



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr JP Lister MP—Chair
Mr AJ Baillie MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr MPT Healy MP
Mrs ME Nightingale MP
Ms JE Pease MP

Staff present:

Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 11 August 2025

Emerald

MONDAY, 11 AUGUST 2025

The committee met at 12.38 pm.

CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. I declare open this Emerald public hearing for the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My name is James Lister. I am the chair of the committee. With me here today are committee members: Margie Nightingale MP, the member for Inala and deputy chair; Mark Boothman MP, the member for Theodore on the Gold Coast; Michael Healy MP, the member for Cairns; Joan Pease MP, the member for Lytton; and Adam Baillie MP, the member for Townsville. Also at the table here is Zac Dadic, the assistant secretary, and Bonnie from Hansard who is recording the proceeding of today for transcription.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited guests may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind everyone here that misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's rules and my directions at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings, and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

GIGANTE, Mr Brendan, President, Central Tech Rescue Inc.

CHAIR: I now welcome Mr Brendan Gigante, President of Central Tech Rescue Inc. I invite you to make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you.

Mr Gigante: Thank you very much. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to present today. As a brief background on myself, I am a volunteer with the Rural Fire Service here in Emerald. I am also the captain of the auxiliary station with Fire and Rescue. I am also the branch president covering 102 auxiliary stations through North Queensland for the Queensland Professional Firefighters Union. I am presenting today on behalf of Central Tech Rescue. I am presenting some of the hurdles we have encountered with recent changes to the Fire and Emergency Services Act.

Primarily, our organisation was born from a request from the Mines Inspectorate under the department of mines. We had some issues here west of Emerald within the Gemfields in the Sapphire mining district where there are approximately 1,800 underground claims. We were suffering capability for professional retrieval services and skill retrieval for underground rescue. That was identified by the department of mines. They have approached me and said, 'What can we do about it?'

Our local area here in Emerald is heavily subscribed by the mining industry with our local population. Even within my auxiliary firefighting workforce, there is a massive amount of skills in people whose primary occupation works with the Mines Rescue, but we cannot utilise those skills currently within the organisation. Previously, there was an avenue within the act to establish the emergency services unit where I could have fielded volunteers within that unit drawn from the coal industry, servicing the resources sector out with the Sapphires. That was up and going. The Mines Inspectorate met with council. Council supported it. It went to the LDMG. It was supported by all participants of the LDMG. Then there was a change to the act where the emergency services unit is no longer available for us.

Effectively, we lost an avenue to become recognised and authorised rescue officers to undertake those tasks, which would have given us provision within the act and those protections that we require. It is a high-risk task that we do out in that area. It also then stopped our avenues for recurring funding via the arrangements of the emergency services levy and also the resources sector. As a recognised mines rescue unit, we certainly had the provisions for the department of mines to reach in and enforce funding via the resources sector directly. With the change of that act, we have lost that pathway.

Right now, I am probably fortunate that I have a large volume of volunteers, but I cannot really use them. We are always seeking pathways where I can get that protection for them, particularly with WorkCover, and also protection under legislation to operate as authorised rescue officers. Currently we do not have that avenue.

CHAIR: I was having a yarn with you before and you had some really interesting things to say. I know the committee definitely has questions for you. I will go to the deputy chair.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for attending and for the great work you do. I am interested to know that should there be a need to rescue miners, who is the lead organisation? How does that happen in the current status if you are not involved?

Mr Gigante: Currently under the new legislation or the new act, Queensland Police are the lead agency for all rescues now. It is up to Queensland Police to respond with the appropriate resources. Locally, there are no resources to respond. The nearest is Queensland Fire and Rescue which would come out of Rockhampton or Mackay to undertake that. Out in these areas it is generally about a four-hour trip to get out there. What we find is that out here it is time critical. Our medical team say that usually you have 15 minutes, on average, to do a retrieval—to have somebody in the chopper.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: The work that your organisation does, if all worked well, they would step in and be that immediate response?

Mr Gigante: That is correct, yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Has there been a period of time when you were operating and had that capacity?

Mr Gigante: No, at this time, without any protections we do not operate.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Have you ever operated in that way?

Mr Gigante: Not under this organisation, no.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Thank you, Brendan, for what you are doing. How did it work under the previous regulations and the previous legislation? I had a fair bit to do with the SES a long time ago for many years, but I am trying to get my head around how your organisation worked under the previous legislation.

Mr Gigante: What we were heading towards as part of our startup was to become recognised as an emergency services unit which is a hybrid with SES and the fire services. That was where we saw ourselves fit, so we could generalise and not be an SES or a fire service specifically. We were set up to provide a service for the underground mining district out at Gemfields.

Mr BOOTHMAN: The change in the legislation to do with disaster management which took SES from QFES into the Queensland Police Service has then denied you the ability to that. That is an interesting one to try to sort out.

Mr Gigante: Yes. Right now there is no avenue for us to become a recognised entity.

Mr BOOTHMAN: No.

Mr Gigante: As I said, there is no avenue for even our personnel to come under the act as authorised rescue officers which would allow us to do that type of work.

Mr HEALY: Brendan, I am trying to get my head around the fact that you would be both a rural fire service and a mines rescue service; is that correct? You told me that that is what you were looking for and prior to the changes to legislation that could happen but now—

Mr Gigante: Now, it cannot, no. There is no pathway for us to become a recognised rescue organisation.

Mr HEALY: You talked about the expertise because obviously mine rescues are quite a unique area.

Mr Gigante: Yes.

Mr HEALY: You do mention it here, and you have made a good submission, so thank you. I note that you have the appropriate staff. If changes were to be made or if favourable outcomes were determined as a result of this parliamentary inquiry, what is the guarantee that you will always have staff to do that role?

Mr Gigante: At the moment, as I said, most of our members align with the Queensland Mines Rescue Service. There is a big appetite to do those roles. The work itself is very interesting. It is not hard to get people to volunteer to do that type of work. Right now we have around 20 volunteers ready to go and that is without putting any advertising out into the mining districts or speaking to the mines directly. Certainly we are well supported by the local mining industries such as Kestrel coal. They were on board straight away. They provided resources, equipment and vehicles—the whole lot there. Unfortunately, I have no avenue to actually place people directly at this time.

