



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SM Dillon MP—Acting Chair
Mr AJ Baillie MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Hon. ML Furner MP
Mr JP Kelly MP
Mrs ME Nightingale MP

Staff present:

Ms M Westcott—Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 16 June 2025

Brisbane

MONDAY, 16 JUNE 2025

The committee met at 9.30 am.

ACTING CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My name is Sean Dillon. I am the member for Gregory and the acting chair of the committee today. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay our respects to elders past and present. With me here today are: Margie Nightingale MP, the member for Inala and deputy chair of the committee; Mr Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville; Mr Mark Boothman MP, the member for Theodore; Mr Joe Kelly MP, the member for Greenslopes, substituting for the member for Cairns; and the Hon. Mark Furner MP, the member for Ferny Grove, substituting for the member for Lytton.

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 the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I do 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. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's discretionary all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings, and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please remember to press your microphones on before you start speaking and off when you are finished, and please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

CUNEO, Ms Nikketah, Deputy Chief Commissioner, Scouts Queensland

DOO, Mr Geoff, Chief Commissioner, Scouts Queensland

JOHNSTON, Ms Chrissy, Assistant Chief Commissioner, Scouts Queensland

ACTING CHAIR: I now welcome representatives from Scouts Queensland. I invite you to make an opening statement before we start our questions.

Mr Doo: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I take a moment to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people with us today. Scouting in Queensland has over 3,500 volunteers being leaders and supporters. We support 12,000 young people who experience the scouting program each year which is adventurous, fun, challenging and inclusive. We have been delivering programs in Queensland for 117 years, and our program focuses on young people aged between five and 25. We are represented across 175 communities in Queensland. Our strategic plan is focused on empowering our young people to their full potential through our youth program.

We acknowledge the importance of volunteering and understand that there is a declining volunteering population. We are not immune from that decline and the impact that we are seeing is that young people in Queensland are missing out on the scouting experience which is all about growing and developing our young people. Our focus is on our community and thus seeking to deliver the next cohort of citizens to our society who understand the value of volunteering and giving back to the community. In terms of volunteering, I recently had the pleasure and honour to present one of our leaders with a 75-year service recognition award.

We see the barriers to volunteering on two levels—namely, to the individual and to the organisation—from an individual perspective, cost, time, training, legislation and regulation and for the organisation, legislation, insurance, funding, time and catering for diverse needs and litigation.

The purpose of this inquiry is to understand the barriers to volunteering, but, more importantly, once that is discovered, it is about practical implementation of strategies and policies that will address, reduce and remove those barriers and strengthen government support for volunteers, which will lead to more volunteers across our communities and, in scouting's case, more programs being able to be delivered to young people in Queensland.

Cost is a barrier to the organisation and the individual. From an organisational perspective, that comes in many ways, but significantly through insurance costs. The requirement for public liability insurance under legislation and the ISR insurance cost under property leases imposes a large funding requirement on the organisation. Further, compliance work is a cost burden on scouting with requirements to workplace health and safety legislation. Costs for individuals are in terms of travel costs to attend training. Travel costs to attend weekly programs can also be a barrier. We recommend the government consider amending legislation requiring a need for public liability insurance, and the government consider funding insurance costs for not-for-profit volunteer organisations, or that the government establish a volunteer insurance program for volunteers.

In addressing specific terms of reference, No. 1 for the committee: as I have said, scouting in Queensland has been providing youth-based programs for 117 years. We have two streams of volunteers: leaders who are directly involved in program delivery or support, and adult members who are in committee support roles. We have seen a decline in the number of volunteers over recent years, due to the COVID pandemic regulation legislation that make it challenging for volunteers and personal time commitment.

The benefits we see are: for the volunteer, the intrinsic value of seeing a young person grow and develop into a person who contributes to their community now and in the future. Also, our volunteers receive training and outdoor skills, leadership and personal growth that they can take back to their own communities. For the state, we estimate the economic contribution in Queensland of our volunteers to be at \$45 million per annum. A recent example of that is the Australian Scout Jamboree held in Maryborough, where we believe the economic contribution to the Fraser Coast local economy was at least \$4 million.

A recommendation would be that the state government consider funding training for volunteers. This would significantly reduce the cost burden on scouting, and allow more volunteers to undertake a role in scouting.

Ms Johnston: In relation to terms of reference No. 2, as has been stated, the barriers to volunteering include regulation and legislation. Scouting has in place policies and procedures to ensure compliance with legislation and regulation. However, from a volunteer perspective, we struggle with the ongoing need to implement changes to legislation across 3,500 volunteers across Queensland. The impact of legislation with potential legal implications for volunteers is a barrier. We acknowledge and understand that we are a PCBU and thus are required to comply with varying pieces of legislation around child protection, workplace health and safety and ACNC regulations, to name but a few. Our challenge is: how, in a volunteer workforce that spans the breadth of Queensland, do we review, advise, document and implement those legislative requirements across our 175 communities?

I will give a couple of recent examples of the challenges we have faced. One is with the working with children card requirements under Queensland law. We quoted this example in our submission. We, as Geoff has mentioned, recently held a jamboree in Maryborough. When seeking assistance from the relevant department to advise them that we would have a large blue card requirement for that event, we were advised to just run our jamboree for seven days so a card would not be required. So, Queensland volunteers were staging a national event, hosted in Queensland, with economic benefits for Queensland, supported by the Queensland state government, but were advised simply to change the timing of our event, and that does not make a volunteer feel very valued.

Another example is the upcoming reportable conduct legislation regarding child safety. Scouts Queensland is already a mandatory reporter and now will be required to report not only to police but also to a government department with the purpose and process of that reporting still evolving. As a helpful tool, they provided a self-assessment document for us to complete. That ran to 58 pages.

In regards to the recent requirement for a sexual harassment and sex and gender harassment prevention plan, Scouts Queensland already has policies around bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, but there was additional work required to consult, develop and implement that plan for that specific purpose. Again, with the 2022 legislation around psychosocial process within a workplace, an additional volunteer resource was required to be introduced so that we could make sure that our policy suite addressed those requirements.

These are some of the examples where legislation has directly impacted a volunteer delivering our youth program. A recommendation might be that the government could work collaboratively across state and federal authorities to have one working with children card to remove additional administrative work and improve efficiency, and reduce costs and impact to scouting and our

volunteers. Government may also think to introduce legislation or regulation to protect volunteers and organisations where they have followed processes and procedures and introduce a volunteer indemnity scheme.

Ms Cuneo: In response to terms of reference No. 3, we highlight here the time and costs to train our volunteers which has a direct impact on their experience as a volunteer. It also has an impact on the earlier mentioned support volunteers who are charged with fundraising to help cover the cost of that training. Currently we are reviewing our volunteer model to investigate and align with the needs of our volunteers in today's society. In other words, how do we find a role based on what the volunteer can offer rather than our current, typical volunteer positions and being more flexible to volunteering? The training component is somewhere government could assist through funding some of that training cost. This would reduce the burden of fundraising on our volunteers.

Further, it needs to be recognised that the scout training provided does lead to VET qualifications that our volunteers take back to their local communities and aligns with more Queenslanders being active, which supports healthy and active lifestyles and better mental health. It is our recommendation that state government fund training for volunteers.

Mr Doo: Scouts Queensland does not receive any ongoing funding from any level of government, but we do take advantage of grant programs that are on offer. As mentioned earlier, the economic contribution of our volunteers to the Queensland economy is valued at \$45 million. We are aware in Victoria that the state government, through their Education Department, fund public liability insurance, thus reducing that funding burden on volunteers.

Our volunteers are regularly recognised for their contribution to community through various award programs. A direct and ongoing funding line from government would assist Scouts Queensland through supporting the cost of training and insurance, and this would have a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness, and would directly link to our volunteer experience and our ability to provide more programs.

It is well known that volunteering has been in decline over recent years and the scouting program reinforces the importance of community contribution which would lead to us creating the volunteers of the future. Our recommendation is that the government consider an ongoing funding line to support volunteers to deliver the Scouts program to young people in Queensland.

Ms Cuneo: With regard to terms of reference No. 6, Scouts Queensland is in the prime position to provide volunteers to support both games in 2032. We have over 3,500 volunteers who could be engaged to support the games. Further, we have almost 9,000 young members who may also be interested in roles to support the games.

We are also in a position with our extensive camp site and facilities based right across the state to support international teams as they prepare for the games. This would require some capital investment from the government, but would make these facilities available for not only the 2032 games but also beyond, which links to more Queenslanders being active outdoors and helps improve health and wellbeing, coupled with better mental health.

Ms Johnston: We have members across Queensland whom we could reach out to for support in times of natural disaster recovery and community recovery. We have infrastructure and equipment and 300 bell tents that could be made available to support community recovery. A recent example was the 26th Australian Jamboree in Maryborough where we constructed a small city for 12 days for 10,000 participants. We see an opportunity to work with government to support emergency response initiatives.

Mr Doo: With regard to First Nations people volunteering, we have in the past delivered scouting programs in remote communities, particularly in Doomadgee, which was funded through the state government. Regrettably, when the funding ceased, so did the program. Resilient Youth Australia data from 2019 demonstrates the value of being a scout has on the individual and on the community. Therefore, we would seek further consideration of funding to deliver the Scouts program through schools. A scouting and schools concept that could engage both adults and young people in the Scouts program would significantly add value to First Nations people.

Members of the committee, we continually hear reports of the challenges facing our young people in society today, and we do not hear enough of the good in our young people. Being involved in the Scouts program now may influence a young person's decision-making later in life that supports choosing the right path, and that is of great benefit to the government. Our volunteers are focused on building that right path for our young people.

