultural safety
- financial and administrative impediments
- co-designed and locally led frameworks.

The submissions received by the committee reveal a drive to expand the conventional definition of volunteering to include diverse cultural expressions and interpretations. The Smith Family's submission explicitly recognises that activities that support 'community, mob and family' constitute a form of 'time-giving' that holds an important place in First Nations culture.⁵¹⁷ This perspective challenges the traditional view of volunteering as an activity performed for an external organisation, separate from one's personal and familial duties. Instead, it suggests an understanding where volunteering is intrinsically linked to cultural obligations and the preservation of social and cultural capital.

This dissonance between conventional understandings and the First Nations experience has profound implications for existing volunteer recruitment and recognition frameworks. These frameworks, often based on a transactional model that measures hours logged or specific tasks completed, are ill-equipped to capture, support, or even acknowledge the significant contributions made by First Nations people within their own communities. For volunteer policy to be effective, it should first be culturally competent.

The recognition of activities like 'time-giving' for community and family as a form of volunteering is a step towards a more inclusive approach. Bernard Jean's submission further reinforces this, highlighting the 'priceless' nature of First Nations volunteering, particularly their invaluable knowledge of 'the country and the environment'.⁵¹⁸ This cultural knowledge, shared through uncompensated effort, is an essential contribution that the current transactional model of volunteering would likely overlook.

9.1 Deficiencies in recruitment and cultural safety

While First Nations volunteering is foundational to community well-being, several systemic barriers impede broader participation. A submitter notes that a significant impediment is a lack of concerted effort to include First Nations people in recruitment drives.⁵¹⁹ This deficiency, however, is not a simple failure of outreach. It is a symptom of a deeper, more profound issue: a lack of cultural competence and safety within the volunteer sector.

Both the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) and DV Safe Phone highlight the critical need to educate and resource the volunteer sector to provide cultural safety and co-

⁵¹⁷ Submission 31, p 5.

⁵¹⁸ Submission 190, p 1.

⁵¹⁹ Submission 228, p 9.

design opportunities.⁵²⁰ The evidence indicates that even if recruitment efforts were to be increased, the underlying volunteer-sector organisations may lack the cultural training and safe environments necessary to retain First Nations volunteers. An absence of cultural safety becomes a powerful deterrent, nullifying the impact of any recruitment efforts. The problem is not merely one of visibility, but of a fundamental structural incompatibility. It points to a need for foundational change in organisational culture and practice, rather than just superficial changes to marketing strategies.

9.2 Financial and administrative impediments

In addition to cultural barriers, there are tangible, practical impediments to First Nations volunteering. The FRRR point to a 2023 report, 'Barriers to Volunteering: National Knowledge Base,' which identifies several key areas for reform, including eliminating unnecessary paperwork, reimbursing volunteer costs, and providing appropriate training.⁵²¹

The evidence points to a tension between the nature of First Nations volunteerism and the financial and administrative burdens imposed by conventional volunteering structures. For many volunteers, particularly those in remote or financially strained communities, the cost of volunteering, such as travel and supplies, can be a significant and prohibitive burden. This turns an activity that is invaluable in its social and cultural impact into one that carries a tangible, and often untenable, personal cost. The conventional volunteer model, which often relies on the volunteer's ability to absorb these costs, is therefore inherently inequitable and a discriminatory barrier to participation, particularly when applied to First Nations peoples in remote or discrete communities. Any effective policy must not only acknowledge the cultural value of this work but also provide the financial and administrative support required to make it accessible and sustainable.

9.3 Co-designed and locally led frameworks

9.3.1 From top-down to co-designed frameworks

Numerous submissions highlight the vital shift from prescriptive, top-down frameworks to genuine partnership and co-design. While Southern Downs Steam Railway Association Inc. suggests developing 'culturally appropriate frameworks',⁵²² DV Safe Phone emphasises the importance of co-designing initiatives *with* First Nations leaders.⁵²³ There is a clear distinction between simply creating a framework *for* a community and collaborating on the *process* of its creation. The success of any framework is contingent upon trust. The DV Safe Phone submission states that co-design is necessary to 'build trust and capacity over time' and that initiatives should be tailored to the 'cultural context and specific needs' of communities.⁵²⁴ This suggests that a framework developed externally, no matter how well-intentioned, would likely be met with mistrust and fail to gain traction.

⁵²⁰ Submission 235, p 5., and Submission 245, p 4.

⁵²¹ Submission 235, p 5., and Barriers to Volunteering: National Knowledge Base, 2023

⁵²² Submission 83, p 1.

⁵²³ Submission 245, p 4.

⁵²⁴ Submission 245, pp 4-5.

9.3.2 The case for locally-led hubs

The success of models like the Community Justice Groups (CJGs) and the call for locally-led hubs, serves as a potential blueprint for success in the volunteering landscape. The Department of Justice submission describes CJGs as being run by community members who determine their own staffing and volunteer structures based on ‘local needs’. This success stems from their ability to respond to specific, context-dependent needs and to rely on the volunteer support of trusted Elders and Respected Persons.⁵²⁵

The evidence suggests that a one-size-fits-all, centrally-managed volunteer program would be ill-equipped to handle the specific needs of diverse First Nations communities. The call from DV Safe Phone for supporting the creation of ‘locally led volunteer hubs in remote and discrete communities’ reinforces this point.⁵²⁶ The submissions collectively argue for a policy directive where funding and support are directed toward strengthening the capacity of local communities to self-organise and govern their own volunteer efforts. This represents a fundamental move away from a service delivery model and toward a capacity-building model, which empowers communities to lead their own change.

Committee comment



The committee acknowledges that an effective path forward is to empower and resource community-led initiatives that acknowledge and build upon the unique cultural expressions of First Nations ‘time-giving,’ rather than attempting to fit them into conventional volunteering frameworks.

The submissions received by the committee demonstrate that meaningful engagement requires genuine partnership, cultural sensitivity, and the dismantling of systemic barriers—both cultural and administrative – and there may be a need to shift from asking ‘how can we get First Nations people to volunteer?’ to ‘how can we support and enable the volunteering that is already happening within First Nations communities?’



Recommendation 8

The government should investigate a policy approach where government and volunteering organisations act as facilitators, providing resources and platforms for First Nations and multicultural communities to develop their own solutions.

⁵²⁵ Submission 283, p 3.

⁵²⁶ Submission 245, p 5.

10. Terms of Reference part 9

This section discusses key themes which were raised during the committee Inquiry that were relevant to part 9 of the terms of reference:

Any other relevant matters, including academic and other diverse sources, and any relevant reports and reviews at the national level and across other states and territories.

The following reports, reviews and academic research papers were used to inform the committee on the current state of volunteering and addressing the inquiry Terms of Reference.

10.1 Reports and reviews

- 2023-24 Severe Weather Season Review - Report 1:2024-25, Inspector-General Emergency Management
- 2024 report by the Parliament of Australia's Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
- Barriers to Volunteering: National Knowledge Base Report, 2023
- Final Report for a Complaints System Review Prepared for the Queensland Fire Department (3 September 2024)
- Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry (31 July 2020)
- Game Changers Report, April 2024, Urbis and QDN
- Independent Review of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, Final Report (2 November 2021)
- National Strategy Action Plan 2024-2027, Volunteering Australia
- National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, Volunteering Australia
- Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry 2012: Final Report
- Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report (28 October 2020)
- SES Review (Sustaining the SES – Partnering for Change) 2020
- State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report, Volunteering Queensland
- State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Youth Report, Volunteering Queensland
- State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Older People, Volunteering Queensland
- State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report, Volunteering Queensland
- Successfully Engaging Volunteers with Disability, Queenslanders with Disability Network
- The Game Changers Report by Queenslanders with Disability Network and Urbis
- Tropical North Queensland: Green and Blue Economic Stimulus Package (July 2020)

- VIO Online Accessibility Survey, Executive Summary, Measuring the digital inclusion of volunteer involving organisations, August 2023, Volunteering Peak Bodies.