Mr HEALY: You have registered that with the appropriate authorities?

Mr Gigante: Yes, we are an incorporated body. We are also a registered charitable organisation. As I said, we are at startup stage, so we still have quite a way to go.

Mr BAILLIE: Thanks for joining us here today, Brendan. I do not have the same background knowledge as the other committee members do with regard to the legislation. With regard to what you are undertaking here, do your volunteers have special training or qualifications? Is there some technology that is proprietary that helps you be more effective in this type of endeavour?

Mr Gigante: The skill set of our volunteers is directly aligned to the coalmining industry. Their mines rescue skills and capability are maintained annually via the coal mines, so their skill sets would directly carry over. Underground mining is all the same. Quite a few also have hard rock backgrounds, the same as me and have the appropriate training—deep geotechnical training to read underground and understand the conditions. Locally, we have a large pool of engineers. As a part of our organisations, we have ventilation engineers and structural engineers who are also part of the volunteer pool at this stage. So we are able to make a risk assessment of what we have to do and create an operational plan very effectively and very quickly.

Mr BAILLIE: Should there be an incident that requires intervention, would those same people be able to help through another means or another body?

Mr Gigante: We looked into this through the Queensland Mines Rescue Service. They have no appetite to work outside of the coal industry. Their interest is underground coalmining. However, as an organisation, they are not willing to look at other mining districts and other disciplines in mining. Primarily, I believe that for the Queensland Mines Rescue Service to operate they are funded by each particular mine, whereas out west of here they are small mining claims. They are individuals; they are not large corporations that can afford that type of service.

Mr BAILLIE: Do you have any visibility as to how many incidents there might be per year that might require that type of service?

Mr Gigante: On average, with critical rescue, there would be one per year at this stage.

Ms PEASE: When was the organisation first created?

Mr Gigante: It was created in 2018. As I said, we were progressing quite well and then COVID hit—that is what has blocked us. We are just coming back in now to start it up.

Ms PEASE: What was the impetus? What made you decide that this was something that needed to be done?

Mr Gigante: Probably my crew's safety in another organisation, looking at what we are doing and how fast things need to happen.

Ms PEASE: Can I just get some clarity? When you say 'my crew', what crew are you talking about?

Mr Gigante: I am talking about a rescue crew on the site. The people I take onsite—we do not have the appropriate equipment.

Ms PEASE: Who would they have been?

Mr Gigante: At that stage?

Ms PEASE: Yes.

Mr Gigante: That was our fire and rescue auxiliary staff.

Ms PEASE: So they still perform that service?

Mr Gigante: Yes, with their personal equipment on that day, but we are not permitted to do that.

Ms PEASE: You are a rural firefighter, so you can go with that uniform on and perform the same task?

Mr Gigante: No, we cannot. We are not permitted by the organisation to do those tasks.

Ms PEASE: What organisation?

Mr Gigante: By the fire service. We are not permitted by the fire service to undertake and perform those types of rescues, and we do not have the equipment to do it properly.

Mr HEALY: Rescues and firefighting.

Ms PEASE: Yes, but that is with the new organisation. Is this just to do with coalmining or is it all mining? You talked about the other fields.

Mr Gigante: It is predominantly to do with our sapphire mining district where there is no capability I think. Currently all coal mines have their own rescue teams, whereas the sapphire miners out here do not have that capability, so they are left in the lurch if something bad should happen. I am trying to provide a service where I have trained people already here locally, but I need to be able to resource it and do the work as safely as I can.

Ms PEASE: In terms of onboarding your personnel, I guess you are at a bit of a standstill at the moment because you cannot use them.

Mr Gigante: That is correct, yes.

Ms PEASE: Have you experienced any problems with that onboarding process?

Mr Gigante: No, not at all. I have people on a waiting list at the moment. I have 17 on a waiting list who were willing to come on board as volunteers, but I have not progressed that because there is no avenue to keep them trained and well equipped.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: If there were to be an arm within the Rural Fire Service that was specifically for mining rescues, could you see that as solving the problem?

Mr Gigante: Yes, at this time probably the best avenue would be via the SES.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So if there was an arm within the SES that was specifically for mining rescues then that could be an option?

Mr Gigante: Yes, most definitely. It has been an avenue we looked at originally. We did pose those questions locally and within the state. There was not a lot of appetite to do it.

Ms PEASE: Who does it now?

Mr Gigante: Nobody.

Ms PEASE: What happens if there is an incident?

Mr Gigante: Locally nobody is equipped to do it.

Ms PEASE: So it is just the QPS?

Mr Gigante: Yes. QPS are the managing agency.

Ms PEASE: Yes, I know they are, but prior to that change in legislation who would have done it?

Mr Gigante: We did not have anyone here locally to do it. We have not had anyone here locally to do it.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So the police, in that instance, would likely try to get the support services from wherever.

Mr Gigante: That is correct.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That would take time and, as you said, you would be likely to have 15 minutes to be able to respond.

Mr Gigante: That is correct.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance here today, Mr Gigante. It has been really interesting to hear from you because, as you said to me before, you do not have a lot of the problems that most of volunteer organisations have.

Mr Gigante: That is correct.

CHAIR: You have people. They are trained, they are motivated and they have their equipment and everything like that. I am certain we can make sure that there is a reference to your situation in our report so that will get the attention of those who need to hear it.

Mr Gigante: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance today.

MORIARTY, Ms Janice, Mayor, Central Highlands Regional Council

CHAIR: Welcome, Councillor Moriarty. You are very welcome here today. We are enjoying our brief time in Emerald. I am sure we would all want to come back if we could.

Ms Moriarty: Absolutely. We love having you in the best place in Queensland and in Australia. Thank you very much for coming.

CHAIR: You are most welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement and then we will have some questions for you, Mayor.

Ms Moriarty: Thank you very much. I have a reasonably long statement just to share information. Then I am happy to answer some questions. Good afternoon. On behalf of Central Highlands Regional Council, our councillors and the community, I thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I would like to briefly highlight the importance of volunteers to the social fabric of rural and remote communities, outline some of the Central Highlands Regional Council services that we offer to support volunteers and also note some barriers and solutions for volunteering in this region going forward. To start, however, I thought I might set the scene and share a little bit about the Central Highlands.