In closing, I reiterate the importance that volunteers play in our strategic plan of empowering young people to their full potential through our youth program. They are critical in delivering to our communities resilient young people who have gained leadership experience, are physically active and who care for others. I thank you for your time today and we are happy to answer any questions to support our submission.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. I realise the time is very limited. In order to get as many questions as possible in that time, you may wish to take them on notice and provide any specifics afterwards. I may have overlooked this in your submission: is there a regional disparity between the volunteer affectation? If there has been fluctuation in your volunteering numbers, is it disproportionately represented between your large urban centres and regional Queensland? If so, are there any specific reasons as to why you believe that has happened?

Mr Doo: It would be fair to say that the large percentage of our membership sits within the south-east corner of Queensland; therefore, the number of leaders we have with adults supporting the delivery of that program are in the south-east corner and then we are spread across the rest of the state. I think the challenge in regional areas is distance and travel for some of our volunteers. In terms of education and training for our volunteers, some of them need to come to Brisbane to complete some of the courses that we require them to do to be compliant with their role so that presents us challenges in terms of travel. I would say that all of them across the state are very passionate about delivering to young people the importance of the scout program and seeing a young person grow and develop.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for appearing today and for your volunteering. It is a big thing that you do and I know you put a lot of hours into it and it is very appreciated. My question goes to the funding. You mentioned throughout your submission numerous opportunities for the state government to support you through some funding, whether it be for the Indigenous programs or for supporting the training of volunteers. Could you speak quickly to that and perhaps take on notice a more detailed breakdown of the types of funding, the amount that would be beneficial and the outcomes of that funding?

Mr Doo: Currently, the whole program in scouting in Queensland is delivered by a volunteer. Our insurance bill for the last 12 months was just on \$1.5 million. The flow-on effect of that is that the committees that support our scout groups across the state are fundraising to meet that funding obligation across their particular group. In terms of Indigenous communities, it was some years ago that scouting provided that program and that funding allowed us to skill, train and make a small payment to leaders delivering the program in an Indigenous community. You would appreciate the location of that is challenging, so when the funding from the government to support that ran out the program ceased. Getting volunteers in those communities is challenging.

In terms of the quantum of that, we can take that away and come back to you around what that would look like. Training a volunteer from beginning to end for us would probably cost us about \$500 to \$600. We recruit about 500 leaders per year so there is a cost base there that, again, communities are raising funds for to fund training to ensure our leaders are suitably qualified to deliver the program.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Could you take on notice the funds that you have spoken about and extrapolate that a bit more?

Mr Doo: Sure.

Mr BOOTHMAN: When it comes to the insurance costs, what type of coverage does that give you?

Mr Doo: There is public liability insurance and then there is ISR, industrial special risk insurance, which is all about facilities and our equipment. Given that a lot of our scout dens are leases based on either council or department of natural resources land, we are insuring a building but technically what is on the land is owned by the person who owns the land. We are having conversations with councils. In some locations, councils are funding the insurance for our buildings.

Mr BOOTHMAN: With public liability, is it \$20 million coverage?

Mr Doo: I think it is \$50 million coverage under our P&L.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Do you feel that is an excessive amount because it is a lot of money?

Mr Doo: It is a lot of money but then the program that we deliver is adventurous, fun, challenging and inclusive and some of the activities that people undertake present that level of risk. We want to ensure that we have the right amount of coverage. I think it is \$50 million but I will take that away and come back to you as well.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Thank you.

Mr FURNER: As a former cub and scout, I know the work you do and I am quite familiar with the fundraising activities. Back in our era it was Bob-a-Job and the collection of the old brown beer bottles at the back of the den. Building on the question on notice from the deputy chair, could you also provide an example of your fundraising activities and the value now in comparison to back then if you can? As we know, there is probably no longer Bob-a-Job or the collection of bottles because that has been overtaken by Containers for Change. Can you give an indication of the limitations you have on a comparative scale of what the ask is of government of what you need to run the organisation successfully into the future?

Mr Doo: I am happy to provide that.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. The time allocated for this session has expired. I thank you as a collective on behalf of your organisation for appearing both in terms of the submission you have compiled and your attendance here today.

SIGLEY, Ms Sarah, Volunteer Coordinator, OzHarvest

ACTING CHAIR: Welcome. We have a relatively short time and we would love to engage with you, so if your opening statement is longer than five minutes, you could submit that and we will have it entered into *Hansard*. That will allow us to proceed with an ongoing discussion with the committee today.

Ms Sigley: My opening statement is about five minutes hopefully.

ACTING CHAIR: Please do not feel any pressure. It is just that the committee members would love to engage with you about your submission and your opening statement so I am trying to get value for your time.

Ms Sigley: Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. I am the volunteer coordinator for OzHarvest Queensland. That is a paid staff role. Today I would like to summarise the work we do in brief and then look at the challenges we believe are affecting the volunteer system more broadly, not just in our little pocket, because that is where we believe the government can play a key role. OzHarvest is a food rescue organisation in Queensland. We operate in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Gympie, Cairns and Townsville. We are collecting over 65,000 kilograms of nutritious surplus food a week and delivering it fresh and free of charge to around 310 charitable agencies. Since our Queensland branch started in 2014, we have delivered more than 24 million kilograms of excess food to people, not landfill.

Australia is in the grip of a hunger emergency. An OzHarvest 2025 community needs survey revealed a 54 per cent increase in people being turned away from charity doors as frontline organisations struggle to cope with ongoing high demand. At the same time as that need is rampant, one-third of all food produced in Australia is wasted, further contributing to greenhouse gas emissions as it rots in landfill. Our volunteers are vital to supporting our work and we have approximately 400 volunteers in Queensland. Volunteers help us to do that food rescue and support our two education programs and our cooking program to ladder up our impact beyond the immediate need of feeding the hungry and also to educate and to create change.

We increasingly hear that volunteers have to prioritise paid work or child care over volunteering. The cost-of-living pressures that are causing our food insecurity crisis are also being felt by volunteers and are reducing their capacity to help. We try to be flexible by not demanding volunteers commit to a fixed schedule and instead use digital rostering to allow volunteers to self-service, but we cannot change the fact that communities more at risk of cost-of-living pressures are less likely to volunteer. We also know that we are quite lucky in the circumstance to be able to offer that flexibility in that way. Not every charity has that option.

It is important to recognise that, while we know that volunteering increases happiness and builds resilient communities, volunteering is not cost neutral. The cost of volunteers include: onboarding, such as police checks, screening and time to complete training; fuel, toll and parking costs to get to volunteering; and personal protective equipment costs such as work boots. While some of these barriers have always existed, they now pose a genuine impediment to people as they feel the squeeze. So how do we feel government can help reduce these barriers?

OzHarvest supports Volunteering Australia's suggestion of a volunteer passport. Volunteers are resubmitting information to many organisations, creating an admin load for charity and frustration for volunteers. If documentation such as police checks, training certificates and blue and yellow cards could be held in a single digital wallet that volunteers can share with multiple organisations, that would be a huge win, especially if these documents were more standardised between states.

Similarly, an easy way for volunteers to claim back travel and PPE costs to volunteer on tax or by some other mechanism would be very appreciated by our volunteers. Staff can often claim expenses while volunteers cannot. We really noticed with our Brisbane office's recent move to Banyo that toll roads and public transit routes do impact people's willingness to volunteer. We have also had it reported by our Townsville volunteers that limited buses reduce their ability to volunteer. The 50-cent fares have certainly been a popular initiative with our volunteers—thank you—but that depends on the suitability of those public transit routes.

With people under such pressure, another misconception about volunteering becomes an issue—and that is that volunteering does not just magically happen. OzHarvest is very lucky to be at a size where we can employ a team of dedicated volunteer management professionals to make sure that when volunteers arrive to help the work they do is organised, meaningful and strategic and that volunteers feel genuinely supported. Given how it is increasingly difficult to volunteer, we need to honour people's commitment by giving them the tools to be genuinely helpful. This requires: staff cost

and time, including administrative processes and IT support to properly ensure that every volunteer is vetted, trained and insured so that we can operate safely; communications and rostering to excite and recruit volunteers to fill areas of need; and people and culture support to provide feedback, training and guidance to volunteers, their managers and program designers.

For example, until recent investment in improved volunteer management tools at OzHarvest, our onboarding process took on average six weeks for a volunteer to complete—and that is to be eligible to do any shift at all. I do not think that is super unusual for the sector either. You can imagine how many potential volunteers we lost in that process. We have now got that time down to one week. However, that did require an investment of skills, time and money that not every organisation would have available to them.

Government support and advocacy could really help the sector-wide understanding that the backend work of delivering a volunteer program also needs support, and this will improve the efficiency and impact of that volunteering. Tools to support volunteer managers are also key, whether they themselves are volunteers or staff. We wear so many hats—from operational to people and culture to communications—so access to training in any of these areas would be beneficial to us.

Finally, I would like to close by mentioning that talk of volunteers is often tied with talk of resilient communities that can weather natural disasters and bounce back strongly. Our fantastic volunteer networks in Queensland deserve strong government action on climate change and cost-of-living issues so they do not have to be relied upon so often to come together and be resilient. It is not enough to thank us for the work we do fighting food insecurity and greenhouse gas emissions caused by food waste and then not act decisively on the systemic issues underpinning climate change and cost of living. I am excited to see the work that comes from this committee and hope it does flow into these broader conversations.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for your opening statement. I will ask the deputy chair for her first question.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for appearing today. I am interested in how you got that timeframe down to one week. We know that is a struggle for many organisations.

Ms Sigley: Essentially, we went with a fully digital system that took the volunteers through self-paced—through submitting their certificates of a police check and a blue card if required and then completing training modules online before they reached a phone call with me or a program coordinator to make sure everything was suitable. That is obviously very hands off so for some volunteers that is a barrier too, so there are pros and cons. That helped us get it down to a week and that was a significant investment from our end.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: How much did that cost you?

