



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr JP Lister MP—Chair

Mr AJ Baillie MP

Mr MA Boothman MP

Mrs ME Nightingale MP

Ms JM Bush MP

Staff present:

Ms K Guthrie—Inquiry Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 15 May 2025

ROMA

THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2025

The committee met at 9.44 am.

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for coming. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My name is James Lister. I am the chair of this committee and also the member for Southern Downs. I want to acknowledge the other members of the committee with us today: Margie Nightingale, the member for Inala and deputy chair; Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville; Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore on the Gold Coast; and Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper, who is standing in today for Joan Pease, the member for Lytton. Thank you very much for joining us. I also acknowledge that present today is the Hon. Ann Leahy MP, the member for Warrego and the Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers. Thank you for being here today. I also acknowledge that former senator for Queensland Andrew Bartlett is with us today. He has been to most of these and he is the chair of Volunteering Queensland. It is good to see you again, Andrew.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in these proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally 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. In line with general rules relating to parliamentary proceedings, I remind witnesses to please refrain from using unparliamentary language such as swearing or offensive terms, even if you are directly quoting someone else—and I often say that that means you cannot quote Billy Connolly.

These proceedings are being transcribed by Hansard, and I thank Hansard for their presence here today. Media may be present, and I believe *Queensland Country Life* is here. You are very important and politicians will treat you very well, I am sure. We all like to get a good report on what we are up to. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask you to please switch off your mobile phones or turn them to silent mode. We are starting a little bit late due to the late arrival of the flight from Brisbane, so we will just extend all of the timelines by 15 minutes.

McMULLEN, Mr Geoff, Executive Member, Roma Show Society

NIXON, Mrs Julie, Secretary, Roma Show Society

CHAIR: I now welcome representatives of the Roma Show Society. Thank you for coming before us today. I invite you to make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you.

Mr McMullen: I am fairly new to the role—I took it on just recently—but, like most shows, we are very short of volunteers. We have other issues such as people leaving town with the Friday public holiday after the Monday public holiday. I know that one business shut for the other three days, so that is nine or 10 days. Julie might be able to add to that.

Mrs Nixon: Like Geoff, I only just came into the role in January. It is all very different from my role; I am a farmer normally. It is just the lack of volunteers and the lack of people willing to help. We have an amazing group of volunteers, but it falls on half a dozen generally to do pretty much everything. I do not know how we can change that. The show holiday does not generally help, in my opinion. I grew up in New South Wales and we did not have show holidays. I have been in Queensland now for 26 years and there have been show holidays throughout Queensland since then, so I do not know how long show holidays have been going on. When I grew up I was very heavily involved in shows and we just did not have the show holiday. In that regard, we had a lot more volunteers because they were not leaving town because of that long weekend. That is basically our little thing.

There is always a challenge to find executives to step up into the roles. We do not have a treasurer at the moment. It is one of the hardest roles to fill. Obviously, with volunteering you get personality clashes. I do not know how we can address those sorts of things. It is just the sense of community that I think we have to try to get back—and that is open to the floor, probably. I have a

young daughter who is 24 and her sense of community is outstanding, but she is a very lone 24-year-old. She cannot get any of her friends to be involved in volunteering. I think it is that demographic where we have to work towards getting that volunteer base back because, unfortunately, the volunteer base is not very young.

Mr McMullen: Without those from the prison camp in Mitchell—they gave us three days prior to the show, didn't they?

Mrs Nixon: Yes.

Mr McMullen: We would have got it done, but we would have been busy with the half a dozen of us going. The prison came down with about 10 guys who did all the heavy lifting. They are under supervision and they are very good, but, of course, we cannot get them back the next week to help us pack up because they are setting up the Mitchell work and the Mitchell Show because that is where they are based. There are a lot of things like that, but, hopefully, as we move forward I think the new committee is going to be able to get some of the old people come back to help us—just a few. As Julie said, there were a few personality clashes there before and people just drifted away, so hopefully we can get that turned around. That is a big problem, isn't it?

Mrs Nixon: Another thing I suppose we could look more into is the bigger corporations that are out here. We have the big gas companies. Maybe they have to do a little bit of volunteering or provide a little bit more community spirit. If they are going to be in these communities—and they certainly have been in Roma definitely for gas and oil since way back when as there is a huge oil and gas industry around this area—maybe the big corporations have to do that. I do not know if you can force them at all, but they need to have a little bit more of a community spirit because that is what is supplying and supporting Roma.

Mr McMullen: I do not know whether this is possible—and probably a lot of people will not agree—but maybe work for the dole would help. We probably do not have a heap of unemployed here in Roma, but there are some of them that could help. They might not be able to lift stuff but would be capable of doing some of the jobs. We have to find volunteers.

Mrs Nixon: We could certainly sign off on that as a committee for working for the dole.

Mr McMullen: We had two families of grey nomads that did the toilets, because they are staying in Roma and one of the guys knew through his in-laws, so there were two lots of grey nomads doing the rounds cleaning all the toilets. Without them, that is another—

Mrs Nixon: They were doing the rubbish runs as well—

Mr McMullen: Yes, the rubbish runs and that.

Mrs Nixon: It was just the grey nomads, so, again, we are looking at that older demographic wanting to volunteer, not that younger demographic.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The committee will now ask some questions of you.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you, Julie and Geoff, for attending today and for giving us the information about your show. I am sure it is a delightful event. I am interested to know how much attendance you get at the show. Is it quite an active level of participation in terms of visitors coming to the show?

Mrs Nixon: Yes. Our final numbers are not out yet. Like I said, we did not have a treasurer, so we have a stand-in who is trying to fill the role. As this is the first year for both Geoff and me, I am not 100 per cent sure whether we are up or down as yet. From all accounts it was a really good show and our numbers were solid, so I cannot answer fully.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: In terms of the issues with finding volunteers, the show is a successful event and is something the community loves; it is just being able to find those people. You said that the show holiday has an impact because it sends people away in that regard. Would you like to see that show holiday removed? Is that something that would benefit you?

Mrs Nixon: That is a bigger fish for across the board, but I was involved in the Miles Show and it is on a Tuesday. I know that our numbers really waned because everybody will take the Monday off so they technically have a four-day week. It did really have a big impact. They just said, 'I'm not coming to Miles because it's a show holiday, so we're all going away for the four days,' because it is out of school holiday time. It is not a holiday anywhere else in the state; it is only for Miles, so they all go out of town and leave the little communities. I like having the show holiday, but in that respect I think it probably is doing a little bit of damage to the smaller communities.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you both for joining us today and for your efforts with the show. Did I hear correctly that this is the first year you have been executives to run the show?

Mrs Nixon: Yes. I started in January and Geoff came on the executive only about a month ago.

Mr BAILLIE: Wow, but the Roma Show has been going on for some time, hasn't it?

Mrs Nixon: The Roma Show started at the end of 1872 and our first show was 1873, so, yes, it has been going for a very long time.

Mr BAILLIE: So can I ask what the circumstances were that resulted in you both volunteering on the executive, to get involved and to take over the show in some respects?

Mr McMullen: Previously I was on council for eight years, so I had been attending meetings just as a councillor. Once I missed out on getting back on council, I was asked if I would come and join the show committee, which I did. I was just sitting in the background until the little incident happened where we lost some executives, so they asked me whether I would step up. It was a quick learning curve, but we got there.

Mrs Nixon: I am a farmer. My husband works away. We are in a roaring drought, if anybody did not realise, but I have a little packet of about four properties around where I am that have had no rain and I just had to get off the farm. This opportunity came up and, like I said, I have been showing since I was a wee tot. I used to show horses and now cattle, so I know my way around a show society and I thought, 'Yep, this is a challenge I look forward to doing,' and I have always volunteered. It is my personal experience that at one time, when my kids were little, I was on nine committees. I have always volunteered and always given back to the community. It is my passion. I enjoy it. I love seeing things succeed and just the sense of community is in me, but it is unfortunately not in a lot of people, so I do not know how to get that.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you both so much. I am sure your community really appreciates it as well.

Mrs Nixon: Yes, I do and we are looking forward in the next 12 months where we can both sink our teeth into it and make it bigger and better. We will work on trying to get more volunteers and so on.

Mr BAILLIE: Do you have a show society behind the executive and more volunteers sitting there?

Mrs Nixon: Yes, we have a very good committee now. Our president is out at Charleville Show. She is a horse exhibitor, so she has gone out there to support them and she could not be here today. We have an outstanding vice-president, who has the energy and drive of 10 people, but he had to work today. Then we have some other executives who came on when we had three or four quit on us. They came on in the end just to give us a bit of help and guidance and things like that. The general committee and the stewards across the board have just been fantastic. They have really rallied around us and we have all made a fantastic show. If you are not aware, the show was only on the weekend—literally only three days ago.

Mr BAILLIE: You have not come down yet.

Mrs Nixon: No, we are still trying to get over the sleepless nights and everything. It was a huge success, from all accounts. We have only had positive from it. There has only ever been positive talk around town everywhere how good the show was.

Mr BAILLIE: Congratulations.

CHAIR: Being show secretary is no small job.

Mrs Nixon: I am starting to figure that out.

Ms BUSH: I have a couple of rapid-fire questions. Julie and Geoff, firstly, congratulations on your appointment and thank you for stepping up. That is fantastic. Some of my first question has been answered. I can see that you have nine positions in your committee. Is there staff that sits behind that? Are there any paid positions or is it just the volunteer committee that is driving the work that you do?

Mrs Nixon: I am the only paid. I am paid part-time.

Ms BUSH: You are the secretary.