The region spans almost 60,000 square kilometres. As at 30 June 2024, according to the Queensland Government Statistician's Office, our estimated residential population was 29,336 people and our non-resident population was 5,555. From 2001 to 2024—so over those 23 years—the residential population rose by just 0.8 per cent, under one per cent. I am sure you have heard that in most rural areas. Our median age is 34.3 years, compared to Queensland's 38.5 years. In 2023, our zero- to 14-year-old cohort accounted for 23.1 per cent of our overall population and our 25- to 44-year-old cohort accounted for 30.4 per cent, which combined is over 50 per cent of our population and indicates that our demographics comprise a large number of families. The number of persons aged 65 years and over increased from 5.1 per cent in 2001 to 10.3 per cent in 2023.

Council defines the Central Highlands as made up of 13 community localities to ensure both small and large communities are equally considered. According to the ABS 2021 statistics, the combined population of the two largest towns in our region, Emerald and Blackwater, is two-thirds of our region. The remainder of our towns and rural areas range in size from 974 to 38 residents. Additionally, the largest proportion of the region's workforce is employed in the coalmining industry at 19.7 per cent and the next highest, at 6.9 per cent, are employed in beef cattle farming.

After viewing the supporting documents for this inquiry, I am sure I am not going to be voicing anything new. However, I thank you as it is important to have representation from our region to reinforce and restate the importance of volunteers to our livability and quality of life. As a rural and remote region, we rely heavily on volunteers to run our sporting and recreation clubs and groups, to raise funds for local causes, to support each other in times of need, and to organise and host small and large events, from charity golf days to major sporting events or large festivals, which also contribute to our economy and boost our local businesses.

As with other rural and remote regions, we do not have the variety of entertainment venues and businesses as our city cousins do. Therefore, in the bush we have our enterprising, creative, energetic, joyful and entrepreneurial volunteers taking on a plethora of tasks and challenges to keep our communities thriving. Our volunteers bring young and old together, create social connections and cater for the diverse needs within our communities to improve livability, preserve our country way of life and enliven our community spirit—in other words, build social and cultural capital.

How are we tracking with volunteering? At each ABS census, as you are probably aware, we are asked whether we did any voluntary work through an organisation or group over the last 12 months. Over the 10 years from 2010 to 2021, Central Highlands tracked consistently higher than Queensland and Australia, reaching 6.3 per cent above Queensland's volunteering percentage in the 2016 ABS census. While volunteering percentages reduced across the board, including in the Central Highlands, by 2021, we are hoping that post-COVID the next census will see those percentages bouncing back. In this region in 2021, the overall volunteer percentage was 18.4 per cent. However, interestingly, the percentage in our larger communities was slightly lower than that average compared to smaller towns such as Rolleston and Dingo, recording 28.3 per cent and 26.7 per cent respectively. This provides evidence that our smaller communities and towns need volunteers to thrive.

Council offers a range of initiatives and in-kind assistance to support volunteers throughout our region: community grants for clubs and organisations, specifically community assistance and sport and recreation grants up to \$5,000; the community improvement grant for facilities up to \$20,000; as

well as our Regional Arts Development Fund for various amounts, co-funded by the state government. Also, our Australia Day Awards recognise volunteers as well as outstanding achievements of our community members and organisations.

In almost 10 years, council has doubled the number of officers who are employed to run programs and initiatives in areas such as sport and recreation, arts and culture, youth development, Indigenous development and now we have an events team. A large part of their work is hands-on support and upskilling volunteers to access funding grants and navigate the ongoing policy changes, legislative compliance and regulations introduced by state and federal governments as well as council.

Council's commitment to disaster management is a priority. Without volunteers, we cannot mobilise support in the response and recovery phases. Council also funds the Central Highlands Development Corporation, our economic arm, which also runs volunteer and recognition programs and employs part-time staff to run our visitor information centres to support tourists in our region.

I would like to note—and perhaps this is not a direct correlation—that there is evidence of volunteer percentages declining over 20 years in this region and council employing more officers to support volunteering over the past almost 10 years. Stepping forward to assist volunteering places more financial obligations on local government. However, as the closest level of government to the people, local government is well positioned to provide that grassroots support.

From my own experience and as a volunteer, feedback from council and community members anecdotally, some of the major barriers for volunteering in this region are: again, compliance and risk or red tape, so navigating the ever-changing governance requirements such as policy procedures, risk assessments and the introduction of blue cards, which has been brought up quite a bit; demand for increased skills such as grant writing, moving to online, project planning, events management and people management, which are all providing barriers; costs to volunteer organisations and clubs, especially insurance and purchasing resources such as computers, printers et cetera; out-of-pocket personal costs such as fuel, ingredients and electricity for catering and cooking; technology as often our volunteers are older and not computer literate but much of the training and registration is online; burnout, especially when the same few people are volunteering, especially in smaller communities as I mentioned before. Having very small populations with very high levels of volunteering, I think, is a good indication that we have a few doing a lot. Likewise, in rural and remote areas, relying heavily on volunteers means people can be overwhelmed with the number of invitations they get to volunteer.

Relevant to our region, young families can be time poor, especially if both parents are working. Often people move to this region for employment, which means they do not have extended family and grandparents locally to support them. Also, grandparents living here are often providing childcare support because (a) it is unaffordable or (b) there is reduced availability of childcare places which then impacts their availability to volunteer. Finally, shiftwork and shift rosters—for example, the seven days on, seven days off and the three and four day rosters can impact on volunteering in our region.

I have a few solutions: more volunteer assistance programs for attraction and retention specially designed to engage younger generations and provide assistance with personal costs; 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 satisfaction and, importantly, volunteering provides people with purpose after retirement; and perhaps support for workplace volunteer type programs.

In closing, I would like to give a shout-out to another group of volunteers who I think all levels of government forget to acknowledge or quantify the number of hours residents and citizens contribute to turning up to focus groups, public meetings, completing surveys and making submissions to assist elected representatives to make more informed decisions. We are enormously grateful to our volunteers and thank everyone for stepping forward to volunteer because they are vital to sustaining our quality of life and improving livability in every town and community within the Central Highlands. Thank you again for this opportunity to be here today.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mayor. You said that you would probably touch on things that we have heard before. It is true to say that you have touched on themes that have been expressed by many others and that reinforcement is no small thing. You mentioned the participation of everybody in this room who has come to help us in this voyage of discovery. That is the first time I have heard that. I acknowledge everybody for their time in coming before us. You made a very good point there, so thank you.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: As the chair said, we are hearing similar themes. One of the things that we have heard in similar rural or regional areas where there is a FIFO workforce is that there seems to be a lack of connection and ownership or a sense of belonging with the town, so there are fewer people to draw from in terms of their ability to do that volunteer work. Would you say that that has an impact here as well?