10.2 Academic and other sources

- Evaluating the volunteering infrastructure legacy of the Olympic Games: Sydney 2000 and London 2012, Professor Leonie Lockstone-Binney, 2016
- Helping and caring, not only our family: NT Indigenous perspectives on volunteering, by Michaela Spencer, Michael Christie, Andrea Lee, and Ruth Wallace, 2016, Charles Sturt University.
- Hussain Baba, Multicultural Social Network Inc - #129 'Exploring the Underrepresentation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Muslims in Formal Inter-Community Volunteering: A Study of Barriers and Motivations.' – Phd research QUT
- Jedwab, C. (2023). Volunteering inclusion for people from CALD backgrounds. Volunteering Australia, https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/VRP_Volunteering-inclusionfor-people-from-CALD-backgrounds; https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/VRP_Volunteering-inclusion-for-people-from-CALD-backgrounds.pdf
- Darja Kragt & Djurre Holtrop (2019) Volunteering research in Australia: A narrative review, Australian Journal of Psychology, 71:4, 342-360.

Appendix A – Submitters

<i>Sub No.</i>	<i>Name / Organisation</i>
1	Name Withheld
2	Mareeba Meals on Wheels
3	Name Withheld
4	Ethan Csukardy
5	Name Withheld
6	Lights on the Hill Trucking Memorial Incorporated
7	Maleny Show Society Inc
8	Stephen Bartholomew
9	Peter Aarsse
10	Confidential
11	Confidential
12	James Mackland
13	Alison Faigniez
14	Graham Mapri
15	Melanie Annand
16	Paul Wilson
17	Confidential
18	Sarah Bennett
19	Name Withheld
20	Madonna Waugh
21	Name Withheld
22	Name Withheld
23	Ethan Barr
24	Name Withheld
25	Name Withheld
26	Donna Kopke
27	Name Withheld
28	Name Withheld
29	Confidential
30	Karen Dawes

31	Name Withheld
32	Stephen Burnett
33	Len Mitcham
34	Sioux Campbell
35	Name Withheld
36	Guy Hickey
37	Gina Griffin
38	Name Withheld
39	Dianne Mead
40	Mary Valley Rattler
41	Susann Vetma
42	Bloodbikes Australia
43	Name Withheld
44	Clinton Williams
45	Nick Samson
46	Roma Show Society
47	Emma Salmon
48	Name Withheld
49	Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre Inc
50	Brian Marfleet
51	Rebecca McLellan
52	Nicole Graham
53	Damini Women's Association of Queensland Inc
54	Name Withheld
55	Beverley Ann Smith OAM
56	Elizabeth Dillon
57	Roland Fearnley
58	Name Withheld
59	Capricorn Coast Historical Society
60	Federal Rural Fire Brigade
61	Confidential
62	David Taylor
63	Aussie Wildlife Limited

64	Zoe Kemp
65	Matthew Gartrell
66	Sophie Leonard
67	Chris Drake
68	Name Withheld
69	Name Withheld
70	Name Withheld
71	Confidential
72	Gregory Lincoln
73	Ben Styles
74	William Boyd
75	Central Tech Rescue Inc
76	Confidential
77	Name Withheld
78	Robert Plummer
79	Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland Inc.
80	Anthony Young
81	Name Withheld
82	Robert Gluch
83	Southern Downs Steam Railway Association Inc
84	Name Withheld
85	Name Withheld
86	Meals on Wheels Cairns
87	Clifton Benchrest Shooting Club Inc
88	Bernadine McKean
89	Jonathan Carman
90	Bulimba Community Centre
91	Cycling Without Age Australia Inc – Chapters
92	Margaret McGrath
93	Name Withheld
94	Name Withheld
95	Name Withheld
96	Confidential

97	Leslie Green AFSM
98	Townsville Basketball Incorporated
99	Confidential
100	Name Withheld
101	Peter Stock
102	Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc
103	Confidential
104	Name Withheld
105	Tamborine Mountain Bowls Club
106	Name Withheld
107	Susan Gauld
108	Name Withheld
109	Name Withheld
110	Name Withheld
111	Name Withheld
112	Brendan Thomas
113	Michael Barwick
114	Bayside Strikers Football Club
115	Fergus Seawright
116	Name Withheld
117	Confidential
118	Name Withheld
119	Lockyer Cricket Association
120	South Burnett Rugby League Inc
121	Michael Anderson
122	Name Withheld
123	Granite Belt Ladies Shed Inc
124	Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Users Association Inc
125	Confidential
126	Stephen Berquist
127	Elliott Heads Surf Lifesaving Club Inc
128	Gerry McKeering
129	Multicultural Social Network Inc

130	Name Withheld
131	Clementine Livalosa
132	Name Withheld
133	Lorraine Heyes
134	Name Withheld
135	Sunshine Coast Council
136	Freddy Bear Foundation
137	Confidential
138	Caitie Becker
139	Alice Carwardine
140	Jamshed Bulsara
141	Holland Park Hawks Football Club
142	Pat Janes
143	Stan Rasmussen
144	Coral Carmichael
145	Tobias Kennett
146	Boxing Queensland Inc.
147	Toowong and District Historical Society Inc
148	Warren Kuskopf
149	Name Withheld
150	Joan Kennedy
151	Tracey Bugenhagen
152	Frog Safe Inc
153	Name Withheld
154	Gladstone Orchid and Foliage Society Inc
155	Name Withheld
156	Name Withheld
157	Confidential
158	Derek Firman
159	Name Withheld
160	Vicki Bastin-Byrne
161	Rick Hansen
162	Get Around Caboolture

163	Ian Kebblewhite
164	Confidential
165	Lions of Dayboro Inc
166	Name Withheld
167	Name Withheld
168	RACT Association Qld Inc
169	ChaplainWatch
170	Brisbane Jets Swimming Club Inc
171	Confidential
172	Taryn Powell
173	Elizabeth Goodsell
174	Lyndal Hansen
175	Name Withheld
176	Ross McClure
177	Name Withheld
178	John Stalker
179	John McCaffery
180	Name Withheld
181	Wallumbilla Town Improvement Group
182	Spinal Life Australia & Sporting Wheelies
183	Name Withheld
184	Name Withheld
185	The Boys' Brigade Queensland
186	Nat Sullivan
187	Christopher Baker
188	Bellvista and Bells Reach Community Association
189	Confidential
190	Bernard Jean
191	Name Withheld
192	Name Withheld
193	Gympie Medical Transport Inc
194	City of Gold Coast
195	Sherry Tusler

196	Narangba Crows AFC
197	Arts Connect Inc
198	Josie Morris
199	Name Withheld
200	Name Withheld
201	Music Broadcasting Society of Queensland Ltd
202	Kevin McAney
203	Jill Cutting
204	Dougal Pitt
205	Queensland Youth Policy Collective
206	Andrew Clegg
207	Stanthorpe Training Centre Inc
208	Name Withheld
209	FESTURI – a multicultural celebration Inc.
210	Name Withheld
211	The Rotary Club of Gladstone Sunrise
212	Balonne Shire Council
213	Loris Doessel
214	Confidential
215	Tony Gibson
216	Name Withheld
217	Name Withheld
218	Survivors of Suicide Bereavement Support Association Inc
219	Linese Norrish
220	Mount Mee Rural Fire Brigade – Rural Fire Service Queensland
221	Confidential
222	Jill Vardy
223	Jessica Fealy
224	Australian Red Cross
225	Name Withheld
226	Boyne Tannum Football Club
227	Name Withheld
228	Name Withheld