Ms Sigley: I am not sure.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Can you take that on notice, please?

Ms Sigley: Yes, I will take that on notice.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you for everything you and OzHarvest do. I know you are up in Townsville and I have visited several of the organisations you support there. It is very much appreciated by the community and those organisations. Similar to the deputy chair, I think the six weeks down to one week in onboarding is a fantastic accomplishment. I would like to know more about what duties your volunteers perform and why it was six weeks to start with but more around what key things you identified so you were able to reduce that time. You mentioned online, but was there anything that was redundant in that process or are there any other opportunities to streamline the process? We hear all the time from a lot of the volunteer organisations that have appeared before us about how long that onboarding process takes so it is a common issue we are seeing. You have had some great success so I am really keen to hear a bit more on that.

Ms Sigley: To the first part of that, the majority of our volunteers are involved in food rescue. That is manually, physically moving food with a driver, who is normally a staff member, collecting that food from donors and then delivering it. There are other things that come up and education programs as well. Normally we ask all volunteers to come through to that base level of being trained with food safety and with manual handling to be able to rescue that food. Once they understand what we do, they can go and do our educational work on top of that. The real barrier, I think, is that people need to go away and do that training, which is a couple of hours, and they need to find the time to do that. Then it all comes back to the filing: making sure we have double-checked that everyone has their certificates in and checking what step they are up to—step 1 or step 4—and whether they did them in order or out of order. It becomes quite a database management task to do that double-checking of documentation.

We did reduce how much we asked for up-front. We stopped asking for people to fund their own T-shirt because people were getting to the end of their training and not paying for their T-shirt and we could not say that they were allowed to volunteer, as a statewide protocol. It was also about people being able to submit their own documentation in a digital system that ticked it off and said, 'Yes, that is done,' rather than having an admin to go, 'Yes, this has arrived in the inbox. I have filed it correctly to that volunteer's account.'

Mr J KELLY: Does people physically getting to your sites present a barrier to volunteering?

Ms Sigley: Yes.

Mr J KELLY: Have you noticed any changes since the cheaper bus fares and train fares have come in?

Ms Sigley: Yes, I have definitely heard chatter amongst the volunteers that they have enjoyed using the 50-cent fares to get to volunteering. That has been helpful. Yes, location really matters. In the last year in Brisbane we moved from Salisbury to Banyo, which is across the river and quite far away. We definitely lost some volunteers in that move. One of our programs operates out at Bowen Hills and that is attractive because of the train line. Where there are good public transit options, people are more willing to get involved. We hear regularly across the country that if there is a parking fee at volunteering we will lose people.

Mr J KELLY: If you move from the south side to the north side, what can I say!

Ms Sigley: We set ourselves up for it, really.

ACTING CHAIR: The parochialism is back. It only took an hour!

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question is about insurance costs. Obviously, they are a huge impediment. Do you have any suggestions? Is it the coverage? I think it is \$21 million on average for a business. Is that too expensive, having \$21 million in coverage? What are your thoughts?

Ms Sigley: Because we are doing manual handling and we are getting in and out of trucks, we feel that it is very important for us to be very safe and have the insurance. Certainly not in Queensland but in other places, there have been injuries that have been significant. I would like to take on notice to provide details of our insurance policy because I am not across all of that. One thing I have noticed is that as soon as we have to deviate from our standard processes of training, for a volunteer who has accessibility needs or something else, then we start asking questions about whether that is in line with coverage for our insurance. We do not always know, which makes it harder for us to be that really inclusive place that we would love to be.

Mr FURNER: Firstly, thank you for appearing before the committee and the valuable work you do not only in the community but also in aspects you commented on in your opening statement. From memory, I think there is around 40 per cent food waste as a result of, in my view, retail stores changing the perception of what customers want. Has that increased? Secondly, have you engaged with other departments in terms of measures to reduce the opportunities for getting more food into the system or ways of limiting the hurdles you may experience in getting that food from farm to consumer?

Ms Sigley: Definitely. We know that food waste occurs across the whole system. Some of it is on-farm, some of it is in the retail sector and some of it—a significant portion—is in people's own homes. We run educational campaigns to try to raise people's awareness that if an apple has a blemish it is not a bad apple. If it has one little bruise, you can cut it off and keep eating it. That perception around pretty food being the only acceptable food is something that we are working on and our partners at Woolworths are working on as well.

One of the big initiatives we would really love to see is the removal of 'best before' labelling on products. We see that as a significant contributor to wastage. I believe that in the UK they are working on removing it and are seeing good results because, essentially, 'best before' does not mean that a food is unsafe to eat after that date. People confuse it with 'use by'. They see 'best before' and go, 'I can't have that. Get it off the shelves,' but in reality it is still a safe food so we are throwing things out before we need to.

Mr FURNER: The other part of the question was about whether you had engaged with other departments.

Ms Sigley: Yes, we try to collaborate as a food sector—with Foodbank, FairShare and SecondBite. We work together and then with government. I know that we have worked together in the past. I will need to double-check the details.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: In terms of attracting volunteers, what is your No. 1 strategy?

Ms Sigley: Our brand is quite recognisable and people come to us because they know the work we do, which is fabulous. We have been really lucky that we are quite well known now. Probably the largest way we get people is natural flow through our website—and also because our trucks are bright yellow and they are driving around the city. Second to that, though, is Seek Volunteer, a digital listing.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Going to the question of getting additional volunteers, other organisations ask for specific training or specific prerequisites. Is that something OzHarvest also looks for?

Ms Sigley: In general, no. We will provide the required training for food safety and manual handling and additional training if they are involved in our education programs. We say to people that it is actually an opportunity to upskill if they would like to volunteer with us. A police check is a mandatory requirement, as is a blue card if you are working in the education programs. I guess we do not have a standard requirement that is anything out of the ordinary, unless we are seeking a specific skilled volunteer—that is the way we would term it—role for a specific need. In the past I had a fabulous volunteer who helped me learn more about engaging with volunteers with disability and that was a specific request. We were able to find someone who had that skill who donated that time and knowledge to us, but our standard volunteering does not require anything additional.

Mr BAILLIE: Have your volunteer numbers increased or decreased over recent years? What do you find gives you the most bang for buck in terms of trying to get more volunteers?

Ms Sigley: We have seen a drop in volunteering since 2020, as I think most organisations have. I would say that we are stable, but we are certainly not seeing a dramatic increase in volunteering. For most programs we generally have almost enough volunteers, which I feel is a standard way of being—that you have almost enough. In terms of what is best for volunteer recruitment, we have over time become more and more specific about giving people all of the information about what the role actually entails. We get people who are really committed right from the start and they are not going to say halfway through the process, ‘Oh, that is not what I thought it was.’ It is about making sure we are really up-front: ‘You are going to be physically lifting and moving. These are the locations. These are the times.’ That kind of detail is really important to people.

Mr BAILEY: When you say that your volunteer base is stable, is that the same people turning up or is it a stable number and you have some churn there?

Ms Sigley: It is a stable number with churn, I would say. In general, we find that we have our core group of volunteers who commit every single week and are showing up, going above and beyond. Then we have a larger pool who are less regularly engaged but also support the cause. We really try to make that a flexible thing because people move between those two groups. You can imagine someone who has a year’s break from work, gets really involved, does a shift every single week for six months and then gets a new job. They then step back to once a month. For us that is not a loss, because they are still a beautiful part of our team and they are doing what they want to do. That is awesome. Providing those opportunities—that can be super regular and committed or can be a little bit more flexible—is really important. We regularly get asked if we offer remote or digital volunteering, which is very hard when our job is mostly lifting food, so we do lose people in that sense.

ACTING CHAIR: The time allocated for this session has now expired. Thank you for appearing before the committee today and providing your evidence. Please provide your responses to questions on notice by 5 pm on Friday, 27 June if possible. Thank you very much for being here today.

MEE, Ms Jill, Chief People Officer, Foodbank Queensland

ACTING CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before we start with our questions?

Ms Mee: I have a presentation here, starting with some key figures for our volunteering program. We currently have 116 active volunteers at Foodbank Queensland. This includes our board of directors, who are all volunteers, as well as a new program of volunteers in a recently opened distribution centre in Townsville. I have calculated that our volunteers have year-to-date worked over 10,000 volunteer hours with Foodbank. Based on Volunteering Queensland replacement costs of \$58.33 an hour, this equates to a giving of \$585,000 year-to-date that we have saved as a charity. We have 175 volunteers on our waitlist. Our average turnover figure for volunteers is 2.57 per cent. At Foodbank we spend around \$5,000 a year of our budget on reward and recognition for those volunteers. We have a staff member for whom 50 per cent of her role is dedicated to volunteer management, at a cost to us of 50 per cent of her salary which is \$50,000. The average age of our volunteers is around 62.

In terms of the volunteers and the roles that they do at Foodbank Queensland, I have nine volunteer positions that we recruit to—thankfully not too often, because we have a low turnover. Those roles are predominantly in our operational department, similar to what you have just heard with OzHarvest. We have volunteers who sort product and pack orders for the member charities, in particular our school breakfast program. We have volunteers who support that on a daily basis. We have volunteers who work with our traffic control out the front of our warehouse to guide traffic and keep the workplace safe. We have a group of volunteers who drive around collecting donations, working with our member charities that collect from Foodbank, supporting our marketing and fundraising team with donor care. That includes writing thankyou cards to donors and that sort of thing, school breakfast admin and also hamper packing in Townsville.

There are a couple of key points I would like to make about our volunteer program and why we think it is so successful. The first is our recruitment process for volunteers. Potential volunteers express interest via a link on the Foodbank Queensland webpage. On the page they indicate what role they are interested in. All of our potential volunteers are advised to do a trial shift with us. This is an opportunity for us to assess their skills and fit within the team. They also are assessing us as well to see whether it meets their expectations and confirm if they wish to stay on and volunteer with us.