Ms Moriarty: Yes, we would. Shiftwork applies to those people who live within our communities, and mainly our larger communities, as well as our nonresident population so definitely. Looking at those statistics over the years, I was reflecting on when some of the shiftwork was introduced. They were eight-hour shifts and quite often the workers had weekends off. Then we moved to a 12-hour roster, seven days on and seven days off, three days on and four days off, four days on and three days off. I think that also added to a smaller increase in population because people took advantage of that to move to other communities and commute. They are then represented in our nonresident workforce and reside in the region in, I guess, our single person's quarters. We get told that we are only allowed to use certain terms every now and then, but we refer to them as single person's quarters.

Mr HEALY: Be a rebel, Janice. Call it as you see it.

Ms Moriarty: Yes, we will call it as we see it. Importantly, though, we have been looking at how those wonderful people—they are all people and everyone's wonderful. We all have skills and can contribute. We know that many of us have family who actually do that as well. They do go to the pub occasionally to have a beer or to have a meal because they are sick of camp food. They do buy fuel and those sorts of things. We know that we need to do more in that space to break down the barriers.

We have to make sure we are getting in there, inviting them to bring their families. Instead of having a roster and going away, they might bring their family here. We have to promote what is on in the communities. Also, you do not know who is there. There could be people who coach the Australian football team, and it would be great to have them run some workshops or skills development with some of our children in the region. Communities definitely feel it, particularly Blackwater. The population there is around the 5,000 mark, and the nonresident workforce is probably around the 4,000 mark. You can start to see that we do have a variety of communities with unique social arrangements, so that community would feel it more than others.

Mr BOOTHMAN: When we were on the Gold Coast, we were talking to the Insurance Council of Australia about premium costs. Would you have information on any of your organisations that you are aware of that have lodged any public liability claims? It is something that I have never really heard of—that not a lot of not-for-profit groups claim very often. It is more the professional businesses, so to speak. Do you have access to that information that potentially you could give us? Most likely you would not have it, but if you did that would be great.

Ms Moriarty: Just to clarify your question: if we had access to that information—

Mr BOOTHMAN: Are you aware of any organisations that have had a public liability claim against them? I have been in Lions for 20-odd years and I have never heard of any of the local Lions clubs make a claim. The premiums keep on creeping up and it is getting more expensive. Is it fair to lump escalating premiums on not-for-profits who are not claiming? I know it is a tricky one.

Ms Moriarty: I have worked for not-for-profits, and we have had to shop around to make sure we have the right cover at an affordable price, if there is such a thing for not-for-profits. You are right: we did not make any claims, but I do not know that we needed to. However, speaking on behalf of council, there are a couple of things that we do.

One of the things that we do, particularly through our community development team, is we send out information to our community reference groups across the region. What we can do is remind people or promote information from the Insurance Council of Australia. We can send that information out. We can get it out through our interagency. The council facilitates our human and social agencies coming together in Emerald and Blackwater. From council's perspective, we can help raise the issue and promote it so that not-for-profit organisations are aware that they can make claims. Does that answer your question? No.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I personally have never known a not-for-profit group to make a claim. I am curious to know whether you are aware of any not-for-profit group that has lodged a claim. The premium costs for not-for-profit groups keep going up every year.

Ms Moriarty: I do not know. I have been involved in a lot of groups, but I am not aware of it. That is not to say that people have not been.

Ms PEASE: Mayor, you were so thorough with your opening statement, so I do not have a lot of questions. Thank you very much for the effort you have gone to. You talked about your community reference teams. I am on the website at the moment. I actually think that is quite a good name to call your community groups and to use them as a point of reference. Has that been very successful for the council? Is it a new thing or is it something you have always done?

Ms Moriarty: It is something that has been rolled out now for 10 years and it is sustaining. I think everything that could be thrown at them has been thrown at them, but they have sustained. It is important, as you would understand, for us to go out and meet with all of our communities across the region once a year as a full council. We meet regularly with the community reference groups to do a whole range of things around community development as well. However, I would like to point out that, in a council that is undivided, without those kinds of mechanisms where councillors can sit down with communities and talk about their aspirations for the future, their issues now and how we can all work together, our role in representative democracy would be diminished.

Ms PEASE: Congratulations. I just think it is really good and it is turning it on its head. Rather than having community groups here and council over there, seeing them as your reference groups where you can go to them for advice really resonates with me.

Ms Moriarty: Thank you. It is an opportunity for us to do more place-based planning with our community.

Ms PEASE: You have a band of volunteers and people who are experiencing those problems right there at your fingertips.

Ms Moriarty: We greatly appreciate them too. They are volunteers.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you for joining us today. I love all the statistics. It is fantastic. One of the things that we have heard as we have travelled around the state is that the smaller the community the higher the percentage per capita of volunteers. You might link community spirit and community feeling to the number of people who want to help and do things in the community. In your statistics, you mentioned that the volunteer numbers in some of the smaller population groups or smaller regions are about 26 or 27 per cent per capita.

Ms Moriarty: Twenty-eight per cent.

Mr BAILLIE: How big are those communities, roughly?

Ms Moriarty: Rolleston has 132 people, with a 28.3 per cent volunteer rate. Dingo has 221 people, with a 26.7 per cent volunteer rate.

Mr BAILLIE: It is fair to say that they are quite small communities but they are very engaged locals who want to see the region thrive.

Ms Moriarty: As you know in rural and remote areas, if we want it done, we have to get up and do it ourselves.

Ms PEASE: I think that applies pretty well everywhere.

Ms Moriarty: It does.

Mr BAILLIE: Does council engage differently with those smaller regional groups and their volunteers versus the bigger ones like Emerald and Blackwater?

