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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

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

Staff present:

Ms K Guthrie—Acting Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

ROUND TABLE—INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

(Private)

Monday, 4 August 2025

Gold Coast

MONDAY, 4 AUGUST 2025

The committee met in private at 1.08 pm.

BAIN, Mr Brett, Group Officer, Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade Group

BICKERSTAFFE, Ms Zoe, SLSQ General Manager Membership, Surf Life Saving Queensland

COOPER, Mr Brad, Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering Gold Coast

DUTHIE, Ms Rhee, Sector Engagement and Development Manager, Volunteering Queensland

HEDGER, Ms Jane, Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering Queensland

JAMIESON, Ms Tanya, Administration Officer, Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade

PHILLIPS, Ms Kirsten SLSQ Membership State Officer, Surf Life Saving Queensland

SIVALINGUM, Mr Collin, Queensland Director, Red Cross

WATSON, Mr Ben, First Officer, Ormeau Rural Fire Brigade

CHAIR: Thank you, everybody, for your appearance here today. To those we have met before and those who are new to us, the work of this volunteering inquiry in Queensland I think we all knew in our heads to be important when we embarked on this process, but the sheer scale of engagement—the number of submissions we have and the generosity of organisations and individuals who came before us to share their stories and talk about their vision for how to improve volunteering in Queensland—has been fantastic. I am quite certain I speak for all members of the committee in saying that it has been a wonderful experience for each of us. Unfortunately, I had about two months off because of a back injury. I was ably replaced by the member for Gregory, but I can say that getting around Queensland has shown how much everything is different but how much it is the same.

This is a very informal gathering, but we are having a transcript made for the record, and that will assist us, I am sure, in remembering all of the good points that come up. I will throw to the deputy chair, Margie Nightingale, as a constant on this committee for the last 12 months or so, and ask if you can, perhaps on the opposition, say a few words about how we have been going in our inquiry so far and what you have experienced.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, everybody, for coming in today. The idea of this round table really came about because we had seen some fairly consistent themes and suggestions coming up across Queensland, albeit there are some minor tweaks here and there and some ideas that maybe would be beneficial in some areas and a little bit more difficult to enact in others.

We wanted an opportunity to unpack some of those key ideas that seem to be coming through in terms of what some key stakeholders think about them and of their knowledge and experience in being able to contribute their perspectives on some of those key themes. It gives the committee a broader chance to unpack and understand the applicability of some of those top ideas that we have heard or the common themes. It seems to be that themes have been centred around some of the key areas that you all have pretty much included in your submissions, so the ideas will not necessarily be new to you, but it is just an idea not only for us to ask questions but also for you to engage with one another in this discussion so that you might be able to pick up some ideas or share some points of relevance that we, as a committee, may not have come across or have flagged in our brief opportunities to question some of our key stakeholders.

CHAIR: Do any of our stakeholders have anything in particular they would like to lead off with? There is no need to be backwards in coming forward.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: To help, Chair, with the flow, perhaps I could go over some of the top topics that we have identified through the submissions and our inquiry. Would that be helpful?

CHAIR: Your witness.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: The top one was about reducing the administrative demands, costs and legislative requirements. That is that bureaucracy and administration piece. We have had a lot of different ideas and different thoughts, but they are some of the key common ones. That is not only about costs but also about whether they be legislative requirements and those sorts of things.

The next one was about streamlining recruitment, vetting and training, so whether there is the centralised onboarding and what that might look like and where that would and would not work. Training, governance, digital support—those sorts of things—fall under that category, as well as the constraints that we have heard a lot about on blue cards. That will pretty much come under that category.

Then there is promoting a culture of volunteering. How do we go about engaging and promoting volunteering and maintaining that culture? That may be some kind of public campaign. Then there is the support for volunteer management and coordination. That might be in terms of funding volunteer coordinators or ways to enhance the volunteer experience so that volunteers feel supported and, therefore, likely to continue to engage as a volunteer.

Then, of course, there is the regional and remote piece about improving the volunteering infrastructure that we know is quite needed in the regions and remotely. That is about how to engage with local government organisations and community organisations to work on that piece. If there is anyone whose interest was sparked with any of those things, it would be great to start a discussion.

Mr Sivalingum: One of the key things that we see coming through is the sole issue of spontaneous volunteers and more specifically corporate volunteering. As part of our discussions with a lot of our corporate partners, there is a significant interest in corporate volunteering and spontaneous volunteering where we have seen there is not an interest for volunteers to be as traditional volunteers where they are stuck with the same organisation and, as such, it could be a generational thing. They want an association with a specific brand, like the SES or Red Cross or Surf Lifesaving or anything of that sort, but they want to volunteer their time—they want to come in, do the piece of work and go—or they want to volunteer to an organisation that aligns to their values, whatever that may be.

The reason I say that is: we just went through a massive volunteer recruitment campaign and we looked at the number of volunteers who come in and then the ones who fall off. We tried to track back to the end of the scale, both with training and them ready to be deployed—where were the different areas? There was a very big interest in the end and at the beginning when they come in. There is no shortage of interest when people are trying to recruit. They are definitely coming to the website—they are definitely interested—but not many people actually come out on the other end, so the percentage drops drastically. We have researched that and asked a lot of questions.

Some of the key things that came out are that it is really hard to become a volunteer. The feedback was that it seems even harder than becoming a staff member or a paid member—the way we recruit and train and onboard, and the administration around it—and most people are very time poor to go through it. The interest was there, but just to come out on the other end, somehow they fell away when we put them through the regulatory requirements and then the interview process. That is all for important reasons: they are part of the organisation, so you have to go through that robust process. However, I think there is opportunity to look at this in a non-traditional way in terms of volunteering, especially in the area of spontaneous volunteers or corporate volunteers with corporates to give people time to go in and do things. We got some good evidence.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Let's unpack that a little bit.

CHAIR: What does Surf Life Saving Queensland think of that? Does that ring a bell?

Ms Phillips: Yes, 100 per cent. It is a challenge. It is twofold. It is the administrative burden. They do not even make it past the administrative part of it: 'I have to sign up to this, then I have to go and get a blue card, and then I have to go and do this.' That deters people. Then you have the added element. Once you get them through that, you have to onboard them in terms of all of the other things they have to be aware of and be able to do before you can put them out there in a volunteering capacity.

We are trying to take a different approach now. The perception was that you had to be a bronze medallion holder. That was the ultimate in terms of being a surf lifesaver—a 40-hour course, being able to swim this distance and all of that sort of thing. We have taken a big step back in the last 18

months. We are taking a softly-softly approach and going, 'There's a role for everyone in lifesaving. You don't have to have feet in the sand. You don't have to be an ironman to save people.' We are having a lot of success with our recruitment in taking that step back and going, 'You don't have to be this and jump through all these hoops. We are going to ease you into your volunteering experience.' That has been very successful for us.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: One strategy is easing people in rather than expecting them to have everything at the beginning.