Mrs Nixon: Yes, I am the secretary. I would gladly give up the pay to do it because it is my passion.

Ms BUSH: Secretary is a tough job.

Mrs Nixon: It is not the pay that I am doing it for. No, no other position is paid. That is the only one. Yes, we are a big show, but we are small financially. Finance is always a struggle. I do not like taking the pay because I know how much is in our bank. Trying to find more grants and more support out there is always—I am constantly looking out for any little bit of extra we can get to try to help go forward. I think a bookkeeper or a treasurer is probably a little bit more than we need to pay and we just cannot afford it. Trying to keep the books going is just as hard as well. I am doing both roles at the moment.

Ms BUSH: I can see that. Certainly keep that pay, then. How many hours a week or a month do you think it would occupy for the committee? Obviously there is volunteering work that is important on the day and in the lead-up and probably in the days after, but during the year how much time does something like this occupy?

Mrs Nixon: During the year I do about two days a week. Before the show I was full-time, putting in 16- to 20-hour days.

Ms BUSH: It is a big job.

Mrs Nixon: And after the show I am still putting in 12-hour days. Probably for about a month to six weeks it is a full-time position. I have been home for a couple of nights in the last two months.

Ms BUSH: Is everyone else putting in similar or probably a bit less?

Mrs Nixon: Geoff certainly is. Geoff and our VP and our president certainly are. It is that clean-up after the show. It is that setting up for the show. The facilities are getting very old out at Bassett Park so it takes a long time to set it up and to pull it down. Again, there I am looking at grants to try to improve our facilities. Being council owned is also a little bit of a challenge.

Ms BUSH: How many vacancies do you think you are holding generally in the volunteering field? There is obviously the committee; there are cleaners, probably money handlers, probably people setting up and cleaning up the general grounds, advertising. Do you have a sense of the vacancies that you are holding now—the size?

Mrs Nixon: I think there could definitely be another three or four.

Ms BUSH: We are not talking hundreds?

Mrs Nixon: No, we are not. The ones like Geoff, Lachie and I need those ones in charge but to delegate out, to get just that little bit—instead of it being Geoff taking on two or three roles and our vice-president, who takes on about 10. It is just to share the load.

Ms BUSH: How do you find volunteers now? You are new in the role, but who trained you and taught you? Coming into a volunteer management role is a whole other skill set. How did you get inducted—or did you not, which is often the experience?

Mrs Nixon: Like we said, we had the executives leave. One of the them was the past secretary. No, I was thrown in the deep end: 'Here is a computer. Here is a phone. Go for it.' Luckily, I have a background in shows so I sort of knew where I was going and how to go about it.

Mr McMullen: Whilst we were short of volunteers in some of the different sections, we still had the person who had been looking after that section for a few years. Whilst some of the volunteers had not been there before, at least they had someone to point them in the right direction. We could have had a few more, but one lady took on three sections.

Mrs Nixon: Everybody really stepped up.

Mr McMullen: She was here and there was one in the middle that had no-one, so she and her sister joined together then to see one through without dropping it.

Ms BUSH: It is kind of word-of-mouth?

Mrs Nixon: Yes, without trying to drop sections, everybody worked together, and the committee have really pulled together and rallied around us all. It is absolutely a shared load.

CHAIR: Thank to you the representatives of the Roma Show Society. I am sure I speak for everybody in saying that you are not alone. Any show societies that have submitted to us experience the challenge of having sufficient volunteers. I am sure the community is grateful to you for what you do.

JOPPICH, Mrs Debbie, General Manager, Roma Commerce and Tourism

STANFORD, Mr Peter, President, Roma Commerce and Tourism

CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming before us today. I invite you to address the committee for a short time and then we will have some questions for you.

Mrs Joppich: Roma Commerce and Tourism is a volunteer organisation that plays a central role in supporting economic development, tourism and business growth throughout the Maranoa region. We are governed by a professional volunteer board. RCAT is a membership organisation that drives strategic initiatives and community projects and relies heavily on the time, expertise and commitments of our volunteers.

RCAT delivers key objectives throughout the year, including training and skill development, annual networking and business capability events such as the business awards, ladies lunches and supply chain forums, and we also take an advocacy role with our membership. Operating as a volunteer board presents real challenges, particularly in a region facing ongoing workforce shortages. Many of our board members are small business owners or managers who simply cannot step away from their daily operations to take on additional volunteer commitments. This creates pressure on our organisation's capacity and also limits our ability to undertake long-term planning and pursue broader community initiatives.

In addition to the board, RCAT also coordinates a team of tourism volunteers, many of whom are retirees. These individuals make a meaningful contribution to the region's economy by delivering frontline visitor services, providing local knowledge and enhancing the overall tourism experience. Volunteers are essential at our visitor information centre, tour-guiding at the saleyards and operating our Roma miniature train. However, as this demographic ages and recruitment becomes more difficult, the sustainability of this volunteer workforce is increasingly at risk. These issues highlight the need for systematic support to recognise, retain and strengthen the roles of volunteering in regional economic and community development.

The economic benefit that volunteers contribute to the region is often unrecognised or valued. The key issues and barriers that we find to volunteering for our organisation are the workforce shortages and competing priorities. In regions like the Maranoa, workforce shortages are placing enormous pressure on small business owners and employees. Many potential volunteers are also business owners or essential staff and they simply cannot step away from their core responsibilities to contribute to the unpaid roles, no matter how willing or community minded they are. Often volunteering commitments are unable to be kept or made due to the uncertainty of what is happening in their own workforce. This provides reluctance to initially undertake these roles or actively participate throughout the whole duration of their term.

Increased cost of living and child care availability: the increase in cost of living is changing the traditional family structure and forcing both parents to return to work, rendering them both unable to commit to volunteering. With the childcare shortages, often our retirees, who would be our traditional volunteers, are taking up childcare responsibilities and therefore are unable to commit to these duties. Child care is a major issue in our region, and the solution is falling on our retiring generation.

Volunteer burnout and overreliance on a few: with limited availability of new volunteers, existing volunteers often take on multiple roles or commitments, leading to fatigue and burnout. This is particularly true in leadership roles such as board positions, where the workload can resemble that of a full-time role that does not have associated support or compensation.

Our aging volunteer base: our tourism volunteers are predominantly retirees who bring valuable knowledge and time. However, this demographic continues to age and there is a declining pool of physically capable and available individuals. Succession planning is difficult when the younger generations are not so engaged or available to step up to these roles. Often insurance policies have age limits that do not correlate to our current volunteering age group, leaving them either uninsured or unable to volunteer.

Lack of formal support and funding: there is limited financial assistance available for volunteer board organisations for administration support, technology, insurance, governance, training and recruitment, which are all essential components of a healthy volunteering system. Our organisation has annual financial costs of auditing returns, accounting software and increasing insurance risks.

Some solutions and recommendations—all the good stuff: financial support for volunteer-driven organisations. Advocate for targeted funding and grants to support the operational needs of volunteer-led organisations. It includes resourcing for administration technology such as accounting

software and CRMs, coordination roles and training. Even modest funding can significantly improve retention and capacity, particularly if a paid person is undertaken to meet some of the legislative requirements.

Businesses-backing volunteer incentives: develop and promote policies or incentives for businesses that could allow employees to volunteer during work hours. This could include a tax incentive for businesses that actively support staff participating in community roles. Whilst this may be challenging in a workforce shortage as we have, it may provide a sense of community engagement and aid in employment retention within our regions. It would also introduce the wider benefits of volunteering and provide a market that potentially would not voluntarily put their hand up.

Solving wider barriers of workforce issues: in regional communities our workforce is not unlimited. Ensuring adequately skilled staff in a region will allow volunteer professional organisations to select skills that are required versus who has the capacity.

In conclusion, volunteers are the lifeblood of regional communities, underpinning our vital services, events and organisations like Roma Commerce and Tourism, yet without deliberate and targeted support the sustainability of volunteers, particularly in regions facing workforce shortages and demographic shifts, is under threat. By investing in structural support and recognising the essential contributions of volunteers we can strengthen community resilience and ensure that regional organisations such as RCAT continue to thrive. It is time we treat volunteers not as a free resource but as a critical asset to our regions' regional development, deserving investment, innovation and care.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you both for attending today. It sounds like an amazing organisation. I am interested to know what would be the cost to the community if your organisation, through the lack of volunteers, no longer existed. Do you have a rough idea of what that might be?

Mrs Joppich: Not a dollar figure. Tourism is a significant industry in our region and obviously that tourism multiplier effect is quite substantial. The role that our volunteers play in that tourism information centre and at the saleyards is just huge. We know that if we extend volunteers by one extra day they spend an extra \$170 per person in town. Multiply that by our visitation and it is a huge component and a huge industry that supports our region. As far as RCAT—

Mr Stanford: From a business advocacy point of view, we have about 130 member businesses that encompass the organisation. In us being here today to represent those businesses, we are the voice of many. We run a series of networking events throughout the year and we are constantly advocating for businesses or looking for grants for them. That would be lost from the community if we could not continue in our role.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: There is obviously that economic contribution as well as a broader community sense in bringing the community together.

Mrs Joppich: It is bringing the business community together. It is having the voice. It is fighting for that regionalism which is what we continually do. It is ensuring we have these services that other areas have.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Without your volunteers that would all be at risk?

Mrs Joppich: Our board is a volunteer board of nine very busy people who contribute to not only monthly meetings but also activities and events. Continually advocating is one of our biggest roles and utilising those voices.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you both have different businesses or other roles?