Ms Moriarty: No. We divided the region into those 13 community localities to have a reference group at each one. There are smaller towns within all of those areas. We want to make sure that we are meeting with them once a year. For example, once a year we go to Theresa Creek, which is just on the border of Isaac and our council. We take our fold-up chairs. I forgot mine this year, and the deputy mayor had to help me. We sit on the riverbank and talk to eight to 10 people. We are very committed to making sure that we are out there talking to our community. Communicating is something else. We are going out there and talking to our community in a number of ways and making sure that we are listening to them and talking to them. If people do not feel connected, and if we are not having open and honest discussions, how can we build trust to move forward together?

Mr BAILLIE: Congratulations.

Ms Moriarty: Thank you.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I just have one quick question about insurance. If you have a community organisation holding an event on council-owned land, does council public liability insurance cover that or do you require them to have additional public liability insurance?

Ms Moriarty: As far as I know, it is council's public liability that is used. Usually those groups are incorporated anyway and do have their own public liability as well. I think we covered off what council might be responsible for and what the organisation itself might be responsible for. I hope that answers your question.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Some view it as double dipping. If council already has public liability, the requirement for community groups to have it as well could be looked at.

Ms Moriarty: Yes, it is. It definitely is.

Mr HEALY: Mayor, this is more of a statement, but I do have a quick question. I just wanted to say your utilisation of nouns, adjectives and verbs in your opening statement was covered brilliantly. Your passion for your community is very obvious, and we can see that. You covered off a whole lot of areas. Just quickly, because I think it is important, how is your internet connection out here?

Ms Moriarty: That is a good question. It varies. We are constantly talking to Telstra. We were at the Canberra national local government conference, and I believe the NBN have a focus on rural and remote communities going forward. We have pockets of limited data as well as mobile. It is something that we continue to have conversations around and to advocate for. What we are finding is that a lot of community members are just going forward and signing up to Starlink. They are not waiting. The transition to 4G or 5G has really caused some major issues, which you would have heard about everywhere as well. It definitely is an issue.

Mr HEALY: There is certainly big room for improvement. One of the things that a lot of people do not take into account, particularly in isolated areas or areas like this beautiful part of the world, is that connectivity is fundamental when you are engaging with people or doing something from a voluntary perspective.

Ms Moriarty: Correct.

Mr HEALY: We will make sure that is on the register. Thank you, Mayor.

Ms Moriarty: Thank you for that great question. Thank you for all the great questions. I appreciate it.

CHAIR: You have been a most impressive witness, Councillor Moriarty.

Ms Moriarty: Thank you very much. Good luck with the inquiry. I am sure great things will come out of it.

CHAIR: Yes, we think so. We hope so. Did I hear you say that there is a deputy mayor in our presence?

Ms Moriarty: Yes, there is but she is wearing a different hat today. Our deputy mayor is Councillor Rachael Cruwys.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: As is common in our smaller communities.

Mr HEALY: Yes. In big cities they call them conflicts; here it is community.

Ms Moriarty: Absolutely.

CRUWYS, Ms Rachael, Treasurer, Capella State School P&C Association

CHAIR: Now we will go to Councillor Rachael Cruwys, who is here in her capacity as the treasurer of the Capella State School P&C Association. Would you like to make an opening statement and then we will have some questions for you?

Ms Cruwys: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Some in the room may have seen me in my role as Deputy Mayor of Central Highlands Regional Council, but today I speak as a volunteer and as a representative of the Capella State School Parents and Citizens' Association.

In rural and regional Queensland the volunteer base is shrinking. The same few people are doing more with less and burnout is real. We are seeing fewer hands and heavier loads. Our communities are complex. The presence of FIFO workers, while vital to our economy, often means fewer long-term residents available to take up volunteer roles. Add to that the tyranny of distance and just attending a meeting can mean hours on the road.

We rely heavily on grants, which are increasingly competitive and often capital focused. While new infrastructure is welcome, it does not always build community. In fact, it can lead to disengagement. When funding is expected, complacency creeps in and, when operational costs go unfunded, the burden shifts quietly but significantly on to the backs of volunteers and local businesses.

There is a growing trend of cost-shifting from state to community. The more we as P&Cs and local groups step in to fill the gaps the less visible the shortfalls become. Our communities are generous but there is a limit. There are only so many businesses who can sponsor and only so many families who can keep dipping into their pockets. We talk about volunteer hubs, coordinators and programs—and these are great ideas—but what we really need are feet on the ground. You cannot lead a community without people willing to put things into action, and right now the willing are wearing thin.

Much of our current conversation around volunteering focuses on leadership, training, support, hubs and coordination. These are important tools but they are not the solution in themselves, because at the heart of every thriving community is not just leadership but labour—it is putting shoulders to the wheel. We do not always need more presidents, secretaries or coordinators. What we need are more people willing to quietly lend a hand, to show up, to share the load and to do the work that keeps our organisations alive. Leadership without support is just a title. Shared effort is what builds resilience.

In rural communities like ours the same few people are often called upon time and time again. While their commitment is extraordinary, it is not sustainable. We must find ways to invite broader participation not by offering payment but by restoring pride in contribution. Volunteering is a value-based proposition. It is not about recognition and shouting from the rooftops. It is about being quietly valued by those around you.

If we want to strengthen our communities, we must stop looking only for leaders and start looking for contributors, because when there are more shoulders to share the wheel the whole community moves forward not just faster but stronger. The real backbone of community volunteering is not found in titles or roles. It is found in the quiet consistent effort of those who show up, roll up their sleeves and keep the heart of our towns beating.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Again, that was consistent with what we have been hearing, but you have put a real emphasis on boots on the ground, and I thank you for that. You must know Alun Roberts. He was the principal at Capella.

Ms Cruwys: Vaguely, yes.

CHAIR: He was the principal at Severnlea State School when my eldest boys were there. It is a little school with 20 students. He went to Capella and then came back. Everywhere he goes he causes a problem for the local MP when he leaves because all of the P&Cs and mums and dads jump up and down and say, 'You can't let him go.' That has happened to me as well. Thank you very much. Member for Inala, would you like to start the questions?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for your contribution. As someone who is a life member of two P&Cs, I understand fully the challenges. Obviously you have more unique challenges here with a smaller pool of people to draw from. They are the same issues that we see time and time again. What I am keen to get a sense of is: is there anything different for P&Cs in this area than for P&Cs around the rest of the state? Is there anything that you can think of that may be a point of difference?