Ms Phillips: I am not speaking for Collin, but spontaneous volunteers would be like that. It would be like, 'I want to come and do this.' They have a foot in the door then. If you can make that really easy, you can then start to convert them to, 'You could also do this,' or 'Get involved more often.' It is having that touchpoint and then making that touchpoint really easy so that you can start easing them into other things.

Mr HEALY: Kirstin, just so I have this right, I did my bronze medallion and did a radio operators ticket. You are saying that, instead of somebody having to do a run-swim-run or any of those other criteria, they could get a radio operators certificate and sit in the tower?

Ms Phillips: And they are a patrolling member, absolutely.

Mr HEALY: So you are breaking down the existing roles within a patrol.

Ms Phillips: Yes.

Mr HEALY: So 'that is your job and you do just that job'. That gives you the flexibility to be able to do that?

Ms Phillips: Yes, because people want flexibility in what they do and accessibility in participating in the organisation. We were like, 'How can we break this down to make it as easy as possible for people to volunteer?'

Ms Bickerstaffe: Speaking to Collin's point about spontaneous volunteering, my team look after the recruitment campaign that we are running at the minute. It is not just breaking down those roles; it is breaking down the amount of time required so that you are not on the beach every weekend. We have broken it down to just five hours a month. The influx of people interested in that has been fantastic: 'I want to help but I can't give you all my time.' Two of the age groups that have really responded have been youth and the over-60s.

Ms PEASE: Collin, you talked about corporate volunteering. With the corporate volunteering, they do not have to go through the amount of administration for their volunteers when it comes to onboarding because they come as part of that organisation; is that correct?

Mr Sivalingum: Yes. It depends on the corporation. We have a lot of corporations where part of their responsibility is to give staff three or four days and say, 'We will pay you for it but go and volunteer somewhere.'

Ms PEASE: You do not need those volunteers to have blue cards?

Mr Sivalingum: It depends on the role. If it is frontline work, often there is a requirement to have a working with children check, a blue card and so forth. We normally accept them to do a lot of the back-end functions. There are a lot of back-end functions, like any other organisation. A couple of volunteers come in for that. Sometimes it could be a working bee day. They come together with support around it. If it does not require a working with children check, a blue card and things like that, there is a code of conduct they have to do very quickly. We allowed that to happen because we saw a good conversion rate. They come in, they get a taste of a part of the organisation and say, 'Now we would like to become a fully-fledged volunteer.' We get approached by people based on their experience, so there has been a shift on that. If you call for volunteering correctly, we do not put them through massive rigour.

Ms PEASE: I think Jane was going to say something on that, too.

Ms Hedger: With the corporate volunteering, there are two types. You have corporations that say to their staff, 'We will give you two days a year to go and volunteer. You just go and volunteer.' The staff organise that themselves. They volunteer with their local charity and go through whatever process is required by that local charity. Then there is corporate group volunteering. We have a program that does that. It is a labour-intensive program because you have to go to a small organisation and say, 'You're going to have 15 senior executives from Rio Tinto coming in to do

packing today.' We have to have meaningful things for them. We have to have clear instructions. They have to be supervised. We do the catering and all of that. That is a lot of work for a small not-for-profit, so as part of that we give them some money. We pay their supervisor for the day to supervise the group and all the rest of it. There is some effort in that.

I want to circle back around to recruiting volunteers and spontaneous volunteers. Volunteering is going to have to change because the needs of our population are changing. Young people do not want to volunteer every Thursday afternoon. They want to do things in groups. They want to see the change they are making. They want to do something for four hours on a Saturday morning, they want to get a free coffee and they want to see they have planted 100 trees and off they go. For small organisations that do not have the resources that our larger organisations have, it is really difficult. They have to upskill in that. They have to have the time to create new programs. They have to think about it. They have to supervise people differently.

That is the piece that we have: the sector has to change. It knows it has to change. Everybody is struggling, but nobody has the money because everybody sees that volunteering is free and therefore we put no money into it. That, I think, is the piece. We know we have to change but we have to be able to support these smaller organisations to do it. That is probably where our volunteer linking and resourcing hubs idea came in. We need resources in place in communities to help local organisations do this. It is a massive transformational change for organisations about how they now design, recruit, retain and reward volunteers.

Mr Watson: To add to that in terms of speaking from a rural fire sense—I also work in corporate land, so I understand the corporate sponsorship and volunteering as well—we live in a different world. The spontaneous and corporate volunteering just does not help us. There is more technical training. There is longer term training. There is high risk. We go through a longer term process to get those people in. We try to keep them. We try to get them through the blue card process.

I like the idea that was mentioned earlier about having a separate process for different types of roles. Where we come unstuck with the Rural Fire Service is that it is either you do a blue card or you are not allowed to join. That is a real block because we have some support roles and some non-children roles that may be performed, but it was forced on us roughly two to three years back, or maybe further, that we needed to have a blue card. There was a big uproar at the time. It has affected our volunteer numbers. I do not think that onboarding process is the correct one.

Through a Rural Fire Service lens, our organisation is not prepared to continue to support the volunteers in terms of longevity. I have been a first officer for eight years. I have not received any specific training for my role. If you are elected or made a senior person in a rural fire brigade or a group, you are expected to bring along a lot of that knowledge. There is not enough training from the service to support you. A lot of those people who hold those more senior roles have to have a corporate or managerial background outside the service. If you do not, you will struggle a lot. We have a lot of brigades that do not have that experience. They do not understand how to manage people. They do not know how to manage finances and just the general running of the brigade. That really affects the organisations from the bottom, at the grassroots level, right up. We are really struggling in that sense. It is something that we need to work on and change.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: We have covered off two issues. One is the idea that blue card requirements could be modified so that it is only essential if the role you undertake within that organisation will require you to either work with children or be in a position where you would meet that need. Is there anyone here who sees that having that flexibility would be a problem?

Mr Cooper: I think there is actually a stronger statement to be made. If we adopt a principle here that we should not inflict upon volunteers anything which is unnecessary then that clears the table for saying, 'This is a risk assessed role and therefore it has these requirements, but as a principle we do not inflict anything upon it which has no value and no relevance to the role.'

Mr HEALY: That is a true statement because what I am seeing is the diversification of what is provided. It is such a diversified area. You have Surf Life Saving, who can basically fragment a core component of what they are delivering into sections, which makes it more attractive, so that is appealing. In different areas it is totally different. You are right. You could say that, but someone in this government has to sit down and start saying, 'How do we put that into legislation?' if legislation even comes out of this.

It is really challenging and would have to be done in stages. You have to understand the beast we are dealing with before we can start. If everybody is saying, 'This is what we need,' our job is to go, 'There are a whole lot of different things here.' What a small organisation has is going to be very

different to what Collin has. It is the same for being well established. From what I am hearing I am thinking, 'Wow.' I think you right: we need a fundamental statement—make it more efficient and make it a lot better—but somewhere in that we need to drill down.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: You have to have criteria.