Mrs Joppich: I am in a unique situation in that I am actually paid. The organisation does pay me, but Pete—

Mr Stanford: I have several businesses of my own. I am an engineering consultant and I have a co-working space in town. This is our side job.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Thank you for taking the time to come here today. Firstly, I want to say thank you to the information centre, which is at the Big Rig. I have been there many times and they are very helpful. I certainly appreciate all the advice they give us about your beautiful region. My question also relates to the previous witnesses and it is about the younger generation. Some of my schools have community service awards et cetera. Just getting these young people involved in community service certainly enlightens them. It helps them on their career pathways but also gives them a sense of purpose in our society. I notice you have a high school in Roma State College.

Mrs Joppich: We have Roma State College and we also have St John's. We have two schools up to year 12.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Is that an untapped resource that potentially could be used, because we do need to get the next generation involved. What type of help and assistance do you think Education Queensland could provide to get these volunteers?

Mr Stanford: In that vein of education and volunteering, the model of volunteering probably needs a rethink. For example, the local schools do a school fete once a year. Now it is not a volunteer basis; it is almost an obligation that the parents buy ingredients to bake jam drops to then donate them to the school fete to then volunteer to man the school fete to then buy the jam drops back themselves. It would be quicker for us to just give the school \$50.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You are making me hungry, by the way.

Mr Stanford: Once upon a time that might have worked very well, but now within a time-poor society it is probably not the model we should be teaching our kids. That is not an effective way of fundraising.

Mrs Joppich: The school curriculum is so full that introducing volunteering just does not fit into their priorities. They have so many competing priorities. My children go to the state college and the student council do small amounts of volunteering. I know that St John's do the same at Pinnaroo.

Mr Stanford: St John's reach out from the care point of view. They will have kids go across to the local nursing home—not volunteering but more so to just be in the community and help out.

Mrs Joppich: The curriculum is so full that they just do not have that as a priority. I volunteer in a lot of other activities around town and my parents were very big volunteers as well. It is a little bit of a generational thing. I know that my kids will as well because they get dragged everywhere with us. They say, 'Can we just be a normal family and go to a normal event without doing stuff?' That is the next generation and they will volunteer.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Do you feel that with your children it is better for their mental wellbeing to volunteer?

Mrs Joppich: Totally.

Mr BOOTHMAN: One of the issues we find in our society is with the mental wellbeing of our young people. As somebody who has always volunteered, I have always been very passionate about it and I always try to do it with my own children. We have a society where we live on iPads and we do not interact with each other.

Mrs Joppich: I find my children can interact with adults and a wide range of people, and that has come from being forced by their parents to talk with people.

Mr Stanford: I agree.

Ms BUSH: I was interested that you mentioned the resources and that it would be helpful to have grants that specifically targeted resources or services or projects for you to build with the volunteering capability. Do you have a grants calendar now? I am interested in whether you see a gap there. I know sometimes with sports there are specific sporting grants that target volunteers, but that is just for sporting organisations, which you are not, so I am curious.

Mrs Joppich: We have never been able to access a volunteer grant. We have put a couple in.

Ms BUSH: Who did you put them in through? Do you remember?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Were they federal?

Mrs Joppich: I think they were state and that was for safety equipment.

Ms BUSH: There is the gambling benefit fund that comes up, but often that is equipment as well.

Mrs Joppich: Yes, and assets.

Mr Stanford: The gap for the grant funding would be in helping those key positions, like your secretary and treasurer, where people are probably a bit daunted to join the committee. That is a big undertaking if you are not familiar with it in terms of helping them with the accounting software or customer resource—

Mrs Joppich: The accounting software, CRM, Microsoft—all those expenses.

Ms BUSH: Do you use Community Door? Do you know of the Community Door website?

Mrs Joppich: No.

Ms BUSH: That has a bunch of free training for executive positions. It would be interesting to know how you find out about these things.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you for everything you do. I understand you are engaged with a number of volunteers in some different aptitudes and duties across the community. How do you go about engaging with volunteers and recruiting volunteers? Have you found any effective ways to recognise volunteers and their efforts that seem to drive more engagement?

Mrs Joppich: With the recruitment you can advertise, social media, put it out there widely and you will get maybe one touchpoint. However, if you actually touch people on the shoulder, have the conversation and invite them, you generally find you will have a greater success rate.

Mr Stanford: Like me being in the president role; I have been around commerce, the organisation, for a number of years and I have some peers who are on the committee. Deb might have tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Hey, there's an opening for president. We need someone.' It might have been that sort of direct linkage and knowing you are not going to be there in isolation; you are going to know people and they are similar to you.

Mrs Joppich: The board is definitely finding that hands-on approach of tapping them on the shoulder and having the conversation will generally get success. People are very reluctant to put up their hand, but often they will say yes if asked, which is hard; it is feet on the ground.

Mr BAILLIE: Do you have any recognition mechanisms within your organisation?

Mrs Joppich: With our tourism volunteers we hold an annual Christmas party—we take them out for dinner—and then for the local government's Volunteers Week next week there is a morning tea for all the volunteers in the region. The council also has a volunteer award in the Australia Day process. Also through the information centre we take our volunteers on a number of famils through the year. We do give them love. Through the board—

Mr Stanford: It is our Christmas party.

Mrs Joppich:—it is our annual Christmas party.

Mr Stanford: We have the business awards, annually, which is more celebrating the business community. That is recognition of the board as well and everyone in the business community, whether they are volunteers or not.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance today and for answering our questions. We do appreciate it. I now call our next witness, who is the founder and director of Givit.

WRIGHT, Ms Juliette OAM, Private capacity

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance before us. Would you like to give us a brief opening statement?

Ms Wright: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Before I begin I would like to make it really clear that I am actually speaking in a personal capacity today; I am not representing Givit. I do have some pretty good observations to share from my own experience as I built Givit 15 years ago as a volunteer organisation. As we know now, it supports people in crisis and hardship across Australia.

I founded Givit in 2009. It is an online platform created to connect Australians who want to give to those in urgent need. It started at my kitchen table with no staff or funding. It was completely run by volunteers. It was built by volunteers. For the first four years it was entirely run by individuals, mostly mothers, who would arrive at the Givit office at about a quarter past nine, after school drop-off. I provided them a car park and they would leave at about 2.30 to do the school run. I gave them a patch, a turf and a role where they would actually have a set of organisations they would support and help them get their needs met.

The buzz was on a Tuesday and a Thursday. On Monday the office was empty; no-one ever wanted to come in. I had to get them to stop making cakes and doing bake-offs because we were all putting on an extreme amount of weight. As I said, every woman had a patch and they took charge of the donation matching. They took that patch quite seriously and would even take their work on holidays. They were not just helpers; they were essentially a big part of Givit's success.

I have been watching volunteering happen since the mud army of Cyclone Yasi and I have some observations. I saw Volunteering Queensland create the EV Crew app after Yasi and organisations requested support in times of emergencies. I noticed that it never had any traction past South-East Queensland. I noticed in Far North Queensland that mayors and people would organise through their phone, through Messenger and now through WhatsApp. They have a connection via their phones rather than external apps and charities.

I mentored a number of social entrepreneurs who started volunteer organisations like Help Me with It in 2013. It was a little bit different. It was where individuals could actually ask for assistance. They needed to post their request and someone would meet that need. It was not vetted by a charity, as I said. They closed due to lack of funding in 2018. Air Tasker reached out to me to get their service providers doing free work post disasters. Airbnb wanted to get involved and get people to volunteer their homes, which is probably more of a service. Of course, I mentored numerous volunteer organisations who just needed funding for staff. Volunteer organisations need funding for staff, and you are going to hear that a lot. Based on these lessons that I have learned over that decade, I actually started to allow Givit donors to also volunteer their time. There was a huge number of corporates that would come to us that would not want to fund us but would want to give time to us.

Right now, Givit has about 200 active requests on the website for volunteers required, including driving lessons for a young mum in Western Australia, lawn mowing for a mother in Brisbane who is escaping domestic violence, and electrical repairs for a man with a disability whose caravan has been damaged by Cyclone Alfred. Givit supports over 1,800 charities in Queensland. Many are supported and governed by volunteers, but a lack of volunteer numbers and a lack of funding for paid staff often leaves them unable to deliver a lot of their essential services. As you know, volunteers are absolutely critical, particularly in rural, remote and regional Queensland.

The desire to volunteer has not actually gone away. In 2003 Volunteering Queensland stated that there were over 719 million hours contributing \$117 billion to our economy. That is incredible. Formal volunteering has still gone down, and I have been watching that happen. Givit now employs a team of 30. Our ability to maintain volunteers and give them a meaningful patch that they can control and manage has really been up-ended as disasters have become more frequent, Givit has adopted more policies and systems, we are embedded into community recovery and local disaster management groups, requests for support have become more demanding and then we have had COVID. We currently only have one or two part-time volunteers who we bring in who know the systems. It is pretty sad.

When people want to help in a disaster or all year round, often it is because it is donor-driven—they actually want to donate what they want to do, when they want to do it and in the time they can do it. The gentle truth is that unsolicited donations and well-meaning offers often become overwhelming to small communities in times of disasters and when they really need volunteers. It is often not community-led recovery; they are donor-driven impulses about when they want to give. It is vital that communities define what they need and when they need it.

I apply the same principles to volunteering. Donating time is actually really noble—I do it myself and I see the value in it—but the actual value needs to come from the communities. They actually need to tell us what they need. Engagement will only be high if you give them a really meaningful role, but sometimes they actually do not want to give. It is like the lock and the key; it is not quite right. That is why organisations need to promote very clearly what they need and only fulfil that role, in a way.