Ms Cruwys: Our previous witnesses have commented on it. It is the shiftwork and fly-in fly-out, in combination with being in a rural area, that is unique in that you are lessening your volunteer base. Again, in those smaller communities it is always the same handful of people who are always at the forefront of no matter what organisation it is. You could extrapolate that across the region. I think it is that unique shiftwork as well. Even though we have fly-in fly-out, for example, my husband works away and he lives in a mining camp, so he is not there to contribute as much as he would like in his own child's sporting endeavours.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I am looking at the statistics at your school. You have about 107 students.

Ms Cruwys: Yes, about 107.

Mr BOOTHMAN: How many parents would actively get involved with the P&C?

Ms Cruwys: We have 14 members.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You are doing well.

Ms Cruwys: Whether they all have the ability to turn up and provide a quorum at a meeting is another matter. There is probably a core of six who are able to be more active than the others.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I have some schools with 1,000 pupils and if we could get 14 we would be very happy. In smaller townships you obviously rely on each other and you need the strength of each other to help each other out with issues. Do your community groups have multiple networks? Do they do networking? Do they have chambers of commerce? How do you get to know everybody's strengths?

Ms Cruwys: I think because it is the same few people doing it. If we have grant funding to buy, for example, a Square to help with the barbecues or anything like that, it is a known thing that that is open to all community groups. What we try to do is, if we are getting grant funding for something, it is open to the rest of the community groups to utilise. There is no point having something that only the P&C can use and then someone else has to replicate that in their organisation, so we really do try to pool the resources. Again, it is trying to get that pool of resources within the actual clubs themselves. That is still a struggle that we have because there is burnout. The president of our P&C is on at least three or four different organisations. I am on different organisations as well. We try as best we can to pool those resources.

Mr BOOTHMAN: It does not get any better in the city areas unfortunately. Even on the Gold Coast, we have 760,000 people and you will find a lot of people will be in the P&C, in the Lions Club and in something else.

Ms Cruwys: There are competing priorities: which hat am I going to wear today and which one can I give the most time to? It is a hard one.

Mr BOOTHMAN: It is hard.

Ms PEASE: Thanks for your volunteering and also for representing and serving the community. In your opening statement you talked quite strongly about the fact that we need to change and that we need to have a different attitude, a values-based attitude, towards volunteering. Correct me if I am wrong. I am paraphrasing and not doing a very good job of it. What can we do? What are your suggestions?

Ms Cruwys: Probably what we have tried to do as an organisation is take smaller bites out of the cherry so that there is not such a big emphasis on people having to be there all the time for the entire year. How can we shape our fundraising so that it is not such an impost on people just to get them involved? Also what we try to do is have a target of what we are wanting to achieve: 'From this fundraising effort, this is what we hope to buy for the school or for the kids.' So there is a target that they are trying to reach, rather than this constant, 'I have to turn up and we have to fundraise, but where are the funds going?'

I touched on cost-shifting as well. Because we have done quite well at fundraising, there is that expectation that we are always going to be there to provide those things for the school. It becomes a bit not monotonous but there is an expectation: 'Okay, I have to shoulder up again and do the same thing to provide the same thing every year,' which many see as basic things that should be provided by the education department. We should be providing the additional things that we want for our children, not the basics.

Mr BAILLIE: You mentioned you volunteer for several other organisations as well. There is obviously a particular skill set that might come with being treasurer of the P&C. Do you find yourself falling into that particular role in the other organisations or are there others within the community that fulfil that role?

CHAIR: I get it: you are Miss Rabbit from *Peppa Pig*. You are the helicopter pilot, the local deputy mayor, the state school P&C treasurer.

Ms Cruwys: To paint the picture, as soon as my little boy walked through the school gate as a preppie, I was basically collared and they said, 'I think you have the skill set to be the treasurer,' and no-one has taken me on for the title. As soon as you get collared—and you do get pigeon holed. I think a volunteer hub has been talked about. That is probably one of the issues that could pop up—that people are pigeonholed. It is not necessarily where their interests may lie. It is just that there is a body on the ground and you can fill a position, so that is you. Whether it is looking at tags of interest and those sorts of things rather than pigeonholing someone to a specific role within an organisation and then saying, 'That organisation needs that. There is a marry-up.' It really needs to be about the interests.

Ms PEASE: One of the things that I am interested in also is that people might want to volunteer but there is already someone in a role that they probably could fit into. There could be someone like you, for example, who has a high profile, is well known and can do the job really well and then there could be someone who is just not quite there yet but has a similar role.

I have a woman who is working in my office who is exactly like that—they just need to be taken along. We need that model of succession planning and engaging and building on your parent base: 'This is volunteering. This is what it looks like.' I wonder whether there are opportunities for that because I know there are a lot of quiet achievers who think, 'I would really like to get involved but I cannot.'

One of my local schools is quite an affluent school. It is a state school. The principal of the school used to say that his P&C was run by CEOs because that is who they all were—they were all CEOs. Therefore, none of the parents were going to get involved in that because they were going to be competing with these strong, opinionated people. As a consequence, their whole P&C just about died.

Ms Cruwys: There absolutely has to be succession planning. I will put it on record now: if someone wants to take over the role as the P&C treasurer, I will help you to fulfil your lifelong ambition. That is not a problem at all. Definitely succession is a big thing. That is what we try to do. As a P&C, they are championing whether it be one fundraising endeavour or it could be something within the school grounds and those sorts of things. They try to get as many people involved as possible and also make sure that they are getting the recognition. As I said, you can have the executive and that is great, but that is just a title unless you have actual people doing the work. If you have the title then you also need to be rolling up your sleeves. That is how we are as a P&C. That is how we operate.

CHAIR: Usually when I ring the president of the local show to see how things are going, he will have his phone up against his ear while he is welding a gate, shovelling manure out of a cattle pen or something like that.

Ms Cruwys: That is exactly it.

Mr BAILLIE: The member for Lytton hit the nail on the head with where I was going with the question about being a treasurer across multiple organisations. Some P&Cs we have spoken to have mentioned that they have a two-year limit on positions and then a rotation is required. That can be done before the person leaves the P&C, so the next person can do it with the training wheels on and have a mentor there to help them develop into that next role.