If both parties are happy, we then offer them a volunteer shift. They then sign up themselves to their preferred shift via the app we use. They undertake a full workplace health and safety training program as well as a police check. They are also provided with their online induction program, which covers key Foodbank policies and procedures, all very much the same as what our staff do. They are also required to complete a refresher course every 12 months. They will then assign the shifts they want to do via an online app called My Impact. This provides them with flexibility. We do find they have their own teams they like to work in. They always sign up to the same shifts and come back with their team from week to week to do their tasks.

In terms of reward and recognition, I see that as the second major benefit of our program. We celebrate when our volunteers hit 100 hours, 300 hours and 1,000 hours. At 100 hours they get the highly regarded purple T-shirt that Foodbank staff cannot have before they reach 100 hours, so that is a very big celebration. We then just give them a very small token of a \$50 or \$100 gift voucher, depending on the hours they have done. There is a lot of cake, a lot of coffee runs, that kind of thing. We always celebrate their birthday. Their anniversary with us is celebrated with all of the staff as well as any other special acknowledgements. We do team celebrations at Easter, Christmas and Halloween, things like that, where there is dressing-up. Of course, National Volunteer Week is a very important part of the annual recognition program.

I think the management of volunteers as workplace participants is the most important part of managing a successful volunteer program. Volunteers are part of our workforce; they are not separate. If required, we manage those difficult conversations with volunteers very carefully, ensuring there are no breaches of the code of conduct, respect at work legislation and that type of thing. Those conversations are had when they need to be had. We protect our culture fiercely at Foodbank, so any of those behaviours are immediately dealt with. They do all of the same training as staff. They participate in engagement surveys and all that type of thing. We have gone so far as to dismiss volunteers if there are any breaches of that type of legislation, as I alluded to, or policy.

The key to our program is that we have a dedicated resource to volunteer management. My experience is that you cannot tack this onto somebody's job and hope it works. You do need a dedicated employee for volunteer management and you need someone who is an advocate for the

program. Luckily, I have that person, who is celebrating five years today with Foodbank in that role. She is also an HR business partner. She works with the staff as well as the volunteers. Her role as an HR business partner is with the operations team. She is very experienced in the work of operations and working closely with the supervisors of those volunteers. As I said, she is fiercely passionate about the role of volunteers and the contributions they make. She is an incredible advocate for volunteers. She has been rewarded in that role by Volunteering Queensland. I am really proud of the work she has done for us.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for the work that you do. I represent Inala, which is a community that has significant needs. Foodbank benefits them greatly, so thank you for that. Obviously you get food donations, but in terms of dollar funding what sources do you have?

Ms Mee: There are four programs of funding for Foodbank. One is contributions from government. We have had our own incredible fundraising team since my time at Foodbank, which is five years. I cannot remember the figures, but that is a huge contribution to the work we do. We also have particular grants that we do as well as individual donors.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Has government funding changed? Is it sufficient? Are there any issues around that funding at the moment?

Ms Mee: It is never sufficient, no. We would always advocate for more, particularly for the school breakfast program, which is one of our flagship programs. Our CEO, Jess Watkinson, would be glad to talk to any members of parliament or here at committees around the dire need to increase that. We still have schools on the waiting list for Foodbank. Particularly in the regions we would love to expand further, which is the strategy we have with the Townsville distribution centre.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Could you take that on notice and provide the costs of that school breakfast program and what is needed, please?

Ms Mee: Yes.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You briefly mentioned that you have 175 volunteers on a waiting list.

Ms Mee: Yes.

Mr BOOTHMAN: How does that work and how do you retain those individuals?

Ms Mee: How do we keep them engaged? That is a great question. We keep in contact with them and ask them every six months whether they would like to continue to be on that waitlist. Of course, we do lose a few in that way. We are always trying to look for new positions for them. You have to be very careful when you craft volunteer positions that they are suitable to volunteers and not taking on work that should be done by your paid workforce. At the moment, we are looking at another hamper packing role to help supplement some of our corporate volunteer work, which is another program altogether. We are continuously looking at new roles. We also send them information. Our volunteer manager will email them to continue that engagement.

Mr FURNER: I have been to your facility at Murarrie before. I am very impressed with the organisation. You may not have this information at hand, but if you can can you provide on notice the volume of food you take in, particularly perishables, and whether you receive any government subsidies in terms of reduced power costs as a result of that type of food. No doubt you have a responsibility to ensure that food is safe through Safe Food Production Queensland, and I assume they would audit you at times to make sure you are not passing on perishable food that is not fit for consumption. Would you provide that information on notice if you do not have it?

Ms Mee: I do have some of that information which I can provide. In the last financial year we had 14 million kilos of food donated to Foodbank which is processed through our warehouse. We now have a second one on Lytton Road at Morningside. Forty per cent of our product is fresh produce, which we are extremely proud of. We have a couple of programs which assist with that. One is direct farms to families. We have a wonderful program set up where we have really large FB4 bins delivered to farms where farmers can put product directly in for us. We have a relationship with a transport company to transfer that to us or to a closer charity, if need be. I have forgotten the second part of your question.

Mr FURNER: The other part was in terms of government assistance in the form of subsidies for power costs.

Ms Mee: I do not know the answer to that. I do know that we have a HACCP accreditation, which is around food safety and handling, which is just about to come up for its annual renewal. I am not aware of or do not know the answer in relation to power subsidies, but we have plenty of very big freezers and chillers and things that keep our product fresh.

Mr FURNER: If you could come back to the committee with that, we would appreciate it.

Ms Mee: I would love to, yes.

Mr BAILLIE: I was fortunate to visit the Townsville facility recently with Jess and Megan to have a chat and have a look in some of the hampers. They also shared the fact that you have quite a big volunteer waitlist that many volunteer organisations would be particularly envious of. I have two questions. What do you put that waitlist down to? Why do you have so many on your waitlist as a volunteering organisation versus others, who would love to be in that position? My second question is once somebody comes off that waitlist and you want to engage them as a volunteer, how long does the onboarding process take?

Ms Mee: I think the reasons people want to volunteer at Foodbank are probably similar to OzHarvest. They cannot understand that we live in a First World country with Third World problems around food insecurity. I think it is anyone who feels they can contribute to helping those who need food to get it. The old adage of thinking about people being hungry is not what it used to be. It is now everyday families that are often struggling to put food on the table. It can just be one extra bill or having to pay for an excursion or a new pair of shoes that means parents might miss a meal. That is what food insecurity is about—not quite knowing how that next meal is going to come. I think people really want to be part of helping that process for a basic need such as food. I think they want to contribute to that. We also have a reputation as having a wonderful volunteer program with really wonderful roles. People do not leave us once they come in as well. I am sorry, your second question?

Mr BAILLIE: It was the onboarding process.

Ms Mee: It is very quick. It is really a week or so, or just as long as the police check takes. The induction is done either in their first shift or prior with the online learning.

Mr J KELLY: Could you please provide to the committee a list of all the schools that have a school breakfast program?

Ms Mee: I can. I will get that, yes.

Mr J KELLY: Thank you. I was interested to hear your commentary around the role of the volunteer coordinator. Is that a paid position?

Ms Mee: Yes.

Mr J KELLY: I worked in one of those roles about 25 or 26 years ago at MS Queensland, and in those days it was a pretty new practice. It has moved on. Is there a network of volunteer coordinators? Do they connect with each other?

Ms Mee: Yes, they do. Volunteering Queensland, as the peak body for volunteering, plays a role there. Yes, they do connect. They can connect. They are as rare as hen's teeth to recruit.

Mr J KELLY: I am not looking for a job; I am happy with the one I have. I was going to say it sort of strikes me that it has become like a bit of an HR role for people rather than what it used to be, which was just trying to find people and get them out there.

Ms Mee: It is part of my people, culture and safety team because volunteers are seen as part of the workforce, and we manage them in the same way we manage our people. We engage with them and we recognise and reward them in the same way as our people. They are also supervised by paid staff and work alongside staff, so in all of the ways that you look after your team, we look after our volunteers as part of that team.

Mr J KELLY: Are there any qualifications available for people who are interested in becoming volunteer coordinators? Do you think it would assist if there was some sort of subset of HR that focused on volunteers?

Ms Mee: Potentially. I think there is a good understanding of the standards that Volunteering Queensland puts out. I believe there is course work available through Volunteer Queensland to do that, but I would have to check that.

Mr J KELLY: Out of interest, are there any professional development opportunities ongoing for people who are in these sorts of roles?

Ms Mee: There are often courses put out by Volunteering Queensland—as I said, they are the peak body—but not outside of that.

ACTING CHAIR: The time allocated for this session has now expired. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today and for providing your evidence. For the questions you have taken on notice, could you please provide your responses by 5 pm on Friday, 27 June.

Ms Mee: No problem.

GARDINER, Mr Matt, Chief Executive Officer, Cancer Council Queensland

WALLER, Ms Mena, Chief Operating Officer, Cancer Council Queensland

ACTING CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement? If you could keep it to around five minutes so we can allow for the committee's engagement with you, that would be great.

Mr Gardiner: Good afternoon, committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this committee. We, too, acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are on—the Yagara and Turrbal people—and pay respects to eldest past and present. My name is Matt Gardiner. I have the privilege of serving Cancer Council Queensland as the CEO. I am joined by Mena Waller, our Chief Operating Officer. Just for context, I am also the Chair of the Council of Social Service, QCOS, and one of the expert advisory members of the not-for-profit sector blueprint for the Australian government.

We do not take it for granted that our organisation has had the opportunity to appear before the committee twice. We were at the Toowoomba hearing in March where Cancer Council Queensland colleagues provided insights, especially into regional volunteering. Also, I understand that one of our dedicated wig and headwear volunteers shared firsthand experience at that hearing.