I am on a new personal journey and I have started Recovere, which is a global donation management platform which has not launched yet. I found 10 volunteers within a matter of days—marketing, communication, CRM management, debugging the platform, financial systems, Google analytics. There are people who are absolutely keen but, again, you must give them their patch and give them autonomy and control over that and then they stick around—not too much work, not enough, they like to be needed. We make sure that each volunteer gets given their patch, we support them and we make sure it is impact-driven so we can keep them.

CHAIR: If the secret to Givit was a system to connect donors with beneficiaries—and you have talked about other systems—does that imply that the future for volunteering, if we want to maintain it or even grow it, will rely upon systems to connect those who want to volunteer with those who need the volunteers?

Ms Wright: When you are talking about local groups, I do think the tap on the shoulder, as was previously said, is probably the best way. However, when you are talking about skilled volunteering, I think skilled volunteering needs to be online.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you very much for Givit. I represent an electorate that has quite a high need and Givit has been a lifesaver for many people in my electorate, so thank you for that. I really appreciate your work.

CHAIR: Hear, hear!

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I am inspired by the way in which you were able to start. I am interested in the idea of people having that autonomy, accountability and ownership to help promote motivation and their own sense of achievement. Do you have any ideas about how that approach might be extended to some different kinds of volunteer organisations?

Ms Wright: My first thinking is that they need a PD so they know exactly what they are doing, but then when you come to the show society you know that that person just needs to fill in every gap that is coming in towards that event. So it is case by case. I actually gave my volunteers such clear position descriptions once and I decided to give them KPIs. Do not do that; do not ever give them KPIs. That was a very catastrophic week. There were tears; it was not good. You have to give them the support but then not give them any pressure. Sorry, I did not answer that very well.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is a challenging scenario: how we can help people to feel like they are getting the most out of it to help with that motivation and continuation, and also how we can try to make that fit all of the different types of volunteering that we need.

Ms Wright: It is an adaptive challenge because each particular group has their own challenge to solve.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you think novelty plays a role—that is, when something is new and exciting that can help get people on board? How do we then maintain that interest and attention?

Ms Wright: I think it comes to values. One of my highest values is feeling connected. If I do not feel connected, I get quite anxious. If my husband and I feel disconnected, we have to manage that roadway. One of the reasons I think women came to Givit is that I created a sense of community and connectedness; it was really important to me that we were all connected, and that made them come back as well. They felt connected to the charities they signed on and were supporting. They felt connected to the region because they knew the problems of the organisations and what they needed. For example, I think Jenny used to run your patch and she would not let go of her patch even when she went to Paris for a month. She still did it overseas. There is that sense of connection and not wanting to hand it over and keep that ownership around it.

Mr BAILLIE: I know that you said you are not here to talk about Givit as such, but it would be remiss of me, given the rain event we had in North Queensland and how much Givit helped, to not mention that and thank you for everything that Givit does. One of the things you said really struck a chord with me. I was in Townsville in the 2019 floods and also in the most recent rain event—which, to be fair, probably impacted those north and south of us a lot more severely—and you see the best in Queenslanders and the community in those events. The community spirit shines through and everyone wants to get in and contribute, but sometimes it is not in the most coordinated fashion and

it can create more of a burden on those local communities to figure out what they are going to do with all of the goods that are being donated—where they are going to store them, how they are going to keep them cool—and sometimes there are double-ups if it is not coordinated.

Do you have any insights into how we can take that enthusiasm for giving and contributing at the time of the disaster versus what may be a more prolonged effort, donation or interest in helping out? There is the disaster response—where everyone is very active and at the forefront—but the recovery takes years, and that is where a lot of the people need that consistent help. Do you have any insights into how we can maybe redirect or delay or try to apply that desire to help but at different times so—

Ms Wright: So it is more paced.

Mr BAILLIE: So they can receive it rather than trying to drink from a fire hose.

Ms Wright: In terms of unsolicited donations, and that is probably unsolicited volunteers as well, after a disaster happens the second disaster happens, which is a flood of donations and inappropriate donations—poor quality—and an army of people who want to help in a very unregulated way. Where Givit comes in—and I speak personally—is that we do not want their fridge because they do not have a house yet, so we capture that generosity in our virtual warehouse and then the organisations take it as they need it. The heat only comes when the media comes. I think people see those images of people on television, their heart opens up and they want to give, but then the quality of goods goes from 95 per cent to 25 per cent. Givit is more defined by what we say no to than what we say yes to when people are in urgent need. It can be devastating. With Volunteering Queensland, they capture that people want to give their time, and we do that as well, and then the organisations just take it—so it is community-led recovery and taking and requests. It has to be coming from local, because if it is not coming from local it is just donor-driven impulses, which can be harmful.

Mr BAILLIE: By storing that donation in the virtual warehouse, it lets you support the businesses that may be in that disaster zone and may not be trading at that time. It gives them time to restock and get rid of the things that were damaged and then they benefit from the donations to that region, rather than the financial benefit going to organisations and corporations outside of the region and them sending all the goods up.

Ms Wright: Honestly, we discourage item donations in disasters because it completely impacts the local economy. In 2015 I wrote a memo like Jerry Maguire to the board and the team and said, 'I think we should only buy locally in disasters now.' Of course, that was going to be a big risk. I thought, 'Now I'm in competition with all the fab five organisations which want cash,' but what was really wonderful is that the local councils and the local chambers of commerce said, 'Every single dollar that we raise for Givit is going to be spent locally,' so Givit did not fail, which is great.

Mr BAILLIE: That does make such a difference for those small communities.

Ms Wright: We recently spent \$1.5 million in Townsville on whitegoods and beds, basically.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you so much.

Ms BUSH: Juliette, I am very aware of what you do, and congratulations on the model that you have. It is continuing to thrive. You mentioned something at the beginning where it sounded like there was a lot of volunteering from within Givit and then things have become more formalised, with more regulation and structure. That piqued my interest because I see that in startups, where agencies begin, there is a lot of enthusiasm, there are very loose boundaries around people and they just turn up, but then suddenly people need blue cards and job descriptions. I am curious about that transition and how you have managed that to your success.

Ms Wright: I started a thing called Givit Kids, which failed because I could not get around all of the legislation. I could not actually legitimise every single charity worker requesting connecting to a child would have a blue card. Legislation has certainly inhibited a few things. I am not saying that Givit is quasi government or bureaucracy crazy or bureaucratic in any way—we are still quite nimble—but the job that we have in disaster recovery is clearly defined because we work so well with all of the other agencies. Our role is very clear and we can be nimble. We just funded the transport of a school in Adavale, and we do not normally do transportation like that.

Ms BUSH: It is certainly no reflection on you; it is more whether there are opportunities to reduce regulatory burden to make it easier for organisations.

Ms Wright: I am not going to be the one to say, 'Get rid of blue cards,' but it is just another police check, isn't it? It is all the same. There are definitely regulatory concerns around, and I think that would particularly be the mud army side of things. When you are actually dealing with debris and post-disaster things, I definitely think they get hit with legislation. Actually, we do have an issue with corporate volunteering in terms of—

Ms BUSH: In terms of health and safety legislation or something?

Ms Wright: Yes, and our insurance.

Ms BUSH: If you think about it and want to submit any additional evidence to the committee, that would be welcome.

CHAIR: Are you happy to take that on notice and provide us with something?

Ms Wright: Yes, that would be great.

CHAIR: That would be lovely. Could you get that to us by 26 May? Would that be all right?

Ms Wright: It will be short, yes. Thank you.

CHAIR: We are much obliged. Thank you very much, Ms Wright. You are a most impressive witness and I congratulate you on what you have achieved.

DAWES, Mrs Karen, Private capacity

DAWES, Mr Ken, Private capacity

CHAIR: I would now like to welcome power couple Karen and Ken Dawes, representing respectively the Roma Historical Motor Club and the Roma and District Aeromodelling Club. To a young fella like me that sounds wonderful, and I am sure my kids would agree. We have 15 minutes for you and Mr Seawright, so I suggest that you make an opening statement and the remainder of the seven minutes can be for questions.

Mrs Dawes: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My husband and I have more than 40 years experience in volunteering in Roma and before that in Brisbane. We have volunteered most of our married lives. Currently, I am the president, email secretary and web officer for the Roma Historical Motor Club; the coordinator of Crescendo Community Choir; a volunteer with Roma Historical Precincts, Roma and District Family History Society, Roma Church of Christ and U3A Roma; and I also maintain the Roma for Families website.

CHAIR: How did you find time to come before us at all!

Mrs Dawes: That is part of my statement. You make time. My husband has also volunteered in many areas, including for the Roma and District Aeromodelling Club, and he has been the secretary of the Roma Historical Precincts and also held various other positions.

I would just like to talk this morning about a few of my own personal observations from all of our years of volunteering, even with children. Volunteers do not necessarily have the time or the resources to volunteer but they do have the heart, the passion and that connectedness to the community that we were talking about. They feel connected. In my experience, I have always seen prospective volunteers welcomed and, in most cases, sought out to find their best fit within that group. Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills, but that is actually an impediment for some. Some feel concerned about learning new things, so that could be a barrier to volunteering.

A major hurdle has already been spoken of by others in relation to management committee positions in groups. You are required to be conversant in the requirements of the ATO and the Office of Fair Trading, in grants, in insurance and in food licences, to name just a few of the things that I have encountered in my years of volunteering. A lot of people do go to meetings but they see the work that is involved in stepping into a management committee position as a deterrent. Something that I have thought about is that there is no one-stop shop to get information: 'I am president of a club. What do I need to know about incorporated non-for-profit organisations?' You have to search websites, make phone calls and send emails to gather information. One thing I find really great about Roma is that, because we are connected to so many groups, we do interact and we do share what information we glean. That is a benefit. If someone says, 'Do you know that we all have to comply with this new Office of Fair Trading thing?' the information is shared locally, which is good.