Ms Cruwys: Absolutely. There has to be that because of the compliance that we have. You are operating essentially a business. You have all the regulations, the legislation and the constitution that you have to adhere to. You have to have all of that in place because it is not about one position and it is not about one person; it is about the association, what they provide and who they provide it for. You have to have that continuity.

Mr BAILLIE: I was on a P&C until very recently. I am glad you are here in your role as treasurer because one of the issues that came up was around which banking organisation the P&C went with and how easy it was to engage with. If there was any change of personnel or any changes at all, it proved quite an onerous task. It was quite drawn out. Sometimes we would go for six months trying to get a new signatory on and take one off. Have you had experiences with that?

Ms Cruwys: Absolutely. We banked with a major bank. It was the only one in town. It is no longer in town, so you cannot go straight to the branch and say, 'Look, we've just had our AGM and we need to change over those who have signatory rights.' We cannot do that. There is that impost. Another bank has come in, in a smaller capacity. We have tried to invest money there to keep them

afloat and keep that service within the community. Absolutely, we have found issues. Even going to other branches, it has taken a long time to fulfil what we thought should have been a relatively routine thing.

Mr BAILLIE: It seems particularly difficult for some reason. I do not understand. I have not been engaged enough with it to understand all the challenges that are faced by P&Cs, in particular. It does seem like a lot.

Ms Cruwys: It is. It does not seem like it should be such an onerous task to actually do that. There have to be other groups that change their executive every year after an AGM. I would not have thought that it is creating something new. Yes, we have definitely faced those challenges.

Mr HEALY: Rachael, you have covered a few topics, so well done. Do you have any issues with blue cards?

Ms Cruwys: Rather than being tied to the voluntary blue card, a lot of us have the paid blue card. In the P&C itself, we have not found an issue. We have navigated that. For other organisations within the town it has been quite difficult. Probably depending on your organisation and depending on their skill sets, to actually tie that organisation to your blue card has provided a few headaches, particularly if they are not up with the technology and being able to do it online.

Mr HEALY: Getting people to do things online can be very challenging. Obviously getting access to the data is a bit of a challenge.

Ms Cruwys: Absolutely. From a P&C perspective, you have the technology and you have people within the school itself who can assist. When it comes to members of the P&C assisting with other organisations and then having to link back—as recently as a month ago that happened to a few of us. It was an ordeal to get that through before you could start contributing for that other organisation.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance today. Considering how busy you are with all the various hats that you wear, we really appreciate it. How far is Capella from Emerald?

Ms Cruwys: It is only 50 kilometres down the road, so we are all good.

CHAIR: We have time now for individuals to come forward and give a brief statement and then we may have some questions for you.

BUFFINGTON, Ms Lane, Private capacity

Ms Buffington: My name is Lane Buffington and I have been a local resident for 50 years. My current capacity is that I manage an office for the federal member for Flynn, Colin Boyce, and I am based here in Emerald. I have been in that role for 15 years. When I started, my family were still in primary school and I think I wore eight caps be it dance, P&Cs—at one point I was spread across three P&Cs for a kindergarten, a state school and a high school—the show society. It was an array. As my family grew, I would drop off from each one. Interestingly enough, some of those committees I am still very passionate about such as the schools and the kindy. My children benefited from them, so I still want to give back. Obviously, there are grandchildren coming up who will go through some of the similar education facilities.

When the Emerald State School fete was on a couple of years ago, I found myself the only one home over an Easter weekend, so I rang the president of the fete committee. I said to the lady who knows me very well—I actually taught her at high school—‘I’d like to come and sell raffle tickets for the night.’ She said, ‘Hold on, I’ll have to go away, check and come back to you.’ My blue card had lapsed at that time. She came back to me and said, ‘Look, we’re not interested in having you sell raffle tickets on the night of the fete because you’re not blue carded and you don’t have a child still here at school.’ To me, it was their loss. Now I am blue carded but I have not gone back to engage with them. They probably could have had me every year for the next 15 years selling raffle tickets for them or emptying the rubbish bins or something.

You talked with Rachael about banking. We hear quite a lot about banking. Rachael touched on the bank at Capella closing. We had a bank at Springsure close and now we face the threat of the Taroom agency probably closing. 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 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.

I was very unexpectedly asked to come up here, so I have scribbled down notes as I have gone along. I have touched on the massive amounts of fundraising, so there are large sums that have to be held. We are just so fortunate that we can have such a vast range of community events, festivals and fundraisers and the community supports them and some phenomenal money goes into the coffers.

I think I am about ready to finish up. Thank you for coming. I probably should have said that at the opening. Thank you to Brendan, Janice and Rachael for their submissions. My boss, Colin, has made a submission. I am aware of two submissions that have come in—one from my boss and one from my colleague in Gladstone. Nicole put in a submission. I do not know whether they will appear in Rockhampton.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Not everybody who makes a submission speaks.

Ms Buffington: I am aware that two submissions have come in from a Flynn cohort.

CHAIR: I sat next to Colin Boyce in the Queensland parliament for two or three years. He did a bit to improve my welding. I took some leave for my mental health. I had a rough time with a military background and all that. He gave me a camping spot on Mount Kinnoul, at his place near Taroom, where I was left alone for a week which was fantastic. Please give him my best regards.

Ms Buffington: I will.

CHAIR: Are you happy to answer some questions from the committee?

Ms Buffington: Sure.

CHAIR: You know that everybody who comes forward with an opinion will always be asked to give us some more.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you so much for appearing. I think you have brought something new and it is something that I had not considered. Being on a P&C, we would have fetes and we would have \$70,000 that we would have to find something to do with. In the city that was easier. We could get a security person. The bank manager organised for him to meet us at the bank and store it. That was something that I had not considered for remote or regional areas, and that would be a big issue. Even just trying to get a float from the bank would be enormously challenging. I suspect the internet connectivity is probably not great enough to do tap-and-go either, so that would bring additional challenges. Do you even have any security services here that you could engage? I would suspect not.

Ms Buffington: There would be, at a price. Would they hold it over a weekend? I do not know. I do not know if there is still a night safe, the old drawer that pulls out of the wall. I am not even sure. Westpac were the last bank left in town. I am not sure if they still have that facility. As I said, I have moved away from committees. I am going back eight years ago when the children finished school.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you have any potential solutions or is it just that you need a bank?