Mr HEALY: That is where you need to help us. Does that make sense?

Mr Cooper: In day-to-day operations, Volunteering Gold Coast works with a number of different funded programs. You heard this morning about the Commonwealth Home Support Program. We also work in the NDIS space. NDIS is a great model to pick up and replicate because every role that we have in the organisation, volunteer or paid, has to be risk assessed and that determines the right level of probity that gets attached to them. That is how we get to shape and make sure that we are not asking something of someone because we are overly cautious. As an organisation we have to have done the exercise around risk assessment.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That leads us back to the second issue there which is around governance and administration. We already see that volunteer organisations are burdened with too much of that and with them being told that they need to risk assess every position they would need significant support around that systemic change. How do we change so that there is the governance support in place for these organisations? Does anybody have any ideas or suggestions around what that might look like?

Ms Duthie: There is a bit of a model, in some ways, which is what used to be the Community Visitors Scheme, which is now the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme—an acronym. Effectively what is happening is if we are really wanting to re-imagine volunteering, we have to firstly actually understand that even the terminology 'spontaneous volunteer' does not ring true so much anymore because it means different things to RFS, it means different things to ARC, it means different things to a tiny organisation who thinks 'spontaneous volunteer' is just for emergency.

Mr HEALY: Yes, totally.

Ms Duthie: The decline has occurred because people want to volunteer in the different ways that you have all just described, especially young people. I speak with a lot of VIOs across the state and they say, 'How can you help us get more youth volunteers?' I say, 'What are you doing now?' They say, 'We put ads out. We got this lovely young lady who came along and said she wanted to be a member.' This was in Maleny. They said, 'But she never turned up again.' I said, 'Did you ask her what she actually wanted to do when she came along to help you and to be part of this, what motivated her, what was her cause?' They said, 'Oh, she was really good at marketing.' I said, 'Oh, perhaps she just wanted to help with that event.' They were like, 'Oh!' So they went back to her and said, 'Would you like to help us with that marketing event?' She was on board for the whole thing. After that she left, but she continued to stay in touch with them, but did not want to be a member that came every week to the lovely little cups of tea that they held. She did not have time because she worked full-time, was a mum, had a farming husband et cetera. So, the whole conversation about what spontaneous volunteering is needs to be re-examined.

I am in touch with, for example, 35 of the 77 LGAs around the state. They are all ringing us saying, 'What do we do? How do we do this spontaneous volunteering thing? These are some of the restrictions we have at LGAs.' I even had inquiries from six New South Wales LGAs because their reconstruction authority has just funded a whole lot of spontaneous volunteering activities. It is wonderful that they have some money, but they are not even really sure what spontaneous volunteering is.

Then in terms of a program like CVS, which I used to manage when I was with the Australian Red Cross, we had really clear boundaries about what our volunteers could do. People knew when they came in clearly what they would do, what they would not do and what was required of them. If they could not meet those, we would look for other options for them. We had check-in, check-out safety and risk management. These people are going out to various places that could be out the back of Queensland, and we needed to know they were safe coming in and coming off shifts when they visited. So, there is a bit of a foundation. They have just renovated their whole program so that it is more impactful and effective. There could be some grounds in that program.

That speaks to the fact that most organisations like yourself and many of us around the table, started maybe as a volunteer organisation, about having taken on, out of necessity usually, all the service delivery, and then we are governed by all of the quality standards that apply to each of those industries—disability, housing or whatever. An organisation that is trying to keep themselves together then goes, 'Well, I have to meet this master and I have to meet this master,' so everybody has to

meet that standard, when in fact the volunteers should not have to meet the standard for the thing that they are not actually delivering, even though sometimes the quality standards or the legislative expectations on the organisation is pressuring them that everyone has a blanket rule.

I recently worked in an organisation at another peak body and they had an aged-care arm. I was not dealing with older people at all in any respect, but because I was a staff member that had an aged-care facility, I had to have a blue card. We have just run a myth-busters session with our volunteer leaders' network where we got Blue Card Services to come in and myth-bust any of those weird questions, and they offered to answer anyone's particular questions afterwards, and it was so insightful. People were saying, 'Why are we doing all these things when we actually do not have to?' Blue Card Services was really reassuring about all of that.

Mr BAILLIE: I think what we are hearing around the room and what we hear around the state is that an element of the issue is attracting the volunteers to want to participate, but we also hear that there are lots of people that come to volunteer but then are put off by the onboarding process and how cumbersome it is. If we run quickly around the room, of the people that do come forward to volunteer, how many would you estimate are lost, percentage-wise; they are starting the onboarding process and they say, 'Too hard'?

Mr Bain: I will speak to the Rural Fire Service side of things. Particularly on the Gold Coast, for example, where we do have that larger population and so forth, we can often recruit some quite large numbers. Retaining them, as you say, is where the issue is. From the onboarding part of that, we have some quite convoluted processes in place where, for someone to become a member of the brigade, they fill out their application form and that includes their permissions to have blue card checks and all those sort of things done. Just getting that paperwork from them to where the actual processing gets done can take a week or two weeks. That paperwork goes to an area office, and if it is emailed, it has to be printed out by the admin officer. It then goes and gets sat on the area manager's desk. All he does is picks it up, looks at it, signs it and passes it back again. His signature on that is of no value whatsoever. There is no need for him to even handle that paperwork. Then that process repeats itself again at the district level. It goes to the district office and the district office pulls it out of the envelope, signs it, sticks it in the envelope and passes it on. They do not know those people. There is no purpose to them doing that, yet we have this convoluted process that could be done online in a day if the investment was made into that system to do it online.

That is replicated across a lot of things in the Fire Service. We generate this bureaucracy and these processes that are far more complicated than what they need to be. That is a time issue. That is before it even gets to processing where it can then be there for another four, six, eight weeks or more sometimes, depending on how long it takes for police checks and things to be done for the blue cards. Sometimes those checks are getting drawn out due to lack of services available to do that. That is outside our control completely. It is another organisation doing those checks that because their staff are on leave or there are vacancies or they are short-staffed or whatever excuses we get that month, there are all these delays on delays on delays for this convoluted process.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: How many people do you lose as a result of those delays, would you say?

Mr Bain: You would lose a few. We generally try to keep them involved, even though they are waiting on those processes. Say in a larger brigade on the coast, you might get 10, 15 people volunteer that year. By the time they get through the process, get through their basic training, you are probably down to half. Within two to three years you probably get one or two out of that who will actually become solid, long-term members.

Mr Watson: Around 80 per cent is what I am seeing at my brigade.

Mr Bain: Would drop off, yes.

Mr Watson: Two years—80 per cent, I would say.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That is massive.