I agree with some of the things that have been said previously about our demographic here in Roma. We have FIFO workers and a lot of other industries in town have patterned their work hours to follow suit. You get a lot of people not actually in the industry but around the industry who are also working two-on two-off, which makes it quite difficult to gather people for a meeting.

Mr Dawes: I have that same problem with our club.

Mrs Dawes: There is that demographic. There is also another demographic in town: we have a lot of people who come to work here in the hospitals, in policing and in the schools. They call Brisbane home, or wherever they have come from, so they are not here on the weekends. They go home, so there is that too.

I also agree with the previous statements that both parents need to work these days and grandparents are stepping up and doing some of the child care. Therefore, that takes away time from that demographic. I think I missed something but, in my view, in Roma we have more volunteers per capita. That is just my experience. Just about everyone I know, whether they are a young couple or older, is volunteering somewhere, whether it be at a sports club, as a referee, as a coach or at a tuckshop. The older demographic steps in more with things like historical precincts and the car club. We have growth in the car club—we have young people coming in now.

The tap on the shoulder is the best way to connect with volunteers. I agree with that wholeheartedly. I observe the people at my meetings and I talk to them. I find out their interests and then approach them to do just little jobs. Once you get that reward thing happening for them, they get positive feedback and they are willing to volunteer in some other capacity.

In conclusion, volunteering is very rewarding. There is that positive feedback you get from making a difference in the lives of others. Accomplishing goals is another reward, as well as making friends along the way. I think the way forward is to promote the benefits of volunteering and encourage everyone to be connected to their community. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance today and for your insights. I am quite certain that the community would be very grateful for your prodigious volunteering. Mr Dawes, I am sure that you would stand in the shadow of your good wife to some extent but your volunteering also would be greatly valued. Thank you for your appearance today.

SEAWRIGHT, Mr Fergus, Private capacity

CHAIR: Thank you for coming before us, Mr Seawright. Would you like to give us a brief opening address? Then we will have some questions for you.

Mr Seawright: Thank you. I was expecting a different format. Perhaps I will read my overview, go through my other stuff and then let you guys follow with questions. I am Fergus Seawright. I am a grazier. I live on a property south-east of Wallumbilla. As a volunteer of many years, I have been heavily involved in the Wallumbilla Parents and Citizens Association and the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations. I am a volunteer at the Wallumbilla Campdraft Association and have been a member of the Wallumbilla Rural Fire Brigade and SES for many years. I am speaking today as an individual and mostly about my volunteering experience with SES and rural fires.

Overall, volunteering can be very rewarding. You meet like-minded people who have the same goal in mind—that is, to help their community and district. In smaller towns people wear multiple hats, and this can be very demanding, costly, time consuming and, at times, extremely frustrating. There is no common sense left out there. In rural fires and SES, finding the time to attend training on top of all of the other activities can be difficult. Attending call-outs can become costly for businesses and self-employed volunteers because of lost income and time.

In summary, the government should not expect businesses with volunteers and the self-employed to wear the cost of volunteering in extended emergency situations. I heard somebody mention tax incentives before—for many years we have been suggesting a tax incentive for sincere volunteers. If I may, I will go through what I thought you guys were going to ask and then you can ask questions.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Seawright: The benefits of volunteering include meeting like-minded people and enjoying their company. Some organisations would not function without them. Smaller communities rely heavily on volunteers, and most of them wear multiple hats. The state uses volunteers mostly in emergency situations.

Volunteering is costly, especially for businesses and the self-employed who have to catch up, as lost time is lost money. It can be difficult to find time to attend training, especially repetitive training that is sometimes unnecessary. There is too much red tape. Prior skills already obtained from employment need to be recognised, and local experience needs to be acknowledged.

Has the blue card changed anything? A lot of older people said, 'Stuff it. We are getting on in age, so we will just move on.' In relation to criminal history checks, are minor offences really an issue after a number of years? We realise that there is a reason for it, but we have a couple of guys who did something very minor 20 years ago and they cannot join.

I was heavily involved in getting grant money, getting donated money, selling tickets and working through the details to build a complex to house SES and rural fires vehicles and equipment. It was extremely tiring and frustrating. Without council assistance and help to do the submissions, this would never have been possible. Some help from rural fires and SES was much appreciated. It was a huge drought at the time and we felt burnt out. We were really struggling.

It is difficult to organise hazard reduction burns around the towns because of all of the different government departments you have to go through—for example, council, railways and Main Roads. However, if a fire is ignited by some other means, we just turn up and we do our best to contain it—not a problem. National parks and forestry are a big issue because there is little to no maintenance. Volunteers are expected to come to the rescue when there is a bushfire. In these instances, valuable dollars are sometimes wasted using firebombers that are virtually useless in this type of terrain.

All volunteers need to have a sense of humour. The unique challenges to volunteering would depend on the type of volunteering and individuals themselves. That is my answer to the unique challenges question, because different volunteers probably see it differently. It has taken years to get emergency services together. Some 40 years ago they would not talk to one another and now they get together—they have split the sheets.

I believe that emergency services are too top heavy. They get a budget of \$1.1 billion, or whatever, and they are spending \$800 million on wages—there is not much fat left over for anything else. We need more support for local government to assist volunteers in all organisations. I am talking about shows everywhere. They are all struggling. They cannot get volunteers. They have to compete with other stuff. A volunteer needs a reason to come. You cannot get them unless there is a reason. If you chuck a keg on they will probably turn up, but that is not a good reason.

CHAIR: That would be a favourite.

Mr Seawright: You need to use more local knowledge. The question about First Nations people—they should be encouraged to volunteer and shown the benefits of doing it. However, this seems difficult to implement as many do not appear to want to help themselves. That is about all I have. The only other thing is that the people who are more likely to volunteer are country people. You do not get that many out of the town. Going back to the schools, there were a lot of orphans when I was involved there.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Seawright. The committee appreciates your appearance here and your insights today. We have now come to the end of the time for the public hearing. We will have a break and then we will return to hear from representatives of local governments. I acknowledge that quite a few have appeared in the room already. We will have a cup of tea and resume in 15 minutes.

Proceedings suspended from 11.00 am to 11.25 am.

CHAIR: Welcome back to the second session of our public hearing on volunteering in Queensland today in Roma.

BERESFORD, Ms Suzette, Mayor, Paroo Shire Council

CLARKE, Ms Michelle, Chief Executive Officer, Balonne Shire Council

HALL, Mr Ben, Mayor, Quilpie Shire Council

McDONALD, Mr Geoff, Mayor, Toowoomba Regional Council

MACKENZIE, Mr Rob, Deputy Mayor, Goondiwindi Regional Council

RADNEDGE, Mr Shaun, Mayor, Murweh Shire Council

TAYLOR, Ms Wendy, Mayor, Maranoa Regional Council

WINKS, Mr Bill, Deputy Mayor, Balonne Shire Council

CHAIR: I now welcome representatives from Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors, led by the Mayor of Toowoomba Regional Council, Geoff McDonald. Welcome to you, Geoff. I invite you to make an opening statement and if you would not mind introducing your colleagues to the committee.

Mr McDonald: Thanks very much, James, we appreciate it. My name is Geoff McDonald, Mayor of the Toowoomba region, and on this occasion chair of the Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors. Thank you for choosing to hold this session at our meeting. We appreciate it. I would like to start by introducing those who are with me here on the desk. Firstly is the deputy chair of the Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors, Suzette Beresford, Mayor of Paroo. Immediately to your right, as you are facing us, Mayor Ben Hall from Quilpie. Immediately to my right, your left, Shaun Radnedge, Mayor of Murweh, and Wendy Taylor who is the mayor of this beautiful region here. Wendy, thank you for hosting us here as well. Also here is the deputy mayor of Balonne, Bill Winks. We are all present and accounted for. In the gallery we have many other members of council and CEOs. Thank you to them as well.

From the outset, I will make some opening comments, as you have asked for, Chair and committee members. Thank you very much for allowing us this opportunity. A very important part of local government and communities is volunteering, because there is only so much that local councils can do, and we all enjoy going to a variety of events and all sorts of things. Without the volunteers, that would not happen. Thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words.

As a background, this organisation, the Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors, was formed in October 2015, with its main aim to come together and talk about the common issues across the region and how we can work together and therefore lobby and advocate for our region to various levels of government. It includes the communities of Bulloo, Quilpie, Paroo, Murweh, Maranoa, Balonne, Western Downs, Goondiwindi, Southern Downs and Toowoomba regional councils and shires. The group represents, as some of you will well know, one quarter of Queensland's land area, and carries around 25 per cent of its cattle stock, and produces 75 per cent of its grain and pulse crops. While we are attending as a group, the mayors and councillors present also represent their own councils, and that is important when we do come together. We have a common aim to work together, and each council has, of course, their concerns, issues and opportunities that they bring to the table. You would have received submissions from Toowoomba Regional Council, Balonne Shire, Western Downs Regional Council and a confidential submission from Maranoa Regional Council. The reason we appear before you as a group is the crucial role volunteering plays in sustaining the social, economic and cultural fabrics of the communities in our local government areas.

From a Toowoomba Regional Council perspective, we heavily rely on volunteers. In fact, we have over 600 active volunteers across a range of internal program areas that support things such as events, visitor information centres, libraries and cultural services. Despite the clear benefits of volunteering, our council, like many other regional councils, faces challenges in supporting a thriving volunteer sector. Volunteer recruitment remains a persistent challenge in the post-COVID era, and while local volunteers are strongly motivated by civic duty and social connections, factors such as

changing demographics, time constraints, financial costs and a complex risk environment are placing increasing strain on volunteers and volunteering organisations. These challenges reflect the statewide trends which have been reported by Volunteering Queensland.