229	Gold Coast Justices Association Incorporated
230	Janny Spilsbury-Schakel
231	Cystic Fibrosis Queensland
232	Nicole Verwey-Baker
233	Name Withheld
234	Mackay Conservation Group
235	Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR)
236	THRIVE Logan
237	Biddaddaba Rural Fire Brigade
238	Denise Little
239	North Shore Community Centre Inc
240	Carmel Daveson
241	José Martín Mendizabal
242	Name Withheld
243	Buderim Men's Shed Inc
244	Andy Parkinson
245	DV Safe Phone
246	Australian Sporting Alliance for People with a Disability -ASAPD
247	Settlement Services International (SSI)
248	The Leukaemia Foundation
249	Name Withheld
250	Cairns Region Toy Library
251	Bundaberg Street Law Ltd
252	Name Withheld
253	Confidential
254	Name Withheld
255	PCYC Queensland
256	Queensland Theatre of Puppetry
257	New Beginnings International Association Inc
258	Gail Zunker
259	Fraser Coast Regional Council
260	commonkind
261	John Purnell

262	Peter Maher OAM
263	Name Withheld
264	Maroochy River Rowing Club
265	Name Withheld
266	Paul Hutchison
267	Eacham Community Help Organisation Inc
268	Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University
269	Confidential
270	Name Withheld
271	Kyron Halleday
272	Victoria Nancarrow
273	Campbell Hair
274	Margaret Greenway
275	Jim Groves
276	Name Withheld
277	Valdora Community Hall Assoc Inc
278	Co.As.It. Community Services Ltd
279	Phillip Robson
280	Ian Swadling
281	Cheryl Pershouse
282	Glen Trulson
283	Department of Justice
284	Jeanette Chalmers
285	Confidential
286	John Learmont
287	Brendan Gigante
288	John Mabb
289	Liz Bourne
290	Jacqueline Choquenot
291	Toowoomba Regional Council
292	Stella Wheildon
293	Nicole Lobegeier
294	Name Withheld

295	Zonta Club of Gladstone
296	Name Withheld
297	HopgoodGanim Lawyers
298	Mackay Regional Council
299	Name Withheld
300	Heidi Mckellar
301	Geoff Smith
302	Nigel Weekes
303	Karen Williams
304	Motor Neurone Disease Queensland
305	Diana Korving
306	Name Withheld
307	Samantha Bryan
308	Paul Beckmann
309	Name Withheld
310	The Carpenter's Workshop
311	Motorsport Australia
312	Debra Ottway
313	Gillian Kidd
314	Name Withheld
315	Communify Qld
316	Roma on Bungil Gallery Inc
317	Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games
318	Robyn Sharry
319	Active Queenslanders Industry Alliance
320	Eric Turner
321	Name Withheld
322	Confidential
323	Reading Writing Hotline
324	Queensland Air Museum
325	Holly Macdonald
326	Mayor Amy Eden, Cairns Regional Council
327	Georgia Kiepe

328	Confidential
329	Robert Zigterman
330	4ZZZ FM
331	The Smith Family
332	The Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses Inc.
333	Queensland Country Women's Association
334	Agora Community Development
335	Samford & District Rugby League Club
336	Charis Mullen MP, State Member for Jordan
337	Carole Hourston
338	Alford Park Tennis Club Inc
339	Confidential
340	The Pyjama Foundation
341	Name Withheld
342	William Sim
343	Blackwater Clay Target Club Inc
344	Margaret Reid
345	Youthspace Gayndah
346	Name Withheld
347	Port Curtis Historical Society
348	Sandy Bolton MP, Member for Noosa
349	Stanwell Progress Association Incorporated
350	Glynis Myers
351	Wondai Proston Wolves Rugby League
352	Goodna & Districts Gymnastics Club Inc
353	Sunshine Coast Table Tennis Club
354	Gladstone Australian Football Club Inc.
355	Michael Hetherington
356	Peter Dawson
357	Lions Clubs International District 201Q3
358	Multicultural Australia
359	Fiona Hawthorne
360	Animal Welfare League of Queensland

361	Lockyer Valley Regional Council
362	Ceramic Arts Queensland
363	Headspace Gladstone
364	Brian Pike
365	McCosker Contracting Pty Ltd
366	The Boyne Tannum HookUp Association Incorporated
367	Lloyd Harth
368	Queensland Homicide Victims Support Group
369	FNQ Volunteers Inc
370	Young Veterans Central Queensland
371	Name Withheld
372	Name Withheld
373	Professor Sarah Baker and Dr Zelmari Cantillon
374	NFP House
375	Confidential
376	Tina Smith
377	Name Withheld
378	Leanne Christensen
379	Rotary International Districts 9620, 9640, 9560
380	Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association
381	Confidential
382	Confidential
383	Confidential
384	Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS)
385	Anne Tennock
386	Name Withheld
387	Blackall Range Woodcrafters Guild Inc.
388	PeakCare
389	National Council of Women of Queensland Inc.
390	Name Withheld
391	Queensland Rugby League
392	Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society (Woodford Rail)
393	Welcoming Australia

394	Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland
395	Confidential
396	Name Withheld
397	Australian Centre for Regional Events
398	Owners Corporation Network of Australia Ltd
399	Eildon Croquet Club Inc
400	FNQ Diverse Communities Council Inc.
401	The Lighthouse Toowoomba \ The Child Writes Fund
402	Stanthorpe & Granite Belt Community Radio
403	Community media researchers within the Griffith Centre of Social and Cultural Research
404	Trevor Emerson
405	Jennifer Horne
406	Western Downs Regional Council
407	Confidential
408	Gin Gin Agricultural, Industrial and Pastoral Show Society Inc.
409	Traralgon Rural Fire Brigade
410	Cairns Couch Ltd
411	Suncare Community Services
412	Queensland Rural Regional & Remote Womens Network
413	Serving Our People Inc.
414	Community Development Institute Initiative
415	Protect All Children Today
416	Surf Life Saving Queensland
417	Outdoors Queensland
418	Australian Red Cross Bundaberg Branch
419	The Salvation Army Australia Territory
420	Michele Muckle
421	Central Highlands Development Corporation - Central Queensland
422	2Spirits & The Queensland Council for LGBTI Health
423	Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Office of Industrial Relations
424	Australian Sports Commission
425	Name Withheld
426	Royal Queensland Art Society Inc

427	Play Matters Australia
428	Gold Coast Mid-Week Ladies Tennis Association Inc.
429	Queensland Institute of Clinical Pastoral Education
430	Volunteering Gold Coast
431	Teresa Stanton
432	Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management
433	Queensland Water and Land Carers
434	Business Chamber Queensland
435	Woodfordia Inc
436	Gladstone Regional Council
437	Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited
438	Neighbourhood Centres Queensland
439	Girl Guides Queensland
440	Name Withheld
441	Cancer Council Queensland
442	Support Groups Queensland Inc
443	Malcolm Spiden
444	Friends of Parks Queensland Incorporated
445	Dr Caroline Riot – Griffith University
446	National Seniors Australia
447	Community Support Centre Innisfail Inc
448	Maynard Heap
449	Volunteering Sunshine Coast Inc
450	Confidential
451	Atherton Tableland Agricultural Society
452	Howard Community Centre
453	Queensland Music Network Incorporated (QMusic)
454	QSport
455	The Scout Association of Australia, Queensland Branch Inc.
456	Name Withheld
457	Matthew Turnour
458	Name Withheld
459	Confidential

460	Amy Patterson-Kane
461	Eboni Chapman
462	Rotary EClub Australia Nomads
463	AFL Queensland
464	Tracey Slean
465	Menessia Nagie
466	Name Withheld
467	Vikki Baldwin
468	Buderim Firebirds Netball Club
469	Cook Shire Council
470	Colin Boyce MP
471	Name Withheld
472	Name Withheld
473	Confidential
474	Jeffery Cheyne
475	Name Withheld
476	Woodford Agricultural, Pastoral and Industrial Association Inc
477	Robbie Katter MP
478	Little Athletics Queensland
479	Sustainability Focus
480	Confidential
481	Queensland Walks Incorporated
482	Meals on Wheels Queensland
483	Sunshine Coast 2032
484	Sunshine Coast Agricultural Show Society
485	Mater Group
486	Confidential
487	Council on the Ageing Queensland
488	RSL Queensland
489	Biggenden Women's Shed Association Inc.
490	Rosies - Friends on the Street
491	South East Queensland Catchment Members Association
492	Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association Inc.