Mr BAILLIE: I understand it is quite an involved process and the onboarding process, by the sound of it, is still very manual. We have heard today from members of our public hearing that they have some processes that are largely online and streamlined which take a lot less time. If that onboarding service was provided by a third party, would that be something that the RFQ would be happy to accept? If a third party, let's say, was to do that onboarding process and say, 'Here is one we have onboarded. We have the blue card. We have all these requirements,' which you would set, all done for you, and now you just have to deliver the training, for example, is that something you think could work or do you need more input through the onboarding process?

Mr Bain: It would probably work, providing it is properly supported. It is the same as our system would work if it is properly supported. Particularly, the blue card, the criminal checks and so forth involves a third party, and often that is where it is falling down—that third party not having the resources because they are doing more than just the fire service; they are doing all the other services and organisations. It all comes back to resourcing.

Ms Hedger: That is the hard part. To get through all of that you have to have the resources, and that is a lot of resources then to spend if you have an 80 per cent drop-out rate. We have had this database for the last 15-odd years—the EV CREW army database. Essentially we hold that data for the government around spontaneous volunteers for both disaster and then for large community efforts which is the Care Army. However, the government had given us quite stringent parameters around what we could contact those people for and how we could engage with them. I have recently gone back to them and we have renegotiated that to give us much more freedom to be able to do something with it. We are now talking with the government and with a private provider about whether that might be something we could do—to take that database that has already got 75,000 to 80,000 people on it and then what we do with them is that in normal times when there is not a disaster or there is any great need, they register, they give us all the details, they go through that all that process, give us their certifications, we plug it all in, and then when there is a disaster or a need in their local government area, we can email or SMS out to those people who are pre-registered and there is your first tier of people to volunteer for that disaster.

We are looking now at whether we can federate that more broadly across the state to say that anybody who wants to volunteer could register there and we are pie-in-the-sky dreaming that the government will come up with the insurance and go, 'Right, you register with us. You get a Queensland volunteer number.' Once you have that volunteer number, you are covered for insurance. An organisation can call and check with us. 'You have a volunteer number?' 'Yes.' Right, they know that person is insured.

If you extrapolate that out, we can look at a system. Brad has this great onboarding system. I know other people have things. Let us look at what the best practice is around and see if we can do a whole heap of onboarding with them at the time they say, 'Hey, I am interested in volunteering.' They sign up. They do that basic onboarding. We know whether they have a blue card or a certificate. Then anybody around the state who wants to use that volunteer, all they have to do is orient them to the volunteering role they are going to do in their organisation because all of that other stuff has been done beforehand. We are looking at whether something like that might be able to solve some of these problems so they are not dropping out during that process as once they get to the organisation, it is a fairly streamlined, quick process of engaging with the organisation.

I put it out there to say this is something we are working on with the government and a private provider to see what can be done, given we already have a large database and we have a number of other organisations wanting to come in to that. We also now can actually push messages out to them, do some volunteer education and training with them to keep them engaged and to keep them interested and to talk to them about the sorts of volunteering that might be available, but also to give volunteer organisations some intel about who is out there and what sort of opportunities they are looking for so they can start to tailor some of their opportunities to meet those needs.

Mr Sivalingum: My comment on that is we tested the EV CREW system during Cyclone Alfred and we really wanted to get in and target a specific region—a certain course. Based on the EV CREW database, it was more of a targeted approach. All we did was said to Rhee, 'Send a blast out to this cohort of people.' It was very specific; we knew what we were looking for. The database got all the front breakdown and it helped us be more targeted. We had some good success with that process where selective volunteers already had themselves registered, knowing that this is the area they wanted to work in. Some people do not want to work outside Queensland, for example, doing only local areas. We knew those who did not have working with children checks, did not have police checks, so we could target according to our needs. It was a good test, it was on the fly, but it worked really well, and we saw the benefits.

Coming back to the question you are asked, we actually saw the drop-off rate was on the 40 per cent side—just up to 40 per cent was the drop-out rate—and we managed to get it down to 30 per cent. The only reason the drop-out rate reduced is because we had reduced the front end that you are talking about. The front end was just too much. We called the people back and asked them why. They said, 'It is just too much.'

So it was a combination of face-to-face training, online training and all the probity they have to do right. We reduced that to what is the minimum requirements legislation wise and you can do minimum service. The rest you do is part of engagement and you have six months to do it. Obviously Gold Coast

we had to go through a culture piece because I think a lot of us are wedded to our systems and trying to change processes in the volunteering sector is very hard. We had to reduce that at the front end, but that proved to be very beneficial. I would say if you can reduce the front end and still maintain them, but give them a period of time once they are engaged, I think we will see benefits.

Mr BAILLIE: Collin, can you quantify how much you reduced that front end, the first contact hours?

Mr Sivalingum: Initially it was 16 hours. I brought it down to nine hours. That is just at the beginning. That was all the online hours. I switched the face-to-face training to virtual. You still had somebody you could actually speak to, but it was virtual training in psychological first aid, for example. They are definitely good to go. They have had all the probity checks. They received the psychological first aid training. Then they had the option to do a face-to-face, classroom-based session and role-play exercise over the next six months. We did not hold them back. They got a Red Cross shirt. They were good to go, so there has been a big shift. Reducing the online module from 16 hours to just over nine hours made a huge difference.

Ms Hedger: With the spontaneous disaster volunteers that we manage for EV CREW, which is for one-off volunteering in their local community, we get them to watch a four-minute intro video about disaster volunteering. That is all the onboarding they have.

Ms Duthie: That is because we are in a coordination role, not an on-the-ground role.

Ms Hedger: When they are on the ground they will have a bit of an intro to their shift.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Perhaps, or they will just turn up at a sandbag depot and fill sandbags not knowing that they are attached to anything or anybody—that is the majority of what I see. They will just turn up at someone's house with a broom and sweep out the mud because they are a neighbour and they are just walking down the street and helping. It is really good that we have identified it. Doing this, we have identified some key things, and one of them is reducing that.

What we need to try to nut out today is some suggestions around 'how' rather than 'what'. We know a lot of the shared problems. We have all articulated them. We have read about them in all of your submissions. The question is: what are the solutions to those previously identified issues? Looking at the solutions will probably be most valuable for us. We know the consistent problems. What are the solutions?

We have heard about reducing the role requirement and specifying the role requirement criteria for different kinds of checks—blue cards or whatever. That is one thing. Also we should be aware of what flexibility there is already within the existing systems, and education is needed around that.

If we look at recruiting, the best way to go about recruiting is by being flexible and offering whatever that spontaneous volunteering looks like. That then brings it to how do we then support organisations to adapt their model so they can cater for the spontaneous and know how to promote that? In terms of some of the other things, like volunteering hubs, I am keen to explore what that might look like and whether they all require a paid volunteer coordinator. What might that look like?