As the Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors, we certainly thank you for undertaking this parliamentary inquiry into volunteering at what is a crucial time, and we hope that the findings will ensure volunteering remains a sustainable and valued pillar of community life in regional Queensland. Again, on behalf of not only us that are represented here today but all of our communities, we thank you most sincerely. It means a lot to us as leaders of our communities. Certainly with the intent of improving things, we always come with that opportunity to impart some of our local knowledge and we appreciate you being here for that. Chair, I am happy for you to open the floor to other mayors and the deputy mayor, if you like.

CHAIR: Thank you, Councillor McDonald. I am aware, as I am sure we all are, of the vital role that local government has in societal and cultural matters and hence volunteering, so it is great to have you before us. To start off the questioning, I call on the deputy chair, the member for Inala.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you all for attending. It is great to have a collective here of mayors. I think I will go to you first, Wendy. I am really interested to know whether you think there are any issues that are different for you in your region other than the issues that you are seeing across the board. Are there any distinct needs, differences or barriers that affect volunteering in your region?

Ms Taylor: I think we are all the same because our regions are very similar, being remote and rural. Our biggest issue is nobody wants to step up anymore. It is really hard. There was a U3A lady here before. I do not know whether she spoke or not; I did not get here in time. They have 180 members, but they cannot get a secretary or a treasurer, or whatever that looks like. For us, it is really hard to get volunteers. What incentive is there? We just, as a council, decided to give staff two days to volunteer as part of their package. We just do not know what direction to go in. We have a lot of people who say it is just too hard with red tape. One of our suggestions in our submission was that perhaps there be some sort of volunteer hub that they could go to and say, 'Okay, I will be the treasurer of the cricket club.' In our community—and it might not just be Maranoa; we might serve more than Maranoa—we need somebody who can help. That is what they need—they need help. It seems we cannot get the next generation to step up. Perhaps we have to start younger now. Maybe it is getting to the schools and seeing what we can do there.

When they do volunteer, they just love it. I made 1,400 sandwiches the other day at Eat Up. Five local girls came along and did that. They had a great time, talking to us oldies and we were talking about things I did not know about half the time. You know what I mean? We just really need to make them feel valued when we get them and then show them a pathway on how they can be the next treasurer. You go to their end-of-year events and they are all very academic, but where do they go from there? Where do they use those skills they learn? They are all leaders in their school. Where do they go after that? I feel we need help to help them.

I think we all have the same issues. All councillors put our hands up to work on the show gates because there were not enough volunteers; not that we mind—that is just part and parcel of being part of the community, but there was not anybody under 65, except for some of my councillors who are a bit younger than me. You know what I mean? It is that problem, I feel.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Talking about red tape and bureaucracy which is something we are hearing all over Queensland, when it comes to volunteering, and it acting as a roadblock, just picking your thoughts and what you have experienced, how do you think we could reduce bureaucracy, especially when it comes to show societies and, on the other hand, the emergency services like the SES and the like? What do you want to see? How do you think we can reduce bureaucracy? When I was a kid, it was personal responsibility: you did something stupid and you hurt yourself, it was your fault.

Mr Radnedge: Thank you once again to the committee for coming to Roma and giving us the opportunity to speak this morning. Leading into what Wendy said, bureaucracy is our biggest issue when it comes to getting people in to think about volunteering. As you said, I can speak very highly that when you do something wrong, you should pay the price—I am happy for that.

Take our emergency services, we just had an event on Monday to recognise the volunteering that the rural fire brigade have done. Nowadays, to get a volunteer to come in, they need a white card or they need a blue card. It is too hard with the barriers put in front of them. We need to make it easier. I believe if the opportunity were to come up, we need someone from government to help with that bureaucracy and make it easier. The harder it is to fill in a form, the less chance you will get them. They might do it once, but if it is running the second time, you lose those guys. We need to make it at that level.

We know that compliance is very important. Mayor McDonald pointed out the red tape, and there is a reason we need to bring that in, but one umbrella does not fit all. Insurance is another issue that we will be talking about tomorrow as part of the council of mayors. We need to make it easier for volunteers to come forward. With that, we need to make the, I will say, paperwork easier.

Ms Nightingale, if I can just add to what you pointed out before, I have a classic example about volunteering and bureaucracy gone mad. Our show is on tomorrow, starting this afternoon and through to tomorrow. We have a small band of show society volunteers who run that committee and they work very hard. We are very privileged in Charleville to have a work camp that obviously has low-security prisoners there, 10 to 12 at a time. We have had very few problems; we do not even know in our community. However, this year, for whatever reason, the show society of Queensland have been directed that those guys cannot help. They do not do anything as far as being around the mainstream crowd or anything like that. They pick up the show jumps; they clean the chook sheds. They do all the menial work and they love it, but because they do not have any of those cards, they now cannot be on the grounds. This has been happening for the last 15 years with not one bit of trouble, but, for whatever reason, some bureaucrat has come up with the order that they cannot do it. For that reason, there is no show jumping this year. The volunteer just said, 'It is too hard. How can I manage this?'

To both your questions, I think we have to make it easier because it is a privilege to volunteer and it is so important. We fight for our communities. People make communities, not the other way around, and we need them to be proud of where they live. I hope that helps in both areas.

Ms Taylor: There is also the fact that they have to charge a certain amount of money because they have to have insurance. That is a big thing. It costs \$5,000 or \$6,000 to have the ambulance there at a show. The ambulance is free for me and it is free for you, so why is it not free when I go to the show? Therefore, the community has to make that amount of money to cover that cost. The ambulance thing I do not get at all, to be honest.

CHAIR: I was speaking to you, Deputy Mayor Bill, earlier offline about cross-border issues. I know that Balonne and Paroo are on the border, along with Goondi council in my electorate, the Southern Downs Regional Council. I acknowledge Deputy Mayor of Goondiwindi Regional Council, Rob Mackenzie. Were you going to speak, or were you going to ask your CEO if he could speak about—

Mr Winks: Chair, through you, I would like to defer to our CEO, Michelle Clarke, to refer to the cross-border issue that we are involved with at Mungindi.

CHAIR: That is fine. Thank you, Ms Clarke, please fill us in on the cross-border implications.

Ms Clarke: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Balonne Shire. We put in a written submission, but did not include the cross-border issue, however. While council has welcomed the appointment of Ian Leavers as the Cross-Border Commissioner for Queensland and actually met with him in Mungindi in mid-March, we just wanted to raise with the inquiry that there are some unique challenges for volunteers who live in border towns like Mungindi, Goondiwindi and others. For example, with regard to the blue card, if you need a blue card for volunteering in Queensland, you cannot use that in New South Wales; you need a working with children card there. There are plenty of examples just like that where you have duplication of effort for a volunteer who might be living on one side and working on the other side of the border. The town of Mungindi has the hospital on the Queensland side of the border and the ambulance is on the New South Wales side of the border. We have some good relationships with the Moree Plains Shire Council and also with the SES during disaster events et cetera, but in terms of volunteers, it is problematic.

We have a progress association on the New South Wales side of the border and one on the Queensland side. Sometimes the two of them do not work well together, but as Balonne, we are trying to work with both so that we can recognise that a lot of the infrastructure is on the New South Wales side and a lot of the events are occurring on the New South Wales side, but there are a lot of volunteers from the Queensland side and again vice versa when the people living in the town of Mungindi are coming across the border into Queensland to help. So, some way to reduce the amount of paperwork and recognise that if you have a working with children card in New South Wales that you can use that in Queensland, or vice versa, would be a big step to help reduce that duplication of effort that the volunteers have to go through.

CHAIR: Perhaps we could just annexe that part of New South Wales. It is not very well defended. We could bring it into the fold!

Ms Clarke: We are actually addressing that on 28 May with a 'state of origin' stand-off, with Queensland on one side being painted on the bridge and New South Wales on the other, and meeting with the cross-border commissioners from both sides, and we are obviously going to wear our maroon quite loud and proud.

CHAIR: Pistols at dawn! Thank you very much for that. I thank the committee for your forbearance because that is a very important issue to me as a border MP, and I really appreciate what you have had to say.

Ms BUSH: That was an important question, thank you. To Michelle's point, perhaps, and I know Geoffrey had a quick conversation about Volunteering Australia's recommendation to have perhaps a volunteering passport that would have more of a national focus, I wanted to hear your views on that, whether you would be supportive of something like that. Basically, there is a central repository for volunteering approval and that transcends any state. It basically means you can volunteer anywhere in the country. Would that be something that would be helpful, Bill?

Mr Winks: Anything is going to be helpful, that is for sure. Just recognising the issue and coming up with some solution yourselves, that would be wonderful. You are basically recognising that there is an issue, and if that is the way you can fix it, I think that would be certainly acceptable on our part. I cannot speak for Goondiwindi or Cunnamulla, for that matter, but it would be good.

Ms BUSH: The question I had before, perhaps to hear from each of you: obviously a lot of the issues you put forward seem to be fairly similar to the submissions and what we have heard. I am only filling in today, but if you each could have a recommendation, if the committee could come away with one recommendation that would make a meaningful difference for you and your communities, do you have a sense right now of what that would be? Is there anything burning for you that would make a meaningful impact for you, no matter how big or small?