Ms Buffington: We have banks. The banks have stepped up to try to help out the community. We are very fortunate in that way. There is a bank. If you are within our 13 localities, you are probably only an hour and 15 minutes away, but then a round trip turns into a three-hour trip, and you are at the mercy of events like floodwaters.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That is an additional little bit of information for us, so thank you.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You have a really lovely area out here. I was looking out the window on the way in and I thought what a glorious open expanse—peaceful, so to speak. With the banking issues that you speak of, certainly in areas that are a lot more remote than where I come from, which is in the south-east, it would be a genuine issue. I do not have any more questions. You have all been very vocal in speaking up. I certainly do appreciate everybody being here today.

Ms PEASE: Thank you so much for presenting today and stepping in so quickly, and thank you for all your years of service. Well done. Working as an electorate officer for an MP is a great job, so well done.

Mr HEALY: Challenging but fun, so well done, Lane.

Ms PEASE: Yes, challenging. I am very interested that you raised that issue where you offered to volunteer and they said, 'We'll get back to you.' That is an incredibly valid point: making use of people who say they want to volunteer and giving them a meaningful job to do, and making sure that the management of your volunteers is a priority within any organisation because if people are brave enough to put their hand up to say they will do something then you want to make use of them.

Exactly the same thing happened to me at my Guardian Angels' little fete. I turned up for a fete and I saw the guy doing the chocolates for the chocolate toss-a-coin game. He was madly trying to package them all up, but he was on his own. I went and sat down and just started helping him. The principal came over and I heard them say, 'Now, has everyone got their blue cards?' I thought it was okay because I do, but if I had not have had that I would have been chased away from doing a job this man really needed someone to help him with. Do you have any suggestions about what we can do to make sure the volunteers feel valued? I know that it has already been said today, but what would you suggest could be done to improve that?

Ms Buffington: I do not really know with the blue card. Mine was just a case of—

Ms PEASE: Not just blue card, but anywhere in terms of valuing volunteers. Have you ever managed volunteers yourself in your role?

Ms Buffington: Yes.

Ms PEASE: What do you do in that role?

Ms Buffington: I manage volunteers every election time. I manage volunteers for functions, for Beef Week or whenever we have a stand. There is the Ekka this week, although I am not managing them. I think it is making them feel appreciated. It is the little thankyou or bringing them a cup of coffee when they have done the shift, or at election time when they are handing out the how-to-vote cards making sure on a cold day that they have warm doughnuts and coffee. It is making them feel valued. It is about connecting with them not just at that time but keeping that going every six months. If you know they are a widow on their own, it is just ringing and asking, 'How are you going?'

Ms PEASE: That is something we heard a little bit about on the Gold Coast last week from an organisation, about how they engage with their volunteers. They have a much younger cohort of volunteers. so they engage on WhatsApp groups. At their headquarters they have a gym, a coffee
Emerald

machine and all of those sorts of things so that people can come in and utilise those facilities and feel that they are part of something bigger than just going along once a week and doing a community visitor scheme or something like that.

Ms Buffington: You are exactly right with the technology side of things: what works for a demographic of this age does not work for the 60- to 90-year-olds.

Ms PEASE: I know, yes. You would experience that with your political volunteering, no doubt.

Ms Buffington: Yes, that is right: 'Don't email. Don't send a text.'

Ms PEASE: Some people do not have email and you cannot send texts, yes.

Mr BAILLIE: I did not have anything more to ask, but that last discussion has prompted a question: what does volunteer recognition look like? What does that mean?

Ms Buffington: For things I have worked on in the past, it is having a wrap-up party at the end of the year. If time does not permit and everyone is too busy, picking them up in January or February when it is a little quieter time. After you have done your dance concert and you have time after you have cleaned up, make sure we all get together for a cuppa. Someone bakes a cake or, if funds permit, go and buy a cake. I think it is important to not leave it for six months after you have had an event. You have to come together, not for the wash-up of 'How did we go with this event?', but you need to come together to chill out and within a few weeks of it finishing or finalising things.

Mr BAILLIE: Then again throughout the year just keep the community and relationships going.

Ms Buffington: Yes. Some of your best friendships come from when you are on the P&C committee because your children are the same age or you are on the kindy committee. They are lifelong friends, and now I am going to those children's weddings.

Mr HEALY: Lane, well done. You have done a lot of work in a lot of areas and you have made a significant contribution to your community, like many of you. Well done for that. This is more of a statement than anything about using cash because it is interesting. Probably about a month ago we had our annual fair in Cairns where everybody turns up—people from the Tablelands come down—and everything is cash, but the capacity to get cash into regions these days is becoming so expensive. When we start talking about things like cash, I always ask the internet.

My background is in tourism. I know when you are driving the tourism industry, it is important to reach more people. We are seeing more people retiring and coming out to this beautiful part of the world and other parts like Western Queensland and the North. A lot more people are retiring and driving out to these areas. The digital space gives them greater capacity as not a lot of people carry cash. I want to touch on that point because it is a really big point.

It is becoming so expensive to move cash around in regional areas. It nearly stopped a little while ago. It is costing millions and millions of dollars. Whilst it is not directly involved in this, I think it is a really good point that you touched on. It is a concern. I think digital connectivity for when you are getting people together for anything, whether it is volunteering or anything else, is vitally important. I wanted to make those points. Thank you for your great contribution. Well done.

Ms Buffington: I will add onto that a little bit. 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.

Mr HEALY: Yes. There needs to be the capacity for it. It happens at government level. We need to get better at it, but particularly recognising that in regional and rural Queensland, or in regional and rural Australia, they are significant challenges that have an impact on engagement and they have an impact on the local economy, particularly with those sorts of events. You are spot on.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you very much, Ms Buffington. It is very good of you to come forward. I extend the invitation to anyone who has not spoken. If there is no further interest, why don't we all have a cup of tea and a yarn? I will declare the hearing has concluded. A transcript of today's proceedings will be available on the committee's website in due course. I want to thank our Hansard reporter for being here today—it is always good to have you come with us—and also our committee secretariat. It is the staff who make this possible. The work that goes on behind the scenes is very significant, so I thank them for that. Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 2.10 pm.