Ms Hedger: Brad, you are almost one of those already.

Mr Cooper: With regard to the make-up of the hubs and having paid staff versus volunteer staff, I think most organisations make a good fist of leaning on volunteers. It needs paid staff when there is someone who can lead a service—such as a managerial-type role, which I would suggest is probably at a SCHADS level 6. I think there are two other roles that sit in there as core paid roles: one which looks after volunteers in terms of that volunteer recruitment experience and the other which looks after volunteer-involving organisations and building their capability. I think that is the core, assuming that people have access to all of those other organisational supports that deal with marketing, risk and the like. They would be the roles that I would put into that space. I imagine that, as organisations grow in terms of their capability, you would want to scale up the reward for impact, the service to the community and delivering services that are of value because then you can have access to more resources to have a greater impact again.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: How would they be funded?

Mr Cooper: It is a really vexed question. The heart of the matter is the benefit goes to community—and here on the Gold Coast you can say this is a Gold Coast community—but I think the broadest benefit comes back to the state. I think it is too high for the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth have expressed an interest in working with certain marginalised groups of the population, but they do not touch the masses in terms of the community. I say that Queensland benefits because you have things like community cohesion, social capital building, social bonding and safety integration. There are a lot of benefits for our community that come through the act of volunteering and volunteer organisations through the services they deliver.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It may also reduce the need for individuals to access government support sometimes, like health, because they have been supported at a community level.

Mr Cooper: Exactly. We tell a funny story in Volunteering Gold Coast about our volunteer drivers. It is really clear that, if it were not for the act of volunteering, many of our volunteer drivers would be in the back of the bus using the service to go from A to B. There is a huge protective wellbeing factor that comes out of the gift of volunteering. I think we are often focused on the service element as opposed to that dual benefit and dual delivery.

Mr BAILLIE: Surf Life Saving Queensland operates right across the state. How do you manage the regional hubs compared with the bigger centres?

Ms Phillips: Within Surf Life Saving, we have our own regional hubs. We have six branches across the state, and we have regional staff based in each of those branches to service those clubs. That is how we have to operate because we have a lot of volunteers—37,000 volunteers—across the state. We have to have that regional staffing. They definitely feel it in terms of the administrative burden, which we have all spoken about.

Something that we see a lot of within Surf Life Saving, which could help across a lot of volunteering organisations, is we are all trying to unpack the same challenges. There are a lot of organisations doing certain things with their volunteers really well. I always call them successful practices, not best practices, because it is different for every organisation. As a volunteering community—and this is where the hubs could play into this as well—we need to connect on that more. A lot of these organisations are trying to solve the same issues. How do you welcome volunteers? How do you create a positive experience? How do you value and recognise them? There are key themes that come up, and we probably do not work as a cohort well enough or do not have the opportunity to work as a system well enough to bring that together.

Research is a big one. As a larger organisation, we are lucky enough to be able to fund research. We have just done onboarding research. We have done qualitative research about a volunteer's experience from recruitment right through to the end of their first year with Surf Life Saving. It is Surf Life Saving-specific, but it does not have to be. I am thinking how do we match that up with what Collin is doing in Red Cross and with what other organisations are doing? I am here 100 per cent as a volunteer. As part of my work, I was at the disaster management conference the other week. There were a heap of PhD student speakers there talking about volunteering and fresh learnings that are being made. How are we capturing that learning and sharing it across the system so we are getting that uplift across all the organisations?

We do a member satisfaction survey nationally every two years. The data we get from that about volunteer burnout, barriers and expectations is not just beneficial for us; it is beneficial everywhere. So do we create that context? Maybe it is through the regional hubs, but I think it is also a wider community practice that is brought together around volunteering research and successful practices. Then we can bring organisations on that journey so they can hear those case studies and be part of that lived experience, and then they can implement it in their organisation. I think that is a big gap for us. Maybe it sits under that culture of volunteering, but I did not really see that in these outcomes.

Mr BAILLIE: When we talk about supporting volunteer organisations, though, I think you are right that some of that can be working out what resources government can provide at a higher level which every volunteer organisation can plug into and enjoy the benefits of. We have discussed it across the state when we have looked at the executive roles in a volunteer organisation in terms of trying to build their roles and responsibilities. There could be training modules for things they need to be aware of. A lot of the bottom-tier organisations sound like they are embarking upon a quest that has never been done before, but we could have resources available if someone wants to set up a volunteer organisation.

Ms Phillips: I do not think government has to provide those resources. I think it is more government providing the platform or the opportunity for those organisations to connect. Successful practices will change over time. We saw a huge change in the volunteering dynamic after COVID. It will continue to change over time, and the best thing you can do is connect organisations so they can explore those successful s effectively.

Ms PEASE: One of the things that I would like to say is connecting organisations is a really important piece to this discussion. I know Jane was talking about some work that Volunteering Queensland are doing with the government, which I am not particularly aware of. As we have said, what we are hearing is that everyone is experiencing the same problem. The reality is that we have slim pickings. We only have one audience and we are all trying to pick over the bones, saying, 'We

need volunteers in this space.' You are competing against each other for those volunteers. How does that look if Jane's idea comes to fruition and that is where you go? How do you as an organisation cope with giving that over to another organisation when you are so used to doing the recruiting?

Mr BAILLIE: It is competitive as well.

Ms PEASE: What I am trying to say is you are relinquishing something that is so valuable to you. How would that go?

Ms Hedger: Just to be clear: we are not looking to do the recruitment. What we are saying is, once you have recruited people, we want to take that onboarding or administrative burden away by saying, 'If people are already registered, that's done.' We are not doing the recruitment et cetera.

Ms PEASE: I understand that. I am just putting it out there and saying that those organisations like the Red Cross, Vinnies or Meals on Wheels—whichever it is—which do some recruiting, they are still relinquishing that data. They are still handing over that volunteer to someone else with the potential of losing them. Would that happen? Would that be possible? I do not know.

Ms Duthie: What you have raised is a really good point. We have recently done a full data cleanse of our pool. The way we see it at the moment is the volunteers we have under our legal contractual arrangement of EV Crew and Care Army, for example, are like our talent pool. Collin could come to us and say, 'We're looking for people.' We do not hold all their data—it is your data, your choice. We hold a minimal amount of data, but people can join us. Whole organisations want to bring their whole groups. They want to join and get into the register so they are sitting there and waiting, I guess, for things like the Olympics. We can say, 'We have this many people who have already been through lots of checks. They are just sitting on our register.' Sometimes an activation is required in a disaster.

Ms PEASE: They would have come to you directly. My point is that if they have come from Surf Life Saving on the Gold Coast—

Ms Duthie: No. They want to come in groups. They are just waiting for us to say, 'Come on.' They are keen to put groups of their people on the register as well as keep them for themselves.