As we outlined in our submission, Cancer Council Queensland simply could not deliver the life-changing services that we do without the support of volunteers, in particular across regional and rural communities. For every staff member that we have, for every paid employee, we have 25 volunteers. They are not just the backbone of our service delivery but really the heart of the organisation. Many of the volunteers bring deep personal experience and connection to our mission not only through their lived experience but also through their professional experience. What they contribute goes far beyond volunteering and contributing their time. They bring empathy, insight and authenticity to every volunteer role, helping us to deliver support with compassion and integrity.

Cancer Council Queensland is fortunate to have really strong retention and some growth in different areas of our volunteering. The network overall is about 5,000 volunteers across Queensland, so we are one of the largest volunteering organisations in the state. In saying that, there are some areas—some regions and geographic areas—that are under-represented. We would also say in terms of profile of our volunteering network that First Nations people are also under-represented. There is much more work to be done to expand our volunteer base, particularly where access to cancer information support is often limited. We must and will do better as an organisation. This means creating culturally safe and properly designed volunteering opportunities for priority populations. When I say 'priority populations', I am referencing the National Cancer Plan and by doing that fostering community-led volunteering, values, local expertise and genuine partnerships.

Cancer Council Queensland are preparing ourselves and ready to step up into a sector convening role in this space and in every aspect affecting people living with cancer. In doing that, working along with other community organisations to drive collaboration, community-led solutions as well as growing our own volunteer base is really important to us. Our vision goes beyond the boundaries of just our organisation. We really want to help the sector in building out volunteering, making a stronger and sustainable volunteer ecosystem. We strongly support Volunteering Queensland's proposal for a stakeholder round table arising from this inquiry. A forum like this would help embed ongoing consultation and coordinated action and allow organisations just like ours to effectively contribute to advancing an ambitious volunteering agenda for Queensland.

Another opportunity to strengthen and coordinate the sector would be the establishment of regional volunteer hubs, spaces for collaboration, training and shared resourcing across organisations. In saying that, when we speak to our volunteers, it is really rare to find that they just volunteer for us. It is like that idea of, if you want something done, you find a busy person to do it. It is a bit like volunteering: if you want someone to volunteer, find someone who is already volunteering. We believe that this concept has real potential and would require meaningful cross-sector consultation to shape it effectively.

The concept of a volunteer passport is also critical so that any statewide initiatives reflect the full diversity of Queensland's volunteer workforce. In our submission, we have recommended that any volunteer passport or incentive scheme linked to the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games extends well beyond the traditional sporting roles. Volunteers in health, community services, disaster response and other non-sporting sectors play an equally vital role in our society. They, too, deserve to be recognised, supported and included in any legacy planning for the games.

In our submission we also recommended creating mutual incentives for not for profits and corporate partners to grow employer supported volunteering. I would like to expand on how government agencies and the full purpose sector can work together to set a high-impact agenda for corporate volunteering. There are costs as well as benefits to consider on the part of the volunteering organisation itself. While the intention behind corporate volunteering is positive, the reality is that each new volunteer requires a series of administrative, logistic and training resources just to make sure that the participation is safe, productive and aligned with the mission.

Short-term engagements often disrupt existing workflows and might not justify the investment that is required, especially if the volunteering does not leverage the volunteers' skills and expertise. It is increasingly recognised as best practice for corporate volunteers to accompany their in-kind support with financial contributions to help cover the costs incurred by host organisations. This ensures that partnerships are sustainable. Note that this is a recommendation put forward in the National Strategy for Volunteering. Government has a role to play in encouraging corporate partners to offer meaningful skills-based support that draws on their expertise, rather than just one-off engagements with limited impact.

In closing, we would like to reiterate that the foundational nature of volunteering at Cancer Council Queensland is that our volunteers are not just helpers. They are co-deliverers of care, they are advocates and they are community connectors. Strengthening the volunteer sector will take deliberate coordination, investment and shared leadership across government, the community sector and business. We are here to play our part not only by growing our own volunteer base but also by learning as a sector convener, sharing what works and learning from others.

Once again, I thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. We stand ready to support the committee's work and help bring to life a volunteering agenda that is ambitious, sustainable and connected to the community.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for your opening statement. I would like to ask a question, but the answer is definitely going to take a longer form than we have time for, so if you could just give us a summary of what you think. When it comes to the issue you raised about people volunteering for a number of organisations, it does not matter whether you are in a rural setting or you are in the middle of Brisbane. It is the same. There are a number of roles that people undertake in their volunteering. What is the key strategy from a government perspective? Is it around coordinating through the wallet and the recognition of individuals and their talents or regulatory compliance or is it around developing—Mr Kelly asked a question of a former witness today around this—a training module for paid staff to supervise volunteers. They are not the exact words he used. I am paraphrasing. Are both of those integral or would one outweigh the other in terms of importance as a strategy for any government policy moving forward?

Mr Gardiner: It is really difficult to answer because we have such a diverse range of volunteers. Some of them support events and fundraising, for example. Then we have other volunteers. Like many organisations in our sector, our board are all volunteers. We have a lot of corporate support. We get legal counsel often volunteering for the legal panel. It really does vary.

If I just think about the coordination of that, it is a bit like portable long service leave for our paid workforce. In the same way, that portability between organisations is something that not-for-profit organisations themselves cannot track at the moment. Having at the very least some sort of support around onboarding and logistical support, administrative support, of volunteers would absolutely help an increase in volunteering. It would reduce the administrative burden not just on organisations but on volunteers themselves.

If you have a casual part-time workforce and they are moving from one organisation to the other, you are fulfilling the same requirements around your criminal history and police checks, your references to suitability, your onboarding around workplace health and safety, and all of the other obligations. You are replicating that over and over. I think any streamlining of that would be incredibly helpful for volunteers and for volunteering organisations.

ACTING CHAIR: I appreciate your insights.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for appearing today. It is very valuable to have you here. Notwithstanding the fact that you have seen an increase in volunteers at a time when many other organisations are seeing a decrease and difficulties in recruiting and being able to maintain a volunteer workforce, can you give us some of your top reasons or strategies as to how that has come about?

Mr Gardiner: I will speak and then I might hand to Mena. We are experiencing an overall increase but, again, we engage a diverse range of volunteers. It varies, whether that is running events and fundraising versus actual service delivery. What are we doing to support that? I suppose it is around that focus to mission. Every organisation is going to have a different appeal. You heard similar ideas from Foodbank. Our workforce is made up of volunteers and paid people. They are people committed to our organisation and committed to our mission. Treating them that way safeguards the organisation and the people whom we work with. It also provides a proper experience for a volunteer to come in. Part of that is separating out for us into different job families or categorising what type of volunteering is it? Otherwise, if you are not able to be that nuanced about it, there is a risk of categorising all volunteers into one type. At its worst we tend to stigmatise volunteering. Volunteering provides a huge amount of resourcing and support to our organisation and the people that we are here to provide for.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you both for joining us today. It was great to have your colleagues join us in Toowoomba as well. That is when we first heard about the increase in volunteering and some of the efforts that you put into that, some of the strategies around it. I was reviewing your submission earlier. You mentioned the difference between engaging volunteers in a metro environment versus a regional environment. I am not sure we have really explored that previously. I would be interested in any insights you might be able to elaborate on—how you engage with your volunteers in those different settings and any observations you might have.

Mr Gardiner: It is not too different in some ways to the way that we engage our workforce a little bit differently. One idea is that, when we are looking to recruit, build and develop volunteering in a regional area—I will not be telling the regional members anything new here—that sense of community is something that we leverage. People know each other. They are already part of those community networks. That proactivity and leadership that you get in a regional area is quite different. Strategically that is helpful in recruiting volunteers. In a metropolitan area it is more a traditional approach, as we would any part of the workforce going out. What I am saying is relationships and networking is really important and more productive perhaps in a regional area. As we said in our opening statement, we have not sufficiently or have not intentionally done that in remote parts of the state in the way that we ought to do.

Mr BAILLIE: With regard to the organisation and the operation itself, in a region versus metro scenario, are they different or are they largely the same and it is just the recruiting process that differs?

Ms Waller: It is very similar from a regional and an urban perspective. We have hubs across the state where major cancer treatment centres are. In terms of the types of services, when we are talking about operationally, they are very similar.

To the point around engagement with volunteers, similar to our paid staff, when we are thinking about engagement and what that means to connection to mission, I think that is really important. In terms of how we engage volunteers who are connected to our operational delivery, they feel very connected and clear about what their roles and responsibilities are. They are also engaged in a regular way, whereas a volunteer who is engaging with a fundraiser or a committee are not engaged as frequently. Also, the way in which we were engaging with them has changed based on space for them. We talked about a regional volunteering hub. I think that has shifted the way that they feel connected to what they do and how regular they are getting that love, so to speak. I think there is a difference in how engaged and how connected they feel to the organisation.

To your question around the actual service delivery, it is very similar in urban and regional areas. I will say that my experience in working in regional and remote communities is that there is a sense of everyone has to come in and get things done because we just do not have the resources. I think that is a shared sentiment. Everyone does know each other, so there is a different way of connecting with volunteers in regional and remote settings.

Mr FURNER: I yield to the member for Greenslopes.

Mr J KELLY: I thank the member for Ferny Grove for letting me have a go. Is volunteer management something that is considered at the board level of the Cancer Council? Do you have strategies? Is it a discussion point for the board? Is it something that is considered regularly?

Mr Gardiner: That is a really great question. The short answer is yes, and it is because of the legal obligations and responsibilities that we have to volunteers, which is the same for employees. From a perspective of health and safety, it absolutely does form part of all of those strategies. The way that we think of and understand our volunteering workforce is that it is very much a part of the

organisation, and the way it is run is the same as for paid employees. In saying that, because of the differences, the nuances and the additional cost burden, I suppose, of a volunteering workforce, it is something that we need an independent strategy for. We are working on that at the moment.