493	Confidential
494	Burnett Inland Economic Development Organisation
495	PCYC Emergency Services Cadets
496	Ronald McDonald House Charities South East Queensland
497	The Historical Society Cairns North Queensland Inc
498	Confidential
499	Name Withheld
500	Darryl Prizeman
501	Discovery Coast Tourism & Commerce Inc
502	Townsville Lot Owners Group
503	Logan City Council
504	Lee Hayter
505	Pacific Islands Council of Qld
506	RSL Gracemere & District Sub Branch
507	Adventure HQ Inc
508	Logan Dementia Alliance (LDA)
509	Wade Hart
510	Logan Dementia Choir, Woodlands Neighbourhood Watch
511	Daniel Cordner
512	Confidential
513	Confidential
514	Name Withheld
515	Gail Rodda
516	Name Withheld
517	Frank McKee
518	Fergus Adrian
519	Qld State Emergency Service Volunteers Association Inc
520	OzHarvest Queensland
521	Drug ARM
522	Polonia Polish Association of Qld Inc trading as The Polish Club Milton
523	Steven Dalton
524	Name Withheld
525	Guide Dogs Queensland

526	Lance Mergard
527	P Milo Frawley
528	Autism Gold Coast
529	1770 Art Show Inc
530	Queensland Fire Department
531	The Lottery Corporation
532	Department of Education
533	Clubs Queensland
534	Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)
535	Confidential
536	Archdiocese of Brisbane
537	Name Withheld
538	Legal Aid Queensland
539	Vicki Callinan
540	Callide Dawson Pistol Club
541	Name Withheld
542	Volunteering North Queensland
543	Name Withheld
544	Volunteering Queensland
545	Totally and Permanently Disabled Ex Servicepersons Association (Townsville) Inc
546	Tablelands Regional Council
547	Name Withheld
548	Cairns & Region Multicultural Association
549	Queensland Law Society
550	Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)
551	Mary-Lou Gittins OAM
552	Confidential
553	Better Together Community Support Inc
554	Graham House Community Centre
555	Lifeline Australia
556	UnitingCare Queensland
557	Croquet Association of Queensland
558	P&Cs Qld

559	Gailes Community House
560	Community Plus Queensland Inc
561	Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast Open House and Toowoomba Open House
562	Matthew Crossley
563	Mark McLachlan
564	John Mansell
565	Dalby and District Show Society Inc.
566	Quota Carindale
567	Queensland Police Service
568	Gympie Show Society Inc
569	Insurance Council of Australia
570	Queensland Gives by Queensland Community Foundation
571	Nikki Bennett

Appendix B – Public Briefing, 19 February 2025

Department of Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service

Ms Linda Dobe

Director-General

Ms Bernadette Zerba

Deputy Director-General

Individuals

Organisations

Mr Darryl Byrne President

Mrs Glenda Stimson President

Mrs Jennifer Ziesemer

Mrs Beth Wood Treasurer

Ms Sharlene Smith Vice President

Councillor Kylie Bourne Deputy Mayor

Individuals

Ms Maureen Allen

Mr Robert Bundy

Councillor Jane Erkens

Mr John McKee

Mr Nathan Moody

Mr Steven Paull

Organisations

Ms Jessica Neumann

Ms Georgina Hart Volunteer

Dr Danielle Jackman

Mr Kelly Egan

Mr Daniel Nipperess General Manager

Mrs Emma Mactaggart

Public Hearing - Gympie, 25 March 2025Organisations**Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland**

Mr Justin Choveaux	General Manager
--------------------	-----------------

Gympie Regional Council

Ms Andree Stark	Manager, Community and Commercial Services
-----------------	--

Ms Alex Stengl	Director, Community Sustainability
----------------	------------------------------------

Gympie Medical Transport Inc.

Ms Sally Carkeet	President
------------------	-----------

Ms Beverley Goodall	Secretary
---------------------	-----------

Mary Valley Rattler

Mrs Sherry Lowe	General Manager
-----------------	-----------------

Gympie and District Landcare Group

Ms Alexandra Van Beek	President
-----------------------	-----------

Public Hearing - Sunshine Coast, 26 March 2025Individual

Mrs Michelle Acworth	
----------------------	--

Organisations**Federal Rural Fire Brigade**

Mr Ian Pike AFSM	First Officer
------------------	---------------

Traralgon Rural Fire Brigade

Mr Simon O'Donnell	
--------------------	--

Volunteering Sunshine Coast Inc.

Mr Michael Moodie	Chief Executive Officer
-------------------	-------------------------

Ms Caroline Patton	Board President
--------------------	-----------------

Queensland Water and Land Carers

Mr Michael Bond CSC and Bar	Vice-Chair
-----------------------------	------------

Ms Mary-Lou Gittins OAM	Chair
-------------------------	-------

Sunshine Coast 2032

Ms Kaitlyn Akers	Deputy Chair, Volunteer and Community Committee
------------------	---

Ms Roz White	Chair
--------------	-------

Sunshine Coast Council

Ms Wendy Guthrie	Team Leader, Sport Planning and Development
------------------	---

Public Hearing - Brisbane, 2 April 2025Organisations**Australian Red Cross**

Mr Colin Sivalingum	Queensland Director
Mr Mark Warnock	Senior Advisor, External Engagement
Ms Sarah Strathearn	Director, South Australia, National Member and Volunteer Strategic Initiatives

Griffith University for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University

Dr Diti Bhattacharya	Senior Research Fellow
Dr Adele Pavlidis	

Queensland State Emergency Service Volunteer Association Inc

Mr Edward Cowie	State President
-----------------	-----------------

QSport

Mr Tim Klar	Chief Executive Officer
Ms Alison Lyons	Deputy Chair

Surf Lifesaving Queensland

Mr Dave Whimpey	Chief Executive Officer
Ms Kirsten Phillips	Membership Services Officer

Volunteering Queensland

Ms Jane Hedger	Chief Executive Officer
Mr Andrew Bartlett	Policy & Advocacy Advisor

Public Hearing - Brisbane, 30 April 2025Organisations**Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network Inc.**

Ms Emma Clarke	President
----------------	-----------

Multicultural Australia

Mrs Christine Castley	Chief Executive Officer
Ms Kalpalata Iyer	Research & Advocacy Manager
Mr Jeril Thomas	Regional Manager, Ipswich and Cultural Intelligence Trainer

Queenslanders with Disability Network

Mr Steve Coulter	General Manager
------------------	-----------------

commonkind

Ms Carolina Puleston	Chief Executive Officer and Founder
Mrs Ester Willims	Board Chair
Miss Evie Wright	Volunteer

Queensland Youth Policy Collective

Miss Morgan Lynch

P&Cs Queensland

Ms Clare O'Brien	Strategic Partnerships Manager
Mr Scott Wiseman	Chief Executive Officer