Ms PEASE: That is not the point that I am trying to make. I understand what you are saying. I am just asking the other groups about whether they are concerned about relinquishing their gold.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: What I am picking up from Joan is that if you have one little community group who then says, 'I've just recruited 10 people,' they go through the onboarding and then they become part of a general database, is it likely that they could be poached by another community organisation who happens to contact them and say, 'Hey, I'm looking for 10 people with this skill set'? It is about poaching volunteers. How would that be managed?

Mr Sivalingum: That is happening organically at the moment—100 per cent it is happening. We lose volunteers or we gain volunteers because they join a specific agency thinking this is what it is about and then they realise it is different or they did not have a good experience, so they say, 'Stuff you. I'm going to go to another agency.' From a sector professional perspective, losing volunteers to other agencies is not a bad thing. It is good. I think it is fantastic.

Ms PEASE: My point of throwing that in is that I am a politician—I am an elected official—and I get people walking into my office all the time with problems and that is exactly one of them. I am just playing devil's advocate.

Mr Sivalingum: Yes, go for it.

Ms PEASE: In terms of onboarding, I have volunteered for Meals on Wheels, Parkrun and Vinnies. Vinnies and Meals on Wheels are so time consuming and not so much with Vinnies but with Meals on Wheels you are constantly having to do more and more training, so I just do not bother volunteering anymore because I do not have time to do that. There would be lots of other people who would not have the time, whereas Parkrun is completely different. It was easy—click and that is it, done.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You literally have two situations here. You have your professional response volunteers such as the rural fire brigades and the SES.

Ms PEASE: And Volunteer Marine Rescue.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Yes, individuals who require a certain degree of training. The other aspect is that every time we have a disaster it always brings out the community. It always encourages people to participate. I understand what the rural fire brigades are talking about with the bureaucracy and all the onboarding processes. Being a former SES member myself, I know all the rigmarole you have to

go through, but how do we keep those people still interested long after the disaster is over? I am still trying to get my head around that. How can we get those people to stay? How can we keep them interested?

Mr Bain: The organisation has to be attractive to them. For the volunteer brigades—and Ben touched on this before—there is no training or support to be a first officer to run a brigade. You learn to be a firefighter and, if you hang around long enough and show some leadership skills, you will get elected to a leadership position. There is not a great deal of support. The same goes when we are trying to recruit or attract people. There is no training on how to recruit people or how to attract the public. The service itself which should be driving that might do a little bit of social media engagement once in a blue moon but that is about it. There is very little support there as well.

They have all the processing side of things after the person puts their hand up and comes to us but in terms of getting people to put their hand up there is very little support for the brigades in how they do that. Some brigades do it really well. Tanya's brigade has a recruitment campaign once a year that they do. Again, it is heavily reliant on social media. There was comment before about being able to provide resources in terms of how to recruit. If there were hubs that we could go to and say, 'Can you run a training session for our first officers to come to on how to recruit,' that sort of support would be valuable.

Ms Hedger: We have all of that. We have all of those resources online, but the Queensland government funds us for three people for the whole state to support 2.8 million volunteers. All of those resources are on our website. We can provide training. We do webinars on a regular basis. We do not have the people on the ground in the communities to get out and work with those organisations to download the resources and work with them to help them design new ways of volunteering for their organisation.

I think it does come back to that conversation I had with Margie earlier. We have to get to a position now where the government recognises that volunteering is a key pillar of the community, like housing, like transport, like health. It cannot be funded on the whim of government to government. It has to be built into the budget of the Queensland government. Government has to recognise the value of volunteering in government. We have been asking for this for years. Government has to put resources into looking after what is conservatively, I believe, around 200,000 volunteers who support Queensland government departments compared to their 240,000 staff. There needs to be money and investment and value put into that volunteering cohort for government. Again, for the community, we need the investment in people in the community. The resources are there. We are closing the books on the numbers in our peer network groups because we just cannot support anymore, but we know that people desperately want it.

Mr Bain: A conversation I had not very long ago was: why were there volunteers in the QFD because obviously we have paid components and volunteer components? Why are the volunteers always the poor cousins? Why are we always treated so badly? It came down to there is no actual value put on a volunteer. There is a value on trucks. There is a value on fire stations. There are values on everything that we own, but there is no value on the volunteer: 'Oh well, if we lose them, we will find another one. They will take their place.' Often it feels as though that is the attitude within that broader organisation.

Ms PEASE: We have the SES and the Coast Guard or VMR. Life Saving Queensland, you provide lifesaving support. Do you feel similar to what Brett is saying, that you are undervalued?

Ms Phillips: Yes, definitely. It is the cost too. Compared to other volunteering roles, the cost for our volunteers to participate—I know the subject of cost has not really come up yet—is significant. A lot of the gear that they need to do their role on the beach they have to purchase themselves. There is normally a travel cost to them to those locations and all of that sort of thing. That is all on the burden of the volunteer. There is no option for them to get tax rebates on that. There is no option for them to get funding for that. We fund as much as we can within the organisation. We charge a membership fee to cover insurance costs as well, so they actually pay to volunteer. They pay to be out there putting their lives at risk. That is pretty significant. For us, that is definitely a burden for our volunteers.

Mr Cooper: I think that also makes volunteering less inclusive. It becomes the domain of people who are well heeled.

Mr HEALY: Yes, absolutely.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: One of the issues that we have is around funding. We have seen some suggestions in a couple of submissions around using the gambling fund money in a different way. Some of that money could be sequestered for volunteer management as a concept, rather than going

to little organisations that may eventually fold because they have not got the support or going to discrete organisations over and over again. My first question is: do people see value in that? My second question is around reimbursing costs of volunteering to volunteers. Could there be some kind of tax incentives or how might that be funded?

Mr Bain: In terms of what you are saying about the grant money and so forth, the problem is often making sure that that then does not get soaked up in the administration of that system. We often see that where grants are given, whether it is a federal grant or wherever it comes from—it might not be the gambling grants—for projects within an organisation and three-quarters of that grant gets soaked up by the staff administering it and the actual program itself only gets a very small percentage of it. It is difficult. It is fine to say, 'Let's set up this system to manage that,' but if that system then absorbs those funds then we have not actually achieved anything.

Mr BAILLIE: Regional hubs come up all the time. We talk about regional hubs and service delivery for volunteering. At a government level the state government is there to deliver services. We have regional hubs called local governments. What role could local government play in helping to facilitate the regional hubs? They are set up right across the state. Should they play a more active role and resource these volunteer hubs? Does it need to be independent of government and be specific volunteer organisations?

Mr Cooper: This has been a great topic that has been discussed with Volunteering Queensland and with volunteer resource centres like ourselves, the Sunshine Coast, Cairns and Townsville. I think at the heart we believe that the right geographic split is to look at the ROC structure. It looks a little different here on the Gold Coast, but with some exceptions that scope is about the right size for what we think a regional hub would support.

