

Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Rural Fire Service

**Queensland Fire and
Emergency Services**

Mt Nebo Rural Fire Brigade does not support the Bill.

We are of the view that the draft Bill prioritises paid Queensland Fire Department employees, over Rural Fire Service Volunteers and their communities. The Brigade is disappointed that the Bill does not encourage the voice of volunteers, their experiences, or their needs. The Brigade does not support the centralisation of power to the Commissioner at the expense of our autonomy.

Volunteers are critical for firefighting in Queensland.

Mt Nebo Rural Fire Brigade is built up of volunteers, from the community, with a motivation to support their community in times of need. The Brigade covers the areas of Mt Nebo and Mt Glorious in the D'Aguilar Ranges West of Brisbane. Our Brigade area covers nearly thirty square kilometres of land, protecting almost 800 residents with only three appliances across 30 active volunteer firefighters.

Over ninety per cent of Queensland relies on close to 30,000 volunteer firefighters. The typical volunteer is community-minded and sacrifices time, income and family to serve their community. As a result of this, our volunteer firefighter's number one priority is the community and their safety.

Volunteer voices are at risk.

The current Bill poses a threat to volunteer voices as it prioritises the motives of government department employees. In our experience, employees may be more likely to have political, financial and other factors that impact their decisions over the needs of the community.

The Bill enables the commissioner to dictate how Rural Fire Brigade services operate and removes their autonomy.

Volunteer firefighting experience is not valued.

Clause 12 of the Bill sets out new eligibility requirements to become a commissioner. These requirements do not acknowledge the real firefighting experience that volunteers have. In limiting the scope to 'professional' firefighting experience, the very real firefighting experience of hundreds of volunteers is dismissed. Therefore, is it

likely that prospective commissioners must climb the Fire and Rescue Service ladder, and volunteer firefighting experience is excluded.

The requirements exclude potentially excellent candidates from the role due to the excessively narrow criteria. For example, Katarina Carroll was a well-respected Commissioner of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) for 4 years. Katarina Carroll brought a great depth of knowledge to the role, however, she never had any professional firefighting experience.

Elected volunteer's roles are not safe.

Clause 34 of the Bill allows the Commissioner to remove or disqualify elected volunteers from their positions within brigades.

One of the roles of brigade members is advocating for their community and the needs of the Brigade, including funding for appliances and equipment, and advocating for change when systems and processes are not delivering outcomes to protect the community.

If volunteers, who are elected by the community, can have their roles stripped from them at the whim of the Commissioner or their delegate it creates a risk that their role as advocates for the community will be limited.

This may create an environment where brigade office bearers may not be able to voice legitimate concerns out of fear of being smothered. This unequal power dynamic is likely to harm the relationship between volunteer firefighters and the department. This also works against maintaining sustainability within the service in retaining volunteer firefighters and their work within their communities and Queensland.

The Brigade requests that the committee recommends that all amendments be dismissed and a full rewrite of the legislation is undertaken.

Regards,

Hugo Nobay, on behalf of the Mt Nebo Rural Fire Brigade



Firefighter, Brigade Chairperson
Mt Nebo Rural Fire Brigade