Mr Hall: Simplify volunteering. At every level in every way simplify it. It has become increasingly complex since the insurance issues of 2000. When we came out of that and everyone had to appeal for funding and grants, that evolved into this space of having to be full-time administrators of organisations. Having come through the many battle ranks of being a treasurer of clubs and seeing parents and friends being president for 12 years, seeing that evolution through that period was something that I personally enjoyed. What does concern me about the lack of volunteerism coming from the youth is that volunteering is a great cultivation place for leaders of our community. That is where it is critical and we are not seeing them come through. I am the youngest person on my council and on my board, and I am not young.

Ms BUSH: You don't look a day over 21!

Mr Hall: Thank you. I could not quite get my hair out of the hairdresser! We are at that point now going forward that we have to ask: where we are going to find our next community leaders? The crushing blows to organisations—I went to both Longreach and here in Roma to the pathways for tourism, the 2032 pathways, symposium. One of the overwhelming themes that came out for the people who run organisations across the entire Western Queensland border area was the stripping out of effectiveness of the organisations from things like liquor licensing for events; the restrictions on liquor licensing for events—going past midnight; the security that had to be applied to those events; food licensing; ambulance. They just stripped out all the efficacy of fundraising events for these organisations to actually do meaningful things for their community.

That then relates back to being able to champion your volunteers and their efforts for busting their guts all weekend—giving up their time to do the gate at the show, to do the sausage sizzle at the footy—for nothing. What does it amount to? It amounts to turning around and having to do an overcomplicated process of applying for a grant to buy the jerseys or to resurface your football field. That is what it amounts to. Our community grants scheme is just getting pulverised by paying for ambulances—paying for everything. It is cost-shifting. Simplify it.

Mr Radnedge: As members of parliament, you have a great opportunity—we see this in local government—not to be so risk averse. It has taken over. If we could change that, leading on from what Ben said. Whether it is water, waste, you name it, it is so risk averse that it goes straight off the Richter scale. They do not give a solution; they present the problem. That is what we need to change as far as volunteering goes. As Ben pointed out, being risk averse has gone full off the Richter scale and it needs to change to make it easier.

Ms Beresford: Just following on from what Wendy said earlier about compliance and accountability, it is very difficult to get people to take on executive positions. Most organisations have to be incorporated these days. It is about whether that compliance and accountability, even though it has to be there, could be a little bit less onerous on people. People feel it puts too much responsibility on them, I think.

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. What Ben said is right. It needs to be simplified.

In my shire probably what I hear most about is the blue card issue. People are pretty keen on sport. People are happy to give their time to umpire or to go along the lines or to help out with the kids' sports, but some of them have had some misdemeanour in their past and they cannot get a blue card. It stops them from participating.

I think people are time poor these days too and that prevents them from volunteering. We do have some younger people taking on our show society. We are lucky, but it is really stretching them. The easier it can be to be a volunteer I think the more we will see them coming back.

We have about 25 per cent of our population volunteer in some way or another. That is from the 2021 census. Over the previous five years that has decreased because we have seen a drop in the population. It is mainly from the rural area. We have lost population in our rural sector. Being self-employed they were able to give some of their time a bit more freely to the gymkhanas and the shows and all of that sort of thing. We have lost a bit of that. We probably have fewer of those events in our community these days.

CHAIR: Are there any other councillors who would like to speak to that? I think we should run this as informally as possible because we really are here to hear your views.

Ms Taylor: For us, I think having a volunteer hub of some sort would help and just a one-pager for whatever they are trying to do. I have been the treasurer of the gun club for I do not know how many years. Nobody is stepping up because it is too hard. We have a very good gun club but nobody wants to do it. For me, it would be some sort of volunteer support hub that they could come to and say, 'I'm thinking about putting my hand up for this. What does it involve? Do I have the capability to do it?' A lot of them do, but they just do not know that they do. For me, I think that would be a big step in the right direction. The blue card is another one for us too. The rural fire brigade volunteers all have to have a blue card. They are all 75. They are not going to fill out a form for a blue card or whatever that looks like. That would be one of my ideas.

Mr Winks: This might be slightly off topic but I note that there is the Dirranbandi model of volunteering with their show committee and their polocrosse committee. Sometimes if you become a chairman of say the local community group 12 years goes by and you cannot get out of the job, right? Oftentimes your wife will go on holidays and you won't because of that—because there is no GM and so it goes on. The Dirranbandi model I refer to is where the president takes it on for two years. The deputy president knows that in three years time he will be the president. I do not think that goes down to the secretary and treasurer just yet. It seems to me that some of the secretaries do not mind keeping on rolling on. In our shire now, with our community groups, we refer to that model. We are starting to see more people rolling over, more particularly the chairman role, more often than the 10-year model anyway. That seems to be working at Dirranbandi.

CHAIR: Lions International got their idea from the Dirranbandi community.

Mr Winks: I wish I could have said it was the Bollon model, but I cannot.

Mr Hall: We have just been through a flood which was pretty significant. We had a wind storm before that. We had a very small SES volunteer base—like three. We had one person at that point. We kept trying to get engagement to get members. One of the things that came out of that was I asked the organisers of our SES to communicate with the next generation. What came out of that was generally, 'What's in it for me?' Other than the warm fuzzy feeling we get out of giving to community which is great, what it is that you are offering from SES? That was one of the points. They said we will teach them. We will get them a boat licence. We will get them a chainsaw ticket—all of those sorts of things—to proactively advertise to try to get that volunteer engagement. There are skills that are deliverable. As much as we hate red tape and everything else, they were willing to do these things to try to get that next engagement.

Bringing something positive to this conversation, maybe they could put some more funding in behind that. Those people then go on to be our labourers on our councils and things like that. They come forward with those tickets on their CV from that activation in SES and volunteerism. It is about looking at pathways and potentially funding elements to do that.

CHAIR: With the indulgence of the committee, the Deputy Mayor of Goondiwindi Regional Council wanted to make a quick contribution. You have no problem with that, Mayor McDonald?

Mr McDonald: No. I am more than happy.

Mr Mackenzie: From a personal point of view, some of the committees I am involved with across our community—and it is not just in the Goondiwindi region—are in a position, either through financial management, good sponsorship, renewables kicking the tin or whatever, where they are actually paying people now to do gates et cetera where once upon a time that would have been done by volunteers. Some of these people are not even coming from our region. We talk about our young people hopefully being our future leaders. Not only are they not volunteering; we are getting people from out of our region coming along and doing those jobs. That is a shift that I have seen. That is what committees have had to do to make sure the gates are manned and the bits and bobs are pulled down or put back up.

For one of the organisations that I volunteer for a blue card is required. It took two months to get it when I reapplied. I would not know how many times I have reapplied for my blue card. I get it renewed every five years or whatever it is. I would have thought it would be a tick and flick, but it took two months. I had to step away for two months and I could not volunteer while it was getting renewed. I think that is ludicrous.

On the volunteer hub side of it, again, in another one of the volunteer groups that I work with—there would be 15 of us—I would be the second youngest one there and, believe it or not, I am 60 next year. You can get a bit of an idea—

CHAIR: You haven't got a grey hair on your head, Rob!

Mr Mackenzie: If I grew it back, James, it would not be grey. You don't think I can grow it back, do you? I raised a lot of money a couple of years ago.

Mr McDonald: I don't think we'll wait around!

Mr Mackenzie: I'll show you some photos later, Geoff. One of the groups I volunteer for are more mature than me. They do not know how to get on the internet and get their blue cards et cetera. What this committee did was they got about a dozen of us in and we sat down for an hour together and we did the whole lot together. If we could emulate that on a bigger scale because there would be some core things that need to be done that would be very similar across a lot of those volunteering groups. For instance, the Goondiwindi GTT could say, 'We're going to get all the volunteer groups in to sit down and tick a heap of those things off all together, have a sandwich and a glass of water and then it's done.' These people want to do it. They just are fed up with, every 12 months in some cases, having to re-do the paperwork. It is just backing up some of what has been said, as I live it.

CHAIR: Do you have any observations to make on the cross-border issue to add to what Councillor Winks has said?

Mr Mackenzie: That was interesting. By the way, we implemented that two-year thing at the Goondiwindi show committee years ago.

CHAIR: The Apex club do it too, don't they?

Mr Winks: Why didn't you spread the word then?

Mr Mackenzie: We try to send as much stuff dead in the water as possible down to you guys. Sometimes you drink it and sometimes you don't! As you know, we have a very strong cross-border community at Goondiwindi. In fact, we have had several presidents of the Goondiwindi Show Society who live in New South Wales. They are handling it. I do not know how they are doing it, but obviously things are getting tougher and tougher for those cross-border issues and making sure they have the right certificates, cards et cetera. At this stage, I have not heard that that has been hampering them. Thanks for your time.

CHAIR: Mayor McDonald, would you like to comment?

Mr McDonald: I have a couple of little things to add—and they are in our submission. Most of what we have heard today is around simplicity. The two things that come to my mind, quite clearly, are around a national digital passport which would cover off on a number of things. That needs to be coupled up with a hub. Rob made a good point: if you look at the average age of volunteerism, it is well above 18. Therefore, for some of those folk a digital passport would mean absolutely nothing to them. It needs to be combined with a hub—whether that is at an existing community centre in regional areas and whether it is run a couple of times or three or four times a year. It could be run by Volunteering Queensland so there is some structure around it and it is not another cost to local government. I think the digital hub will do two things. First, it should mean that you do not have to keep reapplying for your blue card, with police checks and all of those things—that is done, whether you are cross-border or whatever.