There are certainly councils who struggle with volunteering and others who are more keyed into it. Where we sit today is probably having an agnostic view about who provides the service but making sure that they are capable, interested and set up to be able to deliver that service really well. If someone on the Gold Coast, for example, is far better skilled at it than we are then we would say that that is what the community deserves. Finding the right support in the region is critical.

All of those other components have come up in this conversation—peer networks, communities of practice, evidence-based sharing, standardised protocols that can be used in different areas to make it really efficient, impact measurement, looking at efficiency and those sorts of things. It is not the simplest problem but it is not the most complex problem either. I think with support we could come up with documenting what that model looks like so that it is well and truly understood both in terms of how it gets funded and how it is expected to operate and the sorts of benefits that you are looking to see in that space.

Mr HEALY: If you are creating more bureaucracy, it has to be funded. As Brett touched on, the Gambling Community Benefit Fund annually is a spend of about \$800 million, and that is locked in. Governments do budgets and they have a timeframe and there are forwards—this is how budgets work. They say, 'We will fund this program for a certain period.' You want to make sure that in any recommendations there needs to be fixed funding set because if it is one-off funding it will die. Joan, whether the government says, 'Here, you take all the money and you work it out—

Ms Hedger: We do not want it.

Mr HEALY: No. I know you do not but, in the context of the discussion, it might be a collective of both. The requirements are many and varied. It is identifying and prioritising those key ones. Everybody with the exception of one group that appeared here today is having challenges with numbers. I just throw that out there to say that that is something that needs to be—

Mr Cooper: I think we are also talking about two different tiers of volunteer-involving organisations.

Mr HEALY: Correct.

Mr Cooper: There are organisations around here that are large organisations with big government contracts and really healthy balance sheets. It is encouraging to hear that there is a tension that exists within those organisations around how they are supporting volunteers. For those of us who are unfunded and supporting small to medium volunteer-involving organisations, we would love to have that problem. We would love to have the problem of trying to figure out where our resources get distributed to have the greatest impact. We are fighting for crumbs here.

The other piece for me is doing nothing is not an option. If there is no outcome from the inquiry—and I am not suggesting there will be zero outcome—I am trying to be very careful with not using colourful language but there is a ton of things that are at risk here in terms of the community—

service delivery, social cohesion, delivering on the Olympics, being able to respond in terms of spontaneous volunteers. There was a lot of discussion around spontaneous volunteers in today's piece but when it comes to the vanilla volunteer—that everyday volunteering piece—in our experience the people who stand up as spontaneous volunteers are not usually interested in becoming vanilla volunteers for service delivery. They are different beasts.

Mr HEALY: Yes, it is an ageing population. It is a greater challenge in so many other areas.

Mr Cooper: You have to be courageous and be volunteer-centric and be willing to turn everything on its head right now to make your business work well for volunteers.

Ms Phillips: Can I flag too, Surf Life Saving is the largest volunteering organisation in Queensland. Equally, I see us playing a really key role in supporting those smaller organisations if we can be connected to them. We see volunteers coming into our organisation who also volunteer for the Total Rescue volunteer group. They bring that to our organisation and then our volunteers go and help them as well because they have visibility of it. I think there is a real opportunity. We are currently looking at working with the Daniel Morcombe Foundation, for example. They have a volunteer network. How can we get some of our volunteers over to them and equally their volunteers working with us? It is about creating those connection points to allow that to happen.

I want to flag that even though Surf Life Saving is a large volunteer organisation, I see that we definitely have that kind of corporate citizen role, if you want to call it that, in supporting other volunteer organisations and sharing our research, sharing our learnings and sharing our volunteers. I definitely do not see it as: these are our volunteers and nothing else. It is like: okay, how do we work collectively across the system to lift it all up?

Ms Hedger: Talking about the funding and the volunteering hubs, again we see that it has to be government's main decision that volunteering is a pillar of our community and has the money quarantined to do that. We do not want to set up whole new organisations in communities. It is like when you build a park and you put a concrete path through the middle of it. In two weeks time, you will see a little track over here and a little track over there and no-one will be using the concrete path. We do not want to build a concrete path. We want to go into communities, find where those tracks are and say, right, let's fund those organisations with extra money to put on these volunteer involving resources to be able to draw on the resources and the training and the cert IV and all the stuff we have and to be able to then connect big and small local organisations. You have to have someone who is doing that connecting in communities and who is having those conversations because we know that people learn about so many volunteering opportunities through word of mouth. We want to put more mouths in the communities, talking about volunteering. We still want to provide that professional peer support to them or the training and the development that we have that is just sitting there for organisations, but it needs to be in the community because that is where the volunteering happens.

Mr HEALY: Jane, how is your organisation's engagement with other volunteer groups, particularly the smaller ones, that would be aware of your organisation but not necessarily the engagement? Sometimes you get the feeling that there is infrastructure out there but people are not aware of it. You run through local, state or federal government grants and funding and sometimes they will say, 'Oh, we didn't know.' I am wondering: how is your engagement? You really are one of the organisations, along with others, that can be a strong voice to say, as you just said, 'Don't go and create another string of bureaucracy that will create significant revenue challenges down the road. Look at the existing pathway.' How is your engagement process?

Ms Hedger: The Queensland government funds us for \$550,000 a year, which gives me 3½ staff and a bit of rent and a bit of insurance and those sorts of things. We then fund some other stuff through our own activities.

Mr HEALY: Do you raise money outside of that?

Ms Hedger: We raise a little bit outside of that but not a lot. As I said, our peer networks are full. We know that if we had more staff on board then we could do so much more because the resources are all there. We have developed it all. There are 1,000 templates. There are training videos. We have a cert IV for volunteer managers.

Mr HEALY: So on engagement, you think you could do a lot more?

Ms Hedger: Absolutely. We have a volunteer involving register that we have just opened up to really map those smaller communities. I think we already have about 300 tiny organisations in there that are purely volunteer run. They are really small organisations. We have 400 members and it is a good mix of larger organisations and volunteer organisations, but with this volunteer involving register

we are starting to see those real grassroots volunteers. We have an incredible mixture all across the state. In the last six months many of the 167,000 downloads of our resources were from the website. There are people accessing that but we just do not have the time to help them and talk them through that.

Mr HEALY: So funding CPI?

Ms Hedger: No.

Ms PEASE: You talk about regional hubs. In every community, there are currently neighbourhood centres or community centres. Do you access any of those?

Ms Hedger: Yes.

Ms PEASE: Is there capacity to use that as a space?

Ms Hedger: In some communities the neighbourhood centre will be the best place to put that, but in other communities there will be another organisation that actually has better engagement across the broader community. In some communities you might have four or five neighbourhood centres so then who does it? There might be a more centralised area that does it and in other places there might not be a really functioning neighbourhood centre. We think it needs to be agnostic because we want it to be community specific. It needs to be place based. It needs to be that community saying, 'This is where we all gather. This is where we all connect.'