Public Hearing - Roma, 15 May 2025Individuals

Ms Juliette Wright OAM
 Mrs Karen Dawes
 Mr Ken Dawes

Organisations**Roma Show Society**

Mr Geoff McMullen	Executive Member
Mrs Julie Nixon	Secretary

Roma Commerce and Tourism

Mrs Debbie Joppich	General Manager
Mr Peter Stanford	President

Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors

Ms Suzette Beresford	Mayor, Paroo Shire Council
Ms Michelle Clarke	Chief Executive Officer, Balonne Shire Council
Mr Ben Hall	Mayor, Quilpie Shire Council
Mr Geoff McDonald	Mayor, Toowoomba Regional Council
Mr Rob Mackenzie	Deputy Mayor, Goondiwindi Regional Council
Mr Shaun Radnedge	Mayor, Murweh Shire Council
Ms Wendy Taylor	Mayor, Maranoa Regional Council
Mr Bill Winks	Deputy Mayor, Balonne Shire Council

Public Hearing - Brisbane, 21 May 2025**Inspector-General Emergency Management**

Ms Kylie Mercer	Director, Legal, Monitoring and Evaluation
-----------------	--

Queensland Fire Department

Ms Kaylene Jones	Chief Officer, Rural Fire Service Queensland
Stephen Smith ASFM	Commissioner

Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games

Ms Sarah Vandersee	Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services
--------------------	---

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Office of Industrial Relations

Ms Andrea Fox	Executive Director, Policy and Workplace Services
Ms Beth Philipson	Director of Safety Legislation Reform and Inspectorate Policy Support

Department of Justice

Ms Kirsten Eades	Acting Executive Director, Community Justice Services
Ms Sally McCone	Acting Director, Strategic Policy and Legislation, Justice Policy and Reform
Ms Michelle Miller	Director, Screening Services, Blue Card Services, Queensland Worker Screening Services, Harm Prevention and Regulation
Ms Nicola Robinson	Acting Executive Director, Queensland Worker Screening Services, Harm Prevention and Regulation
Ms Victoria Thomson	Deputy Director-General, Harm Prevention and Regulation

Department of Education

Ms Kirsten Herring	Deputy Director-General, Arts Queensland
Ms Hayley Stevenson	Assistant Director-General, Student Support

Public Hearing - Brisbane, 16 June 2025**Inspector-General Emergency Management**

Ms Kylie Mercer	Director, Legal, Monitoring and Evaluation
-----------------	--

Scouts Queensland

Ms Nikketah Cuneo	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Mr Geoff Doo	Chief Commissioner
Ms Chrissy Johnston	Assistant Chief Commissioner

OzHarvest

Ms Sarah Sigley	Volunteer Coordinator
-----------------	-----------------------

Foodbank Queensland

Ms Jill Mee	Chief People Officer
-------------	----------------------

Cancer Council Queensland

Mr Matt Gardiner	Chief Executive Officer
Ms Mena Waller	Chief Operating Officer

Ronald McDonald House

Ms Emma Thompson	Chief Executive Officer
------------------	-------------------------

Queensland Police Service

Mr Mark Armstrong	Chief Officer, State Emergency Service
Mr Chris Stream	Acting Deputy Commissioner, Emergency and Disaster Management
Mr Tony Wulff	Chief Officer, Marine Rescue Queensland

Public Hearing - Cairns, 14 July 2025Individuals

Mr Prahlad Dahl
Mr Graham Stokes

Organisations**Animal Care for Seniors at Home Cairns Inc.**

Ms Leanne Bartlett	President
--------------------	-----------

FNQ Volunteers Inc.

Ms Annette Sheppard	President
---------------------	-----------

Meals on Wheels Cairns

Mr Christopher Van Dorssen	General Manager
----------------------------	-----------------

FNQ Diverse Communities Council Inc.

Ms Dianne Austrai-Ombiga	Secretary
Ms Shweta Goyal	Treasurer
Ms Janine Rankin	

Spinal Life Australia

Ms Margaret McDonald	Regional Manager
----------------------	------------------

Public Hearing - Cooktown, 15 July 2025Individuals

Ms Barb Leys
Ms Ella Gonda

Organisations**Cook Shire Council**

Ms Robyn Holmes	Mayor
-----------------	-------

Cooktown Museum

Ms Lois Green	Heritage Site Manager
---------------	-----------------------

Cooktown District Community Centre

Ms Tracey Boulton	Chief Executive Officer
-------------------	-------------------------

Cape York Folk Club

Ms Pasha Lynch	Volunteer Coordinator
----------------	-----------------------

Public Hearing - Townsville, 16 July 2025Individuals

Mr Nick Attam

Right Reverend Dr Keith Joseph, Anglican Church

Ms Alison Maclean	Business Manager, St Andrews Meals on Wheels
-------------------	--

Ms Debra Curd

Mr Brian Rai

Ms Margaret Freestun

Mr Greg Maloney

Mr Andrew Turnour	Representative, Townsville Lot Owners Group
-------------------	---

Organisations**Volunteering North Queensland**

Mrs Margie Ryder	Secretary
------------------	-----------

Ms Maria Taifalos

UnitingCare Queensland

Mr Shane Harris	Volunteer Experience Manager
-----------------	------------------------------

Disaster Relief Australia

Mr Anthony Birch	Head of Operations
------------------	--------------------

Sailability Townsville Inc.

Miss Julie Luke	Media Officer and Volunteer
-----------------	-----------------------------

Queensland Youth Services

Ms Colleen Wing	LearnIT Program Coordinator
-----------------	-----------------------------

Public Hearing - Gold Coast, 4 August 2025Individuals

Mr Alan Gillespie

Ms Joanne Greenfield

Dr Hussain Baba	Founder, Multicultural Social Network Inc.
-----------------	--

Ms Sinead Canning	Advocacy Lead, Queensland Council of Social Service
-------------------	---

Ms Leanne Evans	Volunteer, Gold Coast Mid-Week Ladies Tennis Association
-----------------	--

Mr Shawn Fitzgerald	Volunteer Impact and Engagement Manager, Parkrun
---------------------	--

Organisations

Insurance Council of Australia

Ms Alexandra Hordern General Manager, Regulatory and Consumer Policy

City of Gold Coast

Mr Scott Krueger Manager, 2032 Games Coordination

Mr Mark Ryan General Manager, Disaster and Emergency Management

Volunteering Gold Coast

Mr Brad Cooper Chief Executive Officer

Serving Our People Inc.

Mr Yas Matbouly, President

Ms Genevieve Colling Vice-President, Psychological Health

Public Hearing - Emerald, 11 August 2025

Individuals

Ms Lane Buffington

Organisations

Central Tech Rescue Inc.

Mr Brendan Gigante President

Central Highlands Regional Council

Ms Janice Moriarty Mayor

Capella State School P&C Association

Ms Rachael Cruwys Treasurer

Public Hearing - Rockhampton, 12 August 2025

Individuals

Ms Lou Shipway

Mr Eric Turner

Mr Johnny Muscat

Mr Mark McLachlan

Organisations

Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association Inc

Mr Don Wilschefski President

Not-For-Profit House

Ms Lois Lodding	Chief Executive Officer
-----------------	-------------------------