Ms Waller: Part of our volunteering cohort is people who are helping us fundraise for our services. Most of what we deliver as impact- or mission-driven delivery is actually funded by fundraises. About six per cent of our core funding is government funded and the rest is driven by donors or fundraising teams. When we talk about that at a board level, we are thinking about how we engage the people who are really doing all of the work to make sure we are able to continue as a service.

Mr J KELLY: Your organisation is really well known in the community, and there is almost a perception that it is a very professionally and corporately run non-profit organisation. Do you think that sometimes leads people to form a perception that a lot of your services are delivered by paid staff rather than volunteer staff? Does that have any impact on recruiting volunteers?

Mr Gardiner: A lot of the people are delivering a service as part of their volunteering—they might be transporting people to treatment or fitting wigs and headwear, for example—and many of them bring their own lived experience. The majority of people have been volunteering with us for a very long time—many of them several decades. Part of the attraction is working with our professional team in supportive care, in community accommodation or, indeed, through the statewide helpline. There is an attraction to that and being seen as part of that professional delivery. From an ethical point of view, it is obviously really important to say that there is a really clear delineation between a qualified and professional service and a volunteer or paraprofessional service.

Mr BOOTHMAN: What are the age groups of your 5,000 volunteers? Is the more predominant age group the older generation or the younger generation? You might have to take that on notice. I do not expect you to know that off by heart.

Mr Gardiner: We can take on notice the specific numbers, if that would be useful for the committee. Generally speaking, our volunteer workforce would be older than our paid workforce. Often it is said that we have an aging population in volunteering, but actually the people are often towards the end of their professional careers or are retired and have the opportunity to invest their time in something they are passionate about and want to do. An important part of our strategy to recruit volunteers is that we need people who do have the time and want to follow their passion after their career. We see it as a very positive thing rather than something that we need to try to manage.

ACTING CHAIR: Ms Waller, I may have spoken over you. Did you have something further to add to the question from Mr Kelly?

Ms Waller: I cannot remember what the question was. I will just highlight Matt's point—and I think it does go to Mr Kelly's question. A lot of our volunteers come with lived experience—those who have experienced cancer, who have gone through that journey—and they are fundraising for our services. That does play a role in the age of the volunteers for Cancer Council.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. The time allocated for this session has now expired. I thank you both for appearing before the committee today and providing your evidence. If possible, please tender a response to the questions you have taken on notice by 5 pm on Friday, 27 June.

THOMPSON, Ms Emma, Chief Executive Officer, Ronald McDonald House (via videoconference)

ACTING CHAIR: Good morning. Would you like to make a five-minute opening statement before we start with our questions? If you have anything further you would like to add, please send it in in written form. We thank you very much for appearing today.

Ms Thompson: Thank you so much for the invitation. Our organisation, Ronald McDonald House Charities South East Queensland, provides essential services to families when their children are ill or injured. We do that predominantly through our three Ronald McDonald Houses, based in Herston, South Brisbane and inside the Queensland Children's Hospital. We can only provide those essential services because of the incredible volunteer support we get from our community, so we are extremely keen to talk today.

Over the last 10 years we have seen a serious decline in the number of volunteers that our organisation has been able to recruit and retain. We had 350 in 2017 and that dropped down to 170 at the start of last year. There are a variety of factors for that, which I am sure the committee has already considered, around COVID and other compliance issues as well. We are rebuilding and, as at today, we have 266 active volunteers, whom we are incredibly grateful for.

There are some issues facing volunteering in Queensland which I am sure you are already forming a view on, and we would like to raise a few today. In relation to the compliance and accreditation that some organisations such as ours need to undertake to have active volunteers in some government entities—such as inside hospitals in our particular case—there is a lack of consistency and some of the processes can be very onerous on the volunteers, which puts them off signing up in the first place.

It is very important for us to note that volunteering is not a free activity for volunteers. We know from the *State of volunteering in Queensland* report that, on average, volunteering is costing people around \$15.57 for every hour they volunteer with us. Given the cost-of-living crisis that we are all still experiencing, we would love to see some positivity around that.

We are all very excited about the 2032 Olympics coming to Brisbane, but we are also aware that there will be an impact on our volunteer recruitment at that time and in the lead-up to it. Another area of concern for us is around the burden of responsibility on those extra-committed volunteers who sign up to govern our organisations. Taking on a directorship role in an NFP comes with the same level of compliance and liability as sitting in a director's role for a company. We think the government could do more to support those volunteers as well.

We have set out some recommendations. We would love the committee to consider what recognition and incentives could be offered to Queensland's volunteers and how we can start to mitigate the cost of volunteering to the volunteers themselves to make sure it is sustainable for them. We would love to see financial assistance for them in that regard, and that could be as simple as parking and transport costs. We also see an increased compliance role for our organisations, so any financial support for the NFPs themselves in recruiting and trying to retain volunteers would be great. I do not have an answer for this one but, collectively as a sector, we need to consider how we can encourage volunteerism for the Olympics and then what we can do to harness the amazing swell of volunteers that we will see and build them back into our culture strongly so that we retain those great people in new roles after the Olympics is done.

I have just stepped out of a meeting with our federated system. All of our directors are in Canberra today. We are looking at the governance role of volunteers and how we can better support NFPs to ensure our leaders in the governance space—our directors—have the appropriate skills and resources they need when they are signing up for the vital roles of governing our entities. Anything the government could do to support our directors would go a long way to supporting volunteerism and ensuring that people are still willing to take on those higher level roles in our organisations. Those are the summaries. The rest of our submissions are included in the written submission that we put forward.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much. I am not sure if you have been privy to any of the other contributions today, but Cancer Council Queensland raised the issue of a volunteer base that is very transient. In some cases there are individual volunteers supporting a number of different organisations, either charitable or otherwise. Is that something you track in any way? Are you aware of any volunteers who support your organisation being engaged elsewhere? Are there any strategies that you believe government should employ to assist volunteers who may be transient with their support?

Ms Thompson: It is definitely something we see. When people are generous with their time, they tend to be generous with more than one organisation. We are actually having a chat with a couple of NFPs in the same sector to see if we could share volunteers. I do not think it is necessarily a negative; I think it is a positive, if we could harness them.

One of the things we have considered is compliance. Could there be standardisation of compliance so that when we are onboarding our volunteers they have already been certified as a volunteer? In that way, not every single NFP they are volunteering for has to make them go through the same or very similar processes. We do not track that directly, but it is certainly something we see.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Emma, thank you for the work you do and for appearing before us. I am interested in directors and supporting directors. We have heard from most organisations about the challenges of recruiting and retaining people in executive roles. Do you have any specific ideas that would help to support that process?

Ms Thompson: Yes. In relation to directors, as I mentioned, the compliance is as high as in any other business. There would be a lot of NFPs that are less well resourced than us. We are part of a federated system, as are our friends at Cancer Council. We probably have a greater degree of resource but we still need to ensure that our directors have the correct skills and training. There are great entities out there. We know that the AICD has NFP governance standards that are very relevant, but there is a cost associated to all of it. Is there some support that government could give to ensure the training is in place? A better run NFP sector would only be a great investment for Queensland.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Could you take on notice the cost of that type of training, specifically for those sorts of roles, and the costs associated with maintaining and recruiting for those roles?

Ms Thompson: Yes. I will be happy to provide that.

Mr Boothman: During your opening statement, you mentioned a few times the Olympics and the enormous workforce which will be needed for that. You also spoke about potentially grabbing those volunteers. What types of strategies do you feel would be needed to get these volunteers for the future and then disseminate them to different organisations? How do you feel that could be done? What is your vision of that? It is a really good idea, because tens of thousands of volunteers will be needed.

Ms Thompson: Yes, hopefully they get the bug and we can keep them. One of the things that we found at a local level is the importance of marketing, being in media and highlighting volunteerism as a wonderful thing that is both beneficial for the organisation and the individual who is undertaking the activity. So I think now is the time for us to think about how to convert those volunteers who have had a taste of what volunteering is. I think having a smart media strategy would be very important—potentially funding an organisation like Volunteering Queensland or one of the bodies so that there is a legacy that is held over from the Olympics. We would not want to lose those people. There will be a lot of them. If we can build a culture from that moment that stays with Queensland following the end of the Olympics, I think that would be a wonderful legacy.

Mr FURNER: With regard to recommendation No. 6 in terms of public awareness campaigns, it would be fair to say that probably every member sitting at the table today has been involved in fundraising for Ronald McDonald House on McHappy Day. What sort of campaign are you considering in that respect?

Ms Thompson: We do localised marketing campaigns across the country through our federation around volunteering. We need to be quite sophisticated about this, so we need to recruit people using the same approaches that we use to recruit excellent staff. Our people are still our people, whether they are paid or volunteers. Having a really good understanding of the market and having the resources to be able to get into the social media, into the paid media—all of the normal marketing approaches that a company would use—we need to use to ensure volunteers are having an easy route to access the opportunities that we can offer them. We are investing. We are spending money ensuring we are marketing to volunteers in the same way we would market and target paid staff as well.

Mr FURNER: Would a universal database arrangement be satisfactory to alleviate some of the onboarding issues you have raised in your submission?

Ms Thompson: If we could take some of the compliance away from the organisation and centralise that, it would be nothing but a good thing. If we knew that we had a certified volunteer—whatever that looks like. We have to do police checks. We have to do criminal checks. Most

organisations I imagine would have mandatory training around things like child safeguarding and WHS. It is pretty standard. Whilst we all have our own take on it, I do not see why there could not be a standardised approach for volunteers in Queensland that we could then build on locally. That would be a great step.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you for joining us today, Ms Thompson. I was reviewing your submission earlier which is very comprehensive but also has a particularly interesting observation regarding the changing volunteer demographics. It said—

Younger generations prefer more flexible, project-based volunteer opportunities rather than ongoing commitments.