The second part will be around the introduction of exactly what Ben said: bringing younger folk in to be part of this. They will go to that, but they will not necessarily go to a hub. It could be done in a school system where it is part of education. We see it in Toowoomba. We are a larger populace. We have the Youth Leaders Program—which we struggle to fund each year, mind you—for 13- to-25-year-olds. There are normally around 25 of them. It has now been going for a decade. We have seen any number of those volunteers over 10 years either gain employment, which they never thought they would, because they have volunteered in council for different things and been part of it or, importantly, they have then come back and assisted others. That is nirvana. When they go through a system, volunteer and then they garner and present to those next wave of youth leaders and say how good it is and how important it is to do it.

I know that other councils have youth programs, but for volunteering and Volunteering Queensland that might be a good way forward. That would be a good place to start to garner some feedback as well. I would be quite happy for our council to be a pilot for that, to see how it does work. Then we would share that across the Darling Downs and South West Queensland Council of Mayors. You need to start at that level—you really do.

To Suzette's point around timing: we are seeing anecdotally that we need 600 volunteers to deliver a program where in the past we may have had 150 to 200 because people are donating one day a month or one hour every second day—not every day for three days of the week. There has been a shift. We cannot bury our head in the sand. We need to shift with it. Digital passport, a hub and bringing the youth through—I think they are the three key points. You asked for one, Jonty, sorry. There are three but they tie in with each other.

Ms BUSH: Three is fine. They do, yes.

CHAIR: What was the name of that program you were talking about?

Mr McDonald: It is the Youth Leaders Program, through our Youth Connect program. I am more than happy to be a pilot for a trial. They are very engaged young people. They go through a process to be on that program. It does not mirror council, so you do not have portfolios. One of their tasks is, as either an individual or group, to run an event on a small budget of around \$500 or less, so they learn the whole process. They get to understand the red tape and the things that they need to do and they need volunteers to do it, so it would be a really good program to test that out.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you all for joining us today and for representing your communities. Some of you have touched on it a little bit already. Obviously in regional areas we have very strong community values. As a result, there is perhaps a higher participation of volunteering per capita than in the more metro areas. As councils, what resources do you have in place to assist? I see from some of the submissions there are very high volunteering rates and lots of volunteering organisations. As councils, do you have resources in place to assist volunteering organisations? If so, could you share some insights into what space they focus on as far as trying to help volunteering organisations is concerned? I am trying to understand if there is a duplication of efforts or if there are tools or any solutions in future that would ultimately bring down the FTE requirement on councils to support volunteering organisations. There might be tools that can also help volunteering organisations and essentially make those resources operate more efficiently.

Ms Taylor: In every one of our towns we have a local development officer. They are actually all women at the moment. They help communities with events or with grant writing—anything that the community needs, that is their job. The one in Roma is under a lot of pressure most of the time. We are just doing an organisational structural review where we will bring in a dedicated grants writer because there is so much paperwork. That is one way we feel we can help the volunteers to still keep volunteering. The LDOs is our prime one. We used to have, and we are going to reintroduce, a sport and recreation officer so they can help sporting groups with grants and things like that as well. We are trying to help them as much as we can. We have one very small organisation that has a lot of volunteers over 80, so we help them with their roster and their banking. It is a cost to council. This is something we have to budget for. There is a lot of 'in kind' because they cannot carry the chairs or the tables and lots of things like that. We are really trying very hard to back our community in any way that we can. It is just another cost.

Mr BAILLIE: I am not overly familiar with your region but, if you had to estimate, how many towns are there? I am trying to get an idea of how many FTEs you have?

Ms Taylor: We have five.

Mr BAILLIE: So five full-time people?

Ms Taylor: Yes.

Mr BAILLIE: So one in each town. In addition, you are looking for another person to help with grant writing?

Ms Taylor: We are looking for a grants writer and a full-time sport and recreation officer, yes.

Mr BAILLIE: So that is seven?

Ms Taylor: I am not saying we will get them either because that is the other issue—employment.

Mr Winks: Probably similar to Roma, we have a community development officer doing similar sorts things—going to community group meetings and offering assistance and help. We do not have a grant writer for any of these people, but we do have a grants officer who works for us. She also keeps an eye out for various grants that are relative and will be becoming available. We have a list, for argument's sake—like our various showground music group, committees and things. We need a grant for this and we need a grant for that. That information then comes back to our grants officer who knows what they are looking for so when those grants do become available those various committees are informed at the given time and then it is up to them to fill the form out. That is what we do for those communities.

Mr Radnedge: Most councils are probably exactly the same. I will just bring it down a level. We encourage groups to have big events and to bring outside people in because that money is worth 10 times more than economic development. For those organisations, it is cleanliness. For the show this weekend we employ staff members to assist with the cleanliness of the event. To Wendy's point, for councils that comes at a cost—someone has to pay for that at some stage. We do that because it is enhancing. FTEs: I do not know how you fix that but it comes down to numbers. The more volunteers, the less help they need. Unfortunately or fortunately, that is what we are there for. I just wanted to bring that down a level, but everyone will have a different perspective.

Ms Beresford: We are similar. We provide free grant writing for any community organisation so that they do not have to do it. They just have to liaise with our grant writer and she will do the grant application for them if they are not able to do it themselves. We also offer a fair bit of in-kind support for events such as the ones Wendy referred to and Shaun. We help with providing furniture or providing things, clearing up, getting things ready—that type of thing. Also, community officers give their time and quite often go to events and volunteer as well to help people with their small events.

Mr Hall: We are pretty much the same as everyone else, just on a smaller scale. There are 580 people in my region. Our delivery for community events is a modest budget of \$50,000, which goes out as small grants to those organisations. To reiterate, I would say \$25,000 of that potentially goes towards state-based costs—ambulance, licensing.

Mr BAILLIE: Do you have a head count of those who are tied up in helping volunteer organisations?

Mr Hall: No. We cannot afford it.

Mr McDonald: From the Toowoomba Regional Council's perspective, we are obviously the same but on a larger scale, to be honest. We have five community development officers who do a similar role to what Wendy's local development officers do. We also have a sport and recreation team who assist sporting-wise. There are probably three who do that. One is not full-time but, say, three. Then we have a grants officer within council looking at our own work, but they assist others as well.

The area that we find has the greatest benefit for volunteering is a volunteer coordinator, which we fund. That is 1½ FTEs. Of all the things we have spoken about, organisations struggle to navigate their way through the red tape—the insurance issues. They are areas that in the past probably were not as evaluated as what they are now because of the reasons everyone has said. We see that right across from showgrounds to art galleries—it is the same scenario.

People feel as though they are putting their own lives at risk by volunteering for an organisation where they could ultimately lose their own house if things are not structured properly. There is that risk and that may be extreme but it is the reality. That is why we have put this scaffolding, if you like, around our community. We have community development officers but we do have our volunteer coordinator. As I said, we have around about 600 volunteers on the books. That is just for council. Of those 600, you will probably find more than a quarter of those would be volunteering not only for council but for many other organisations. If you go to a volunteering event, it is like a school presentation night—there are 54 different things they volunteer for. Every community—the more regional you go—is exactly the same. In respect of all of the things we have spoken about, there is a similarity: make it simpler and make sure it is necessary to bring those people on.

As a local council, we will need more of it. If we cast our minds forward to 2032 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, it may not seem much for those places that are not a host venue but, let me tell you, it will be. There will be tens of thousands of volunteers required for the four weeks of the Paralympics and Olympics, and they will have to be drawn from across the nation. Who would not want volunteer at an Olympics or Paralympics? When that happens, places around the regional extremities will stop. Heaven forbid if we have a disaster because those three SES workers that Ben spoke of will be down at the Olympics.

There is a runway—it is a short one—but council is looking at years eight, nine and 10 for our volunteer base. Fortunately, as we will be an Olympic venue for equestrian, we will definitely need them. We do not know the numbers but we will need hundreds of volunteers. I have said we have 600 volunteers. A high percentage of those 600 volunteers in seven years will not be volunteering, so we need to replace them—plus some.

There is a good opportunity here to actually do something and make it an Olympic legacy, if you like. You are probably sick of hearing that term. From a leveraging perspective, volunteerism is certainly one of those key areas that should be front and centre. As the chair of the leveraging committee for the Council of Mayors South East Queensland, it is something that is top of mind for us. I flag that as it will draw from these areas, so we need to bring people on. Mind you, it is pretty exciting to be able to volunteer at an Olympics or Paralympics. It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so you would not want to hinder those from in these parts from doing that. That is our opportunity.

Mr Radnedge: I want to touch on a comment that Ben brought up. I want to remind people that they pay an ambulance levy in their rates. When it comes to clubs, usually when we do events the only way you can pay for that is through the gate, so that makes the event dearer. These people are actually paying twice. This is something I think we can hone in on. I run an event myself, and they just put a \$6,000 potential fee on that. That means whoever comes is going to have pay more. I just wanted to make that point.

Ms Taylor: That is an easy fix. The state government could just wipe the fee.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is noted. We have come to the end of our hearing today. I want to thank each of you and all of the other identities from local government and the community for your participation in our hearing. It has been fantastic. At a personal level, Councillor McDonald, would you be happy to provide the committee with a briefing on the Youth Connect program? I note that you said that you would be happy for that to be used as a pilot program, and that could be of interest to the committee. Would you be happy to furnish the committee with some information on that?

Mr McDonald: I am very happy to. It may not be this afternoon.

CHAIR: What about 26 May?

Mr McDonald: That will be fine.

CHAIR: Thank you. I would like to thank our Hansard reporter, Ros Paterson, for coming all the way from Brisbane, as well as our inquiry secretary, Kylie Guthrie, who does so much work to make this crazy schedule we have all over the state happen. Thank you on behalf of my colleagues on the committee. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 12.17 pm.