Mrs Lyndal Hansen	Director
-------------------	----------

Ms Jennifer McGuire	Director
---------------------	----------

Keppel Coast Arts

Ms Dana Crees	Secretary
---------------	-----------

Ms Leanne Smith	President
-----------------	-----------

Statement of Reservation

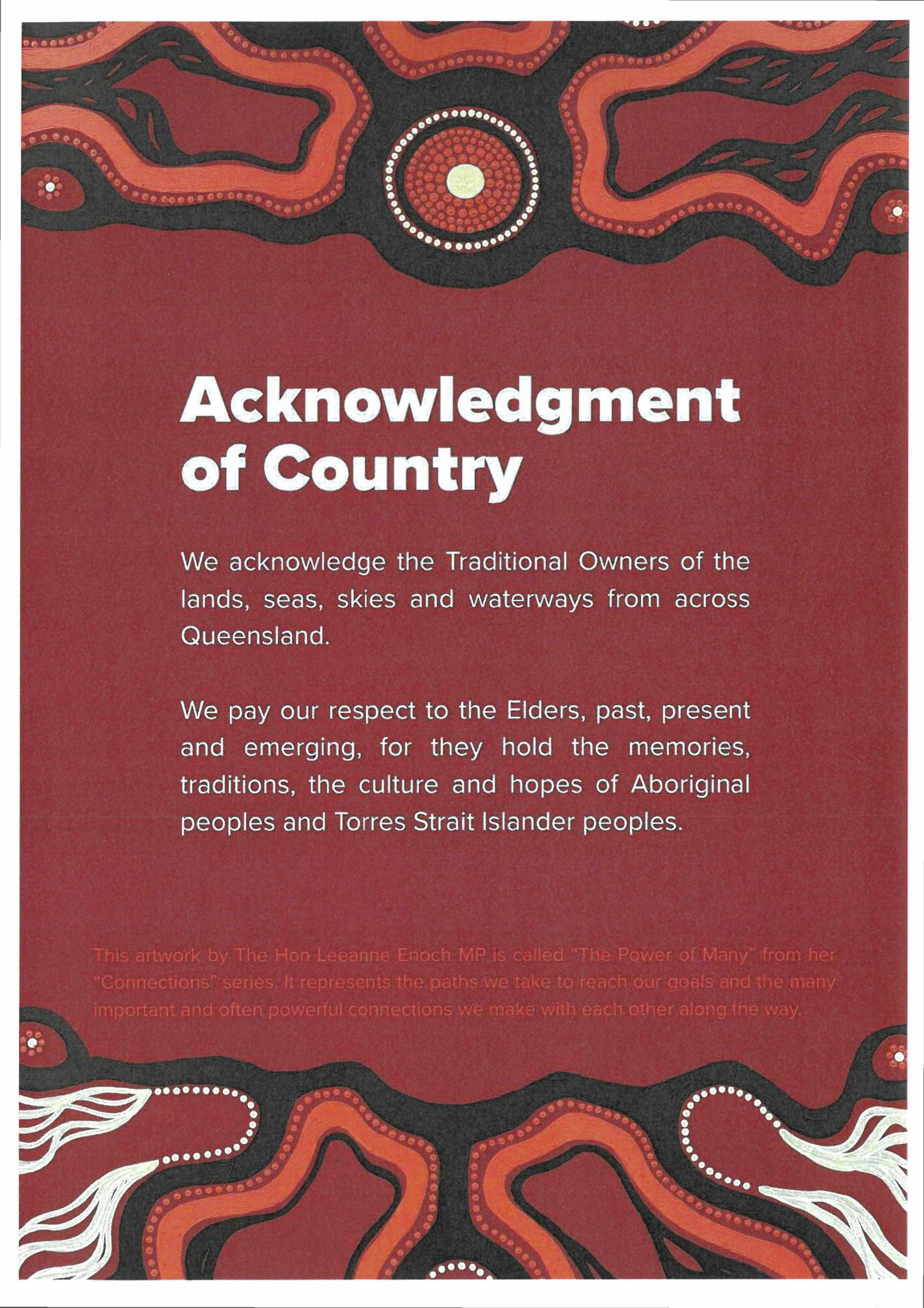


Statement of Reservation

Local Government, Small
Business and Customer
Service Committee

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland



The artwork is a vertical composition. The top and bottom sections feature intricate Aboriginal-style patterns. The top section has a dark background with wavy, organic shapes in shades of red and orange, some outlined with white dots. A central circular motif contains a yellow center surrounded by concentric rings of red and white dots. The bottom section has a similar dark background with wavy shapes in red and orange, also outlined with white dots. On the left and right sides of the bottom section, there are white, stylized, flame-like or leaf-like shapes. The middle section of the image is a solid dark red background with white text.

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands, seas, skies and waterways from across Queensland.

We pay our respect to the Elders, past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This artwork by The Hon. Leeanne Enoch MP is called "The Power of Many" from her "Connections" series. It represents the paths we take to reach our goals and the many important and often powerful connections we make with each other along the way.

Queensland Labor Opposition

From local sports clubs, pride networks and community service organisations, to those responding to disasters and emergencies, volunteering is central to Queensland's social fabric, economy, and resilience.

The Queensland Labor Opposition places on record our thanks and appreciation to all volunteers, both formal and informal, who dedicate their time and efforts to enrich our communities.

At the outset, the Queensland Labor Opposition thanks the hundreds of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations who engaged with the committee process through submissions and appearing as witnesses and acknowledge the paradoxical nature of the Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland (the Inquiry) having benefitted from a tremendous volume of volunteer hours.

This Inquiry should have been an opportunity to test and advance reforms for the volunteering sector in Queensland. Instead, the Crisafulli LNP Government sidelined weeks-old evidence-based policy, only to commence this Committee process for political point-scoring, wasting considerable public resources to do so.

While the Queensland Labor Opposition, and indeed the sector, wished to see meaningful support for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations developed as a result of this Inquiry, hopes are not high, as in an Estimates hearing, the Minister refused to rule out having already told stakeholders that she wanted the inquiry *"...to deliver three to four recommendations with no cost to government."*¹

Coincidentally, the recommendations that have been made at the conclusion of this Inquiry call for very little financial investment from the government. Further, most of the recommendations made by the Committee have been couched with qualifying language:

"That the government commit its determination to improve..."

"That the government investigate... the creation [and] ...the development..."

*"That the government investigate... conducting a review..."*²

These recommendations are, at best, mere suggestions for the government to commit to considering taking action. Even though the Inquiry has already re-prosecuted the exploratory process undertaken through the Strategy's consultation, rather than delivering any concrete reforms. The Committee's recommendations now call on the government to undertake even more investigations.

RETRACING THE QUEENSLAND VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY 2024-2032

The *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032* (the Strategy) and the accompanying *Queensland Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2024-2026* (Action Plan) were released in September 2024 by the former Labor Government. Developed through extensive consultation with over 110 sector representatives and more than 20 co-design meetings, the Strategy outlined a new, whole-of-government strategy to recognise, celebrate and grow volunteering in Queensland. The Strategy drew on existing national and international frameworks, and incorporated the largest evidence base of volunteering data ever collected in Queensland.

It is therefore understandable that some stakeholders felt caught off-guard when only 8 weeks after the Strategy was released, the Crisafulli LNP Government announced they were proceeding with the Inquiry, particularly given the Strategy had already identified nearly every matter within the Committee's scope for consideration, with the first Action Plan providing the initial implementation plan.

¹ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Estimates hearing – 8 August 2025 transcript*, page 51.

² Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. 2025. Report No. 4: Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland, Extract of Recommendations.

Queensland Labor Opposition

Perhaps even more remarkable is that the proactively released Cabinet submission that approved the commencement of this Inquiry mentions the Strategy only once in 218 pages – as a source for a definition.³ The omission of the Strategy from this Cabinet briefing may explain the clear overlap between the terms of reference approved by the Crisafulli LNP Government, and the critical priorities already addressed through the Strategy.

While submissions and witnesses throughout the committee process have shared valuable insights, this Inquiry still represents a missed opportunity for the Crisafulli LNP Government. The Inquiry should not have been focused on rediscovering well-documented challenges but should have instead been scoped to build on the Strategy to fully realise the opportunities that volunteering offers for all Queenslanders.

As a result of this overlap, countless volunteers, community organisations and peak bodies have been asked to present much of the same evidence and recommendations already provided during the development of the Strategy and Action Plan, placing further demand on the limited time and resources of volunteer-involving organisations.

Given Premier Crisafulli's Cabinet did not consider the Strategy ahead of approving the Inquiry's commencement, the Queensland Labor Opposition takes this opportunity to educate the Crisafulli LNP Government on the work described by the sector as a "...crucial initiative," and "...a significant step forward in addressing and advocating for the priorities of the volunteering sector."⁴

Queensland's Baseline, Barriers, Burdens and Volunteer Experience

The Committee was asked to examine the current state of volunteering, its economic and social value, and the barriers facing volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, even though significant research has already been undertaken to establish baseline statistics and sentiments in Queensland, and the Strategy and Action Plan jointly addressed and respond to these issues.