Can you elaborate on that? You might have had particular cases or examples where a project-based opportunity presents itself versus a more ongoing volunteer requirement.

Ms Thompson: We do have those opportunities. I think the challenge for us is that our operational need is ongoing so our preference is to recruit those ongoing volunteers. That certainly seems to have shifted. We absolutely have project work that comes through so we will have interns or project-based volunteers coming through doing work around maybe our diverse equity inclusion strategies, so helping us build strategies and then implementing them, so quite bespoke skilled work that may align with studies or may align with their future career goals. They are great. We are very appreciative of them, and they do reduce the burden of some of our financial costs of staffing in those areas. I think the shift and the issue for us as an organisation that impacts our ability to progress strategy is it feels like there has been a shift in the longer term volunteers. We still have them but just not to the degree that we probably did 10 years ago.

Mr J KELLY: I am very interested in the management committee level of volunteers. I have referred a number of local community organisations to the AICD NFP course. One of the things that concerns me as someone who has done the Company Directors course and sat on a number of boards is just how many people step onto community organisation boards with zero understanding of governance or even the basics of their obligations around what they are legally required to do and how they are legally at risk if they get things wrong. Do you think there should be some baseline information available for people who are stepping into any community board at any level to make sure they understand what their obligations and responsibilities are?

Ms Thompson: Absolutely. I have literally just stepped out of a meeting where we have been discussing organisational enterprise level risk management for boards. I think the board sophistication needs to be high in order to protect themselves and protect the organisation that they are governing. If there were a suite of documents available—there are some but they could be collated more locally—around enterprise management, risk management, directors' duties and liability, I think that would be nothing but beneficial. There is best practice that could be adopted and is adopted by a lot of NFPs that are extremely well run around board governance skills, around recruitment, around retaining and about reviewing the performance of the board as well. All of these tools could be more easily available to our boards to allow them to do the best job they can do.

Mr J KELLY: As a follow-up question, it seems to me that a lot of particularly smaller management committees do not have anyone fulfilling that company secretary role and that is where a lot of issues seem to arise around compliance. I am wondering whether or not there would be some opportunity to have some sort of a centralised, almost virtual-type company secretary role that management committees could rely on to sort of ensure they are meeting all of their obligations, particularly around compliance?

Ms Thompson: That is an excellent suggestion. I think just having that company secretary role as the person who is the go-to to check and ensure directors are following the right procedures and that they have confidence that they have somebody who is not monitoring but who is that point of reference. Every director wants to do their role as well as they possibly can but any support that could be offered, I think, is an excellent idea.

Mr BAILLIE: You mentioned your challenge recently with the number of volunteers. I think it started at 350 and then dropped down to 170. You have now got it up to 266. Did you stop trying to recruit for a period of time? I imagine you were always trying to recruit but you might have done something different. Could you share with the committee what you did differently to experience this recent success?

Ms Thompson: Yes, absolutely. Obviously COVID had a massive impact on our volunteer base, particularly because we are in the health sector, so there were some restrictions that needed to be in place that impacted us. The team have done a great job. We developed a full strategy around volunteering. It is an internal and external strategy. We have really embedded volunteering as core

to our organisation and we understand that without volunteers we will fail to meet our strategy and we will fail to meet our mission. The external marketing has been a really significant push for us: understanding who our volunteers are and what volunteers we need; reimagining the roles so that we are meeting the needs of the volunteers, rather than expecting the volunteers to always be able to meet the organisational needs at the same time; and streamlining some of the onboarding processes.

We always knew that we had a lot more people offering to volunteer but getting them all the way through our compliance process felt—well, we were losing them at that period, so anything that NFPs can do to streamline that process. We certainly have seen a huge success. We have paid volunteer managers. We have two FTE in those roles, and we need more. It is a very time-consuming role because of the connection with the volunteers and the procedures we have to go through. As soon as we succeed in increasing our volunteer numbers, ironically, the knock-on effect is we have to increase our staffing numbers to support them and onboard them properly.

Mr BAILLIE: You mentioned your onboarding process. I guess you have paid closer attention to your onboarding process for optimisation?

Ms Thompson: Yes, absolutely. We tried to step in and set the scene really early. We were finding that the people we were recruiting maybe did not understand what they were volunteering to do so they would go through the process and then drop off when it was not quite meeting their needs. One of the things that we found extremely beneficial was just really early intervention—‘This is exactly what we are looking for. This is exactly the role that you will be fulfilling; does that meet your needs?’ I think as soon as we get past that ‘does that meet your needs’ moment, the volunteers are excited and they can complete the volunteering onboarding. That has made a big difference.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Is there an area of volunteering where you have significant gaps and struggle to recruit or attract into?

Ms Thompson: At the moment, one of our issues is around getting enough volunteers into our hospital-based programs. We think that that is significantly because of the increased compliance that is required for those programs. There are vaccination requirements, there is additional training that is outside of our control that the hospital or the HHS requires to happen so that I think is where we are finding our challenge at the moment. It is a challenge and it has meant that from time to time we have to close some of our programs because we do not have enough volunteers to man them. Inside our houses, we are very fortunate, I think we have the huge benefit of having large bricks and mortar buildings filled with wonderful people so those ones are easier to recruit for. However, there are simple things like car parking access—some very logistical things. Hospital precincts have very expensive car parking and there are costs that we have already spoken about—the \$15.70 that it is costing volunteers before they have even turned up—all of these costs I think are coming into play as well.

ACTING CHAIR: The time allocated for this session has now expired. Thank you for appearing before the committee today and for providing your evidence. If possible, could you see that the responses to those issues you have taken on notice could please be tendered to the secretariat by 5 pm on Friday, 27 June.

Ms Thompson: Absolutely. Thank you so much for your time.

ARMSTRONG, Mr Mark, Chief Officer, State Emergency Service, Queensland Police Service

STREAM, Mr Chris, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Emergency and Disaster Management, Queensland Police Service

WULFF, Mr Tony, Chief Officer, Marine Rescue Queensland, Queensland Police Service

ACTING CHAIR: Welcome. Do you have a short opening statement you would like to make?

Deputy Commissioner Stream: Good morning, Chair, and committee members. I am Acting Deputy Commissioner Chris Stream from the Queensland Police Service. I am currently looking after the disaster and emergency management portfolio. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, the Turrbal and Yagara people, and pay our respect to elders past, present and emerging but also acknowledge all of the mobs Queensland wide who we work together with delivering community safety to the great people of Queensland.

The committee will be aware that this public hearing's purpose is to inquire into the current state of volunteering in Queensland including the value and benefits of volunteers' contributions as well as the experience, barriers, motivations and challenges experienced by individuals and organisations. I have listened with great intent to the earlier evidence today. The committee will also be aware that the Queensland Police Service has a primary role as a law enforcement agency. Just last year the Queensland government enabled the law for the Queensland State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland to transition to the Queensland Police Service—MRQ, Marine Rescue Queensland, as a new entity and the State Emergency Service to transition from the Queensland Fire Department to the Queensland Police Service.

The Queensland volunteering community plays a crucial role in helping the Queensland Police Service and the wider community, helping not only to prepare for but respond to and recover from disasters and critical incidents but also to engage with the community through community safety and education activities. That was very evident in the disaster season which we saw at the start of 2025 which affected all of the areas which you represent. The Queensland Police Service supports several essential volunteer-centric services and programs that build safety, resilience and trust across Queensland.

For over 50 years the State Emergency Service has been a well-respected volunteer-based emergency service preparing for and responding to emergencies impacting on Queenslanders 24 hours a day, every day of the year. As at 30 June 2024, the State Emergency Service had approximately 5,000 volunteers across 76 units and 298 groups in Queensland, currently supported by 194 full-time staff members.

Marine Rescue Queensland was established in July 2024 as a single and integrated Marine Rescue service in Queensland and remains committed to the process of bringing together the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard association, which has 21 flotillas, and the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland, which has 25 units. These organisations have decades' long history of keeping Queenslanders on coastlines and waterways safe through education and water rescue and emergency operations. Prior to joining the Queensland Police Service, if all existing units accept the invitation to transition, Marine Rescue Queensland will have around 2,700 volunteers across 47 rescue units.

The chief officers present with me today are responsible for the strategic and operational functions of their respective entities and for the day-to-day operations and management of volunteers and employees. With the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland each having a long history of volunteering before becoming part of the Queensland Police Service, you are encouraged to address your questions directly to both of those chief officers as you see fit.

For the Queensland Police Service, we oversee a small contingent of volunteers, mainly in Volunteers in Policing, who assist the Queensland Police Service with customer service, community safety and crime prevention and administrative activities through local police stations. There are approximately 200 of these volunteers across the state. Neighbourhood Watch Queensland is a partnership between the Queensland Police Service and the Queensland community to enhance community safety. It encourages communities to join together in small informal groups to improve the safety of their families and other people who live, visit and do business in their neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood Watch Queensland is focused on enhancing home security, reducing the fear of crime and reporting suspicious activity to police. There are approximately 248 Neighbourhood Watch Queensland groups located throughout Queensland.