The *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024* report, produced by Volunteering Queensland, provides an empirical evidence-base "...into the status, and the economic and social value of volunteering..." in Queensland, and represents one of the largest volunteer-specific sample sizes ever collected in Australia.⁵

The Queensland Volunteering Strategy embedded key statistics identified by the Volunteering Queensland report into the Strategy. Baseline figures included that:

- 64% of Queenslanders volunteered in 2023, representing 2.8 million people;
- People spent an average of 21.6 hours per month volunteering, totalling 719.8 million hours in 2023.
- For every \$1 invested in volunteering, \$4.70 was returned; and
- The value of volunteering to the Queensland community is \$ 117.8 billion.⁶

The Strategy included further data on participation rates, barriers to participation for both volunteers and organisations, as well as motivations for volunteering. These figures showed a post-COVID reduction in overall participation in volunteering, with a decrease in participation of more than 10% from 2020 to 2023.

³ The State of Queensland - Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers, 2025. *Proactive Release Cabinet Submission: Parliamentary Inquiry into Supporting Our Volunteers*. Accessed from <https://dpccabinetpublic.blob.core.windows.net/published/Document-106>.

⁴ Ms Jane Hedger, CEO, Volunteering Queensland, 2024. Accessed from <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/101461>

⁵ Volunteering Queensland, 2024. *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report*, 2024. Accessed from <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/>.

⁶ State of Queensland (Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts), 2024. *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*, page 14. Accessed from <https://www.dwatsipm.qld.gov.au/media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/queensland-volunteering-strategy/volunteering-strategy-2024-2032.pdf>

Queensland Labor Opposition

Given the strength of Volunteer Queensland's data and analysis, it was unsurprising that the anecdotal evidence shared by witnesses were consistent with these findings.

"COVID really impacted our volunteer numbers. Volunteering was not possible during COVID, and it took a while to get volunteers to come back after COVID." — Ms Andree Stark, Gympie Regional Council ⁷

"Our volunteer numbers and hours volunteered have varied over the years. This reflects changes in volunteer availability among other things, and COVID really impacted our volunteer numbers." — Mr Jeril Thomas, Multicultural Australia ⁸

The Strategy also included key themes and sentiments identified throughout its consultation and development. In addition to declining participation and challenges in attraction and retention, the Strategy recognised the resource burdens and administrative challenges faced by volunteer-involving organisations:

*"Training requirements, regulations spanning different levels of government and jurisdictions, disparate administrative systems and limited resources all add to the complexity of involving volunteers."*⁹

*"Many current requirements exist for good reasons—including to help volunteers feel safe and supported. However, we heard that too often, the task of involving volunteers is unnecessarily confusing, duplicative, and disproportionate to the risks."*¹⁰

It was to be expected then that the Department's response to written submissions identified more than 125 submissions referring to administrative burden,¹¹ with these same challenges also being consistently raised in public hearings:

"A barrier to the volunteering that I would like to raise with you ...is that there is a significant challenge in the duplication of the administration work that is involved in the expressions of interest, applications and background checks.

...It is also a challenge for organisations, no matter how they are structured or how large or small they are, to resource the administration behind those processes in the application, the background checking and the onboarding." — Mr Shane Harris, UnitingCare Queensland ¹²

"Community volunteers are not action driven and are not administrative driven, as you have heard before.

... Our directors are volunteers and we put a lot of hours into the administration of Queensland Water and Land Carers to make sure that capacity is there so that we can pass onto our groups." Ms Mary-Lou Gittins OAM, Queensland Water and Land Carers ¹³

⁷ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 25 March 2025 transcript, page 8.

⁸ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 30 April 2025 transcript, page 5.

⁹ State of Queensland (Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts), 2024. *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*, page 19. Accessed from <https://www.dwatsipm.qld.gov.au/media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/queensland-volunteering-strategy/volunteering-strategy-2024-2032.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid., page 15.

¹¹ Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers. 6 May 2025. *Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee Inquiry into volunteering. Commentary on key themes raised in written submissions*, page 6.

¹² Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 16 July 2025 transcript, page 6.

¹³ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 26 March 2025 transcript, pages 10-11.

Queensland Labor Opposition

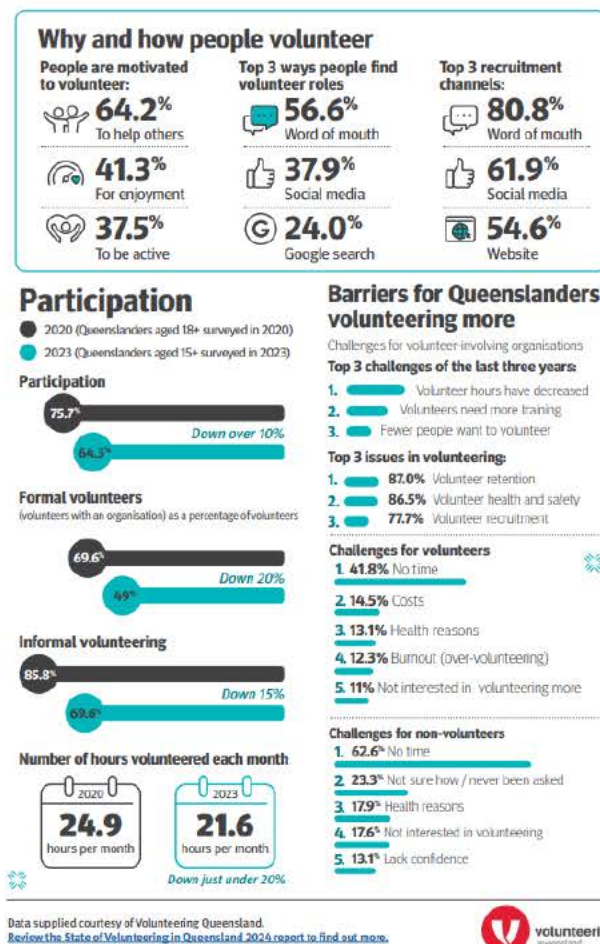
“Where we find clubs are really struggling is around those administrative roles, having good finance management and those sorts of things.

...I think it is to try to reduce the burden on the volunteers so that they can concentrate on delivering their core business and have less time spent on the administration and the management responsibilities of those clubs.” — Ms Wendy Guthrie, Sunshine Coast Council ¹⁴

These concerns are precisely those that informed the Action Plan committed to by the former Labor Government. To remove barriers to volunteering, and support the attraction and retention of volunteers, the Action Plan included:

- Scoping a volunteer reimbursement fund;
- Providing ongoing support to organisations to better facilitate blue card system compliance;
- Funding Volunteering Queensland to strengthen volunteer management and recruitment strategies.

Each of these actions were recommended by stakeholders throughout the Inquiry, further validating the Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032.



Extract: Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032. ¹⁵

¹⁴ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 26 March 2025 transcript, page 18.

¹⁵ State of Queensland (Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts), 2024. *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*, page 15. Accessed from <https://www.dwatsipm.qld.gov.au/media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/queensland-volunteering-strategy/volunteering-strategy-2024-2032.pdf>

Diversity in Volunteering and First Nations Volunteering

The Committee was asked to examine the “*unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations...*”, with specific consideration also being given to First Nations volunteering. Once again, these issues were at the heart of the consultation that informed the Strategy and were also explicitly addressed in the accompanying Action Plan.

The Strategy committed to making volunteering accessible for all Queenslanders, regardless of background, gender, ability or geography. Stakeholders highlighted challenges faced by culturally and linguistically diverse communities, where cultural capability in organisations is often lacking, and by rural and remote communities, where distance and transport costs act as barriers.