In relation to the value of volunteers, the benefits of volunteering in Queensland supporting disaster operations are wide reaching. We could not have delivered community safety in terms of response without the volunteers who assisted us in delivering that community safety across those disaster operations through the last disaster season. Some of those recovery operations continue as we appear here today. For the Queensland Police Service's volunteers within Volunteers in Policing and Neighbourhood Watch, their motivation to volunteer comes from wanting to serve the community, engage with community members and help their local community to prevent crime. In closing, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to appear before the committee today. My two colleagues and I welcome any questions.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much, Deputy Commissioner. I acknowledge at the outset that, unlike some of the other presenters here today, you are obviously an employee of the state and governed by your ability or lack thereof to comment on government policy. My question is open to anyone to answer. We have heard today from a number of presenters around the fact that a number of volunteers support a number of organisations and in their mind a central governance type approach would be beneficial. What strategies, if any, have QPS been able to employ, given that you have essentially brought two volunteer organisations in-house, in terms of streamlining a central clearing process and if, in fact, you have been able to do that, is there a standard way that volunteers are onboarded, bearing in mind you are two very distinctly different entities but there would be some elements perhaps similar? Is there any way that you could perhaps provide advice on what the QPS have done to date in that respect?

Deputy Commissioner Stream: We are still working through a central methodology on that, as you have identified already with the two organisations focusing on separate missions, if you like, although brought together under the Queensland Police Service. I might actually hand over to both of the chief officers to answer more specifically with regard to their organisations.

Mr Armstrong: There has been significant work to try to identify synergies between SES and MRQ. Wherever we can standardise processes we have. For example, the blue card application process and criminal history checks are run through the same unit and wherever possible we have similar processes so that there is no difference between them. More broadly, beyond our department we work closely with the Queensland Fire Department and will continue to look for synergies in there. A particular topic of discussion is training and where training is conducted within one agency that it can be applied seamlessly in the other is the goal. That work is ongoing at the moment.

Mr Wulff: From our perspective, with the coming together into QPS we have built efficiencies in our support for volunteers by leveraging the corporate services functions of QPS to support SES and MRQ. We do not have separate corporate services functions in our organisations, we have one, which is QPS, and we support that. All of the paid employees between SES and MRQ are outward facing to support volunteers. To Mark's point, demonstrating the synergies between our organisations, we share our headquarters. Since coming into QPS we now have headquarters in the same building on the same floor which enables that organic support and partnership between our two organisations to develop.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for appearing and thank you for the work that you do. My first question is about Neighbourhood Watch programs. Have you seen a change in the number of programs and the number of volunteers involved in the programs and have you seen any implications from some of the social media type groups that tend to form for community safety rather than engaging with formalised Neighbourhood Watch programs?

Deputy Commissioner Stream: We have certainly seen a change. We are seeing I would not describe it as a proliferation but it is certainly an increase in engaged groups through social media. A simple example of that is via postcode. What the QPS does there is we have a team that closely monitors activity across those sites and attempts to myth bust, if you like, as sometimes the information shared across those is unfortunately inaccurate. We are constantly working to try to steer persons within those groups towards the more formal groups. But to answer, yes, we have seen a change.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question is predominantly to do with the SES, as an ex-volunteer for many years a long time ago. You have recently finished an 18-month strategy, specifically developing productive partnerships and also growing capability and capacity in the organisation. What strategies have you looked at and how can we stop that general decline of the SES? Back in the days when

Pam Parker was the mayor of Logan City she used to call them the orange angels. She tried to promote the SES and create that partnership. How can we stem that decline, bring it back up to a number and get a lot better retention of these volunteers?

Mr Armstrong: Thank you for your service even if it is a few years ago. The 18-month strategy you mentioned was something we put in place soon after transition to provide the initial direction for the organisation post transition. You mentioned two of the particular lines of effort within that.

In terms of overall numbers, pre transition, for the previous five years, there had been a decline in SES volunteer numbers of 14 per cent. I am pleased to say, that as at 31 May we have actually grown slightly in our volunteer numbers this financial year. It is modest—2.8 per cent—but I think that is an indicator that we have arrested the decline and begun a growth phase again, noting there is much work still to do.

On the two lines of effort you mentioned, in relation to productive partnerships a lot of that is our partnership with local government that are a key partner for us. Local government actually provides much of the funding for the SES, notably the provision of facilities and vehicles as well as the expenditure of cash to support operations. They are a key partner. Last year, as you might be aware, the then QPS Deputy Commissioner, the Chief Officer MRQ and I met with each local government to talk about the future of the organisation and the opportunities for keeping the good and looking for the opportunities for improvement. From that series of round tables there were a number of actions and strategies developed. We are following those up at the moment to address where there are specific needs in particular local government areas or more generally. Some of the general ones typically were around the provision of training for our volunteers, how do we recruit and grow and where can we work together between the SES, QPS and local government to develop better service and supports to the community in the area. That is the productive partnerships.

The other side was growing capability and capacity. I think what we want to achieve in the strategy is a close alignment—that the services that we providing are needed and wanted by the community. I think there is some opportunity there where the services that we are providing we need to adjust given growth and changes in demographics and the evolution of other capabilities provided by government. SES has a chance to recalibrate some of what we offer in areas, particularly in rural and remote areas. That is an ongoing piece of work. The 18-month strategy was only a start point. We started to develop a 10-year plan for SES and a key part of that will be working with local government to really understand where those capabilities should be in 10 years time rather than a legacy of a decade ago.

Mr FURNER: Deputy Commissioner, the ViP program in my opinion has been a success. In fact, I will be working with one of them this week: Coffee with a Cop. You were present when the previous witness appeared and I asked about their recommendation 6, seeking a campaign around promoting more volunteers. I would think 200 is probably insufficient to cover off on the focus of crime prevention. Is that an aspect that would benefit the growth in those volunteer numbers?

Deputy Commissioner Stream: Yes, absolutely. Together with our community engagement command we are working towards that. We saw that decline in ViP numbers, not dissimilar to other organisations, through 2019 to 2020-21 in particular, probably for very similar reasons. The average age of our ViP is actually close to 70 years old. Again, through that COVID period there were complications. In terms of working towards a solution to increasing numbers, yes we are. We have a set of guiding principles that we are in the process of finalising, together with a new volunteering strategy. Obviously that had to be modified to include the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland and the broad diversity of volunteers which they see. We are certainly working towards that. You are right, we hope to see the increase. We do see some complications around the difference between, say, urban and more rural areas and part of that is cost-of-living pressures and the costs associated with volunteering.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you all for your service. The change for the SES and MRQ going from fire into police will represent a whole number of challenges for the paid staff. I am just wondering how you have tried to manage the interface between the paid staff and the volunteers and whether that has changed at all or has that largely remained the same over that transition period?

Mr Armstrong: I think broadly with the changes the interactions between the volunteers and the staff has changed very little. We have just under 200 paid staff. That number of paid staff increased somewhat during the uplift, but that relationship stayed the same. What I would say is that during the transition period there was a lot of emphasis put on communications and we have things which we continue today like bi-monthly town halls and increased internal communication to talk about the changes that are happening. Whereas in the QFES environment volunteers might have been

interacting more often with QFES staff, in the new environment they are more often interacting with SES staff as opposed to QPS corporate services, if I can put it that way. That would be the change: the volunteer staff members are largely within SES as a service now.

Mr Wulff: Marine Rescue Queensland only started operationally a year ago so the transition from a volunteer's perspective between the organisations was irrelevant because we did not have any volunteers operational until July this financial year. With regard to our organisation and where that is a little different from a volunteer impact perspective is that we are transitioning 46 independent organisations that have been around for 50 or 60 years in their communities to a supported central state service. The volunteers now have extra support that they have not had before at a state level or a regional level where they used to have to do it all on their own. That is probably the biggest cultural shift for the organisation.

Where we have seen that play out in a way that we did not expect was the state-based team or regional-based teams enabling opportunities for volunteers to see how other organisations in other parts of the state operate and deliver the same Marine Rescue services. We have found that those volunteers are organically bringing those improvements to their own units in different parts of the state. An example of that was we had a volunteer from Currumbin who went to Townsville to support the floods up there. They learned a whole lot about how the service is delivered in Mackay and Gladstone, different to Currumbin, and they organically, between themselves, worked out an improvement program to lift the capability in Currumbin. All we had to do, as a paid team, was enable that connection and then they did the rest to share that best practice around the state.

Mr J KELLY: My question is around Neighbourhood Watch. Unfortunately, the number of groups in my community has shrunk down to just one. We have attempted to get a couple of other groups up and running at times when we have had people who are interested and keen to get things moving. One of the barriers has been the heavy administrative burden that falls on those central committees. Has there been any consideration in the Neighbourhood Watch upper echelons to reducing that burden or allowing a little bit more flexibility? The one remaining group now accepts area coordinators from outside its strict Neighbourhood Watch zone and it has actually picked up quite a lot of people who are interested but they just do not want to run their own show.

Deputy Commissioner Stream: That certainly is an issue where you have that administrative burden in the requirements. We are working towards attempting to improve that, with one group just being created in the last couple of weeks. We are working towards that. As an organisation we are required to conduct those checks and have those balances continued on and some of those administrative activities carried out by those volunteers. We are trying to work through having the Queensland Police Service support some of those activities and increase our capacity in those areas to support that, but it is still something we are working through.

Mr J KELLY: I think the challenge is if you look at the traditional Neighbourhood Watch model it is about 10 to 20 blocks and it is often hard to find enough volunteers even in a densely populated area like ours.

Deputy Commissioner Stream: Yes, and to go to the member's earlier point, often people are looking for convenience. If they can be part of a postcode membership and receive advice or information they are often more attracted to that. Again, it is probably not dissimilar to some of the other evidence that was provided, people's time is quite precious now. That is something that we are looking at.

ACTING CHAIR: I thank all the members present for allowing us to run over time slightly. I think it was important that everybody had an opportunity to ask questions. The time allocated for this session has expired. Thank you for appearing before the committee today and providing your evidence. That concludes this hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today, both in person and online. Thank you to our Hansard reporters and secretariat staff. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. A reminder to all who may have taken questions on notice that your responses will be required by the secretariat by 5 pm on Friday, 27 June so that we can include them in this committee's deliberations. I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.35 am.