*“Improving access and removing barriers would foster greater diversity in the volunteer network and strengthen the role that volunteering can play in challenging inequities and bringing people together.”*¹⁶

It also recognised the diversity of language in volunteering and different cultural interpretations of giving time, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship-giving, and affirmed the need for self-determination.

These findings were directly translated into the first Action Plan, which committed to targeted initiatives to improve access and inclusion such as:

- Streamlining the application process of First Nations peoples and organisations in the blue card system;
- Delivery of a capability and capacity-building micro-credential for volunteers;
- Partnering with Volunteering Queensland to support older and young people to engage in volunteering; and
- Supporting the *Empowering Queensland’s Leaders* project, recognising the critical role of CALD leaders in our communities.

Unsurprisingly, the Crisafulli LNP Government’s choice to reinterrogate the same questions throughout the Inquiry has delivered the many of the same answers:

“You mentioned the blue cards before. That is also a massive barrier, particularly in our First Nations people. We find that we are not getting a lot of people who can volunteer because of the blue card system, so that is a real drawback.” — Ms Colleen Wing, Queensland Youth Services¹⁷

“With an aging population, investing in empowering young people today is the key to fostering innovative ideas, encouraging fresh perspectives and embracing the principles of shared responsibility and continuous improvement.” — Office of the Inspector General of Emergency Management¹⁸

“I have a few solutions ...more upskilling, training and recognition of volunteers, remembering to cater for learning styles and abilities, especially with the use of technology for older people; more promotion of volunteering to raise awareness of the benefits such as social connections, personal

¹⁶ Ibid, page 17.

¹⁷ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 16 March 2025 transcript, page 17.

¹⁸ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 21 May 2025 transcript, page 1.

Queensland Labor Opposition

satisfaction and, importantly, volunteering provides people with purpose after retirement...” — Mayor Janice Moriarty, Central Highlands Regional Council ¹⁹

This evidence validates the targeted inclusion initiatives addressed within the Strategy and outlined in the first Action Plan.

Government Support and Sustainability

The Inquiry was to consider and assess government support for volunteering and opportunities for sustainable improvements, including in emergency response and community recovery, even though this was canvassed extensively in the work delivered by the former Labor Government only just last year.

Both the Strategy, and actions from the Action Plan recognise that while volunteers give freely of their time, volunteering isn't free.

*“Supported and sustainable volunteering means looking for opportunities to build core and common infrastructure, shared systems and resources, and innovative approaches that will support volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations to make the most of the resources they have.”*²⁰

Throughout the committee process, stakeholders consistently pointed back to the same issues already addressed in the Strategy. Sustainable, safe and effective volunteering requires sustained government investment in volunteer management, infrastructure and organisational capacity. The Action Plan delivered on this, with actions to support the sector more broadly, and targeted actions to address needs in specific areas:

- Continued funding uplift for critical community services across the sector, such as Neighbourhood Centres, Foodbank, OzHarvest, SecondBite and Queensland Meals on Wheels, recognising their reliance on volunteers to deliver frontline community services;
- Ongoing support for EV Crew, Volunteering Queensland's centralised platform for the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in disaster response and recovery;
- The establishment of a Volunteer Advocate role within the Queensland Police Service, to promote and protect the role of volunteers within QPS policies and frameworks; and
- Undertaking legislative and structural disaster recovery reforms, and delivering specialist training for State Emergency Services and Marine Rescue Volunteers.

Brisbane 2032 Opportunities

The Committee was also tasked with considering “...opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.”

As identified throughout the Strategy, including as early as the foreword, Brisbane 2032 represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to boost volunteer participation, attract new demographics into volunteering, and create pathways for volunteers to transition from major events into sustained community engagement. That is why under the Action Plan, the former Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts was identified as lead agency for cross-government coordination, to identify and collaborate on future opportunities to further incentivise volunteering and reduce barriers to participation.

¹⁹ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland, 11 August 2025 transcript*, page 6.

²⁰ State of Queensland (Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts), 2024. *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*, page 22. Accessed from <https://www.dwatsipm.qld.gov.au/media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/queensland-volunteering-strategy/volunteering-strategy-2024-2032.pdf>

Queensland Labor Opposition

Through the former Office of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Action Plan aligned the development of a vibrant and diverse volunteer network with the ongoing delivery of *Elevate 2042*, the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Legacy Strategy. The importance of this was continuously recognised throughout the Committee process:

"From our perspective, there is a really good opportunity to leverage the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. From a volunteering perspective, I personally think there is an opportunity for this to be one of the top three legacy outcomes." — Mr Mark Ryan, City of Gold Coast ²¹

"In our submission, we have recommended that any volunteer passport or incentive scheme linked to the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games extends well beyond the traditional sporting roles. Volunteers in health, community services, disaster response and other non-sporting sectors play an equally vital role in our society. They, too, deserve to be recognised, supported and included in any legacy planning for the games." — Ms Mena Waller, Cancer Council Queensland. ²²

In fact, a representative of the Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games quoted the Action Plan almost verbatim in a public hearing:

"The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents a unique opportunity to revitalise Queensland's volunteer culture, with approximately 50,000 volunteers to be required. It will be critically important to leverage the heightened interest in the games to maintain a broader uplift in volunteering within the Queensland sport and recreation industry in the lead-up to, during and after the games.

*...To this end, building a vibrant and diverse volunteer network is a key focus of the Elevate 2042 legacy strategy."*²³

Such consistency between evidence presented by witnesses and the former Labor Government's Strategy and Action Plan only highlights that the Government's Inquiry duplicated existing efforts, rather than advancing the sector's priorities.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Inquiry into volunteering was a missed opportunity, at a significant cost to taxpayers. By failing to build on the comprehensive work already undertaken through the former Labor Government's *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032* and the accompanying *Queensland Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2024-2026*, the Committee process largely retraced ground already covered, rather than advancing the sector's priorities. At a time when volunteers themselves face challenges of burnout, declining participation, and limited resources to manage administrative burdens, the Crisafulli LNP Government should not have asked them to repeat the work they had undertaken so recently.

Despite this, the sector deserves meaningful outcomes. The Queensland Labor Opposition therefore calls on the Crisafulli LNP Government to ensure the government response to the Committee's report delivers real, practical improvements for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. Queensland's volunteer sector cannot afford more slick slogans and rhetoric without action; it requires investment, coordination and policy follow-through that reflect the scale of its contribution to our state.

²¹ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 4 August 2025 transcript, page 6.

²² Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 16 June 2025 transcript, page 13

²³ Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. *Public hearing - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*, 21 May 2025 transcript, page 9.

Queensland Labor Opposition

The work begun under the former Labor Government through the Strategy and Action Plan provides a strong foundation for that task. Building on this foundation, rather than duplicating it, will be the true measure of whether this Inquiry ultimately leads to lasting benefits for Queensland's volunteers.

The Queensland Labor Opposition would again like to share our gratitude to the millions of volunteers, and countless volunteer-involving organisations across the state. We would also like to thank the Queensland Parliamentary service staff, with particular thanks to the secretariat of the committee, as well as Hansard, for their support throughout the Inquiry.

The Queensland Labor Opposition members on the Committee wish to state that not all committee comments, statements or elements of the committee report align to the views of the Queensland Labor Opposition and the Queensland Labor Opposition reserves the right to articulate further views through the debate of the committee report when it comes on for debate in the Legislative Assembly of the Queensland Parliament.



MARGIE NIGHTINGALE MP
MEMBER FOR INALA
DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE



MICHAEL HEALY MP
MEMBER FOR CAIRNS
SHADOW MINISTER FOR TOURISM
SHADOW MINISTER FOR JOBS AND TRAINING



JOAN PEASE MP
MEMBER FOR LYTTON
SHADOW MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS
SHADOW MINISTER FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE AND OPEN DATA