Ms PEASE: So reinventing the wheel in that space, rather than utilising what is already there?

Ms Duthie: Or inviting people to a partnership just like potentially you asking us at that high level how we all work better together. In a particular regional area, where does that culmination of people most work well together? That is where you reduce your competition.

Ms Hedger: We are not reinventing the wheel. We are looking at who is already doing it most effectively in that community. It may be the community centre. It may be someone else. That is where, rather than handing it over to an organisation, it needs to be owned by the community. Maybe it is five-year funding and it goes out to those people in the community, they apply for it, they do it for five years and then it goes out again. The community owns it. We still have that overarching role and everyone can get their resources and training and everything from the central peak body, but how that community works determines where those resources go. We do not want to build a centre and we do not want to just give it to all to Anglicare or all to Lifeline or all to neighbourhood centres. We want to go, 'This is your community. You tell us where you gather.'

Mr BAILLIE: We have talked a bit about attracting and onboarding and how we can work more collaboratively. One thing I am not sure we have really touched on is the retention of volunteers, which is a big issue for the volunteer organisations. Does anyone see any potential outcomes from this inquiry that we might be able to put forward that could help or aid with that retention piece of the puzzle? Is it really going to be left up to each volunteer organisation to do the successful practices, which is keeping volunteers engaged? Is there anything we can do with regards to that retention piece of the puzzle?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: If I can add to that, Adam, we have heard ideas about tax rebates, reimbursing full costs or registration rebates for those who use their cars for volunteering. Clearly there are challenges that come with making sure that there is some governance around proper claims for those. One issue is how that would work. It would be good to consider that within what Adam is talking about.

Ms Phillips: For us, retention definitely gets back to those successful practices. We are doing a lot of work at the moment in terms of mapping what a positive volunteering experience looks like because a positive volunteering experience leads to retention. We are mapping all of that at the moment. We have a member satisfaction survey and research that all leans into that. At the moment we are leaning a lot into things like member burnout and volunteer burnout. Again, I feel like we do a lot of it within Surf in isolation. How are we connecting these organisations? Volunteer burnout is common across every organisation. There are key wicked problems within the system that we can all learn about from each other. I think that is how we solve it.

Mr BAILLIE: Brad, in the chart in your submission there was a bell curve and it had fatigue and exhaustion.

Mr Cooper: Engagement and burnout.

Mr BAILLIE: I do not know where the sweet spot was.

Mr Cooper: On the value of volunteers in hybrid organisations where you have both paid and volunteers, volunteers will be the canary in the cage. They will tell you really fast what is going on in your organisation, whether you are paid or not. I would probably take a broader view, like Collin mentioned before, which is that we do not mind losing a volunteer but we would lament the loss of someone exiting the volunteer sector in totality. Moving across to other organisations is important and doing that with almost like a warm handover so that the experience is really great. I think of the mantra of Honda motor vehicles a while ago, which had an internal drive to see everyone have four Hondas in their garage. It is the idea that a volunteer has a group of relationships with different organisations so they can pick and choose the best of things and where they go. It is inevitable that we end up competing for volunteers and retention is another layer where we are competing. You can give the best gala awards dinner or the best uniform. You can hear what volunteers say about how well their shirt breathes or does not breathe. You can give them a choice of fabric. All those things certainly help. Every one of those opportunities creates a layer of investment that we are trying to get a return back on in that space.

I think there is an opportunity for layers at every level of government. It might be taxation benefits at the Commonwealth level to be able to claim your volunteering expenses and registration fees. With local government it might be car parking and pet registration benefits.

I think of our kids. I take your point around needing to qualify. Qualifying is the key piece here because that becomes a burden on the volunteer involving organisation to be able to tick it off. I think of the kids who are coming through. I am a volunteer at a local baseball club and we are about to see people coming through with the sports grants. There are ways to be able to find registration in issuing vouchers. Maybe that is a system where those inputs are coming from a range of different corporates that want to provide support to those sorts of spaces and that could become a pool that gets issued out, but the burden piece back to VIOs is a real issue.

Ms Duthie: And it needs to be multi-pronged. There is not going to be one answer to it. It is a multi-pronged approach.

Mr Watson: I think with long-term retention—and we see it in our organisation, similar to Surf Life Saving—and technical training in the long-term volunteers, burnout is a big thing. Also, at an organisational level, if we are not supported correctly then we feel those longer term five, 10- and 15-year volunteers who are doing the core amount of work are getting burnt out. I am not going to go and say, 'Hey, it's great. Come and join up.' There is not going to be any of that so that retention and that burnout has a big effect on recruitment.

Ms Hedger: If you are a government department employee, for example, you get four weeks paid leave each year and 13 weeks after 10 years. As government volunteers, what do you get?

Mr Watson: zero.

Mr Bain: I am flat out earning a living.

Mr Watson: I have a full-time job at an accounting firm as an IT manager and a family at home. I did 30 hours last week just to ensure that this role is taken care of. How do you continue to keep those people saying, 'Am I going to trade another meeting or another follow-up with area office to find out if someone who wants to volunteer has their uniform and has their training done?'

Ms Hedger: This is on government.

Mr Watson: It is an ongoing circle.

Mr BAILLIE: We are talking about not losing volunteers from the overall volunteer pool. A volunteer passport or a platform where one can document the training and courses they have passed and whether they have a blue card would make it easier to transition from one organisation to another and also potentially prevent that burnout. Someone might say, 'I've had enough of here for the moment so I'm going to take a year and try this one.' Then it might be, 'No, I really don't like it and I want to come back to the fires.'

Ms Phillips: If you are talking about a volunteering culture starting from a really young age, a volunteering passport would be amazing to create culture because young people can use that as leverage for jobs and all sorts of different things. It creates it right from the youth age when we need to instil good volunteering values, which came up earlier, and then carry that through. That is an amazing way to start that. It is also a way to get across organisations.

Ms PEASE: Like the Dollarmites banking program. My son still has his and he is 35.

Mr Bain: Having cadet programs for our youth to get them started early and start embedding that volunteer ethos into them.

Mr HEALY: Schools are where you need to start it.

Mr Bain: We have the Emergency Service Cadets program managed by the PCYC. They do a bit of rural firefighting, they do a bit of volunteer policing, they do a bit of SES and they do a bit of this and that. Those groups are very few and far between. They are very limited in how many there are. That is probably something that needs to be looked at as being able to boost those programs that already exist. They are there. They work. Let's increase those. Let's boost those, which then feeds into the whole volunteer passport and gives youth that CV build.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: And linking RPL from volunteering to training certificates and those sorts of things. We are at our time limit now. I want to thank everyone who has contributed.

CHAIR: There have been some very vivid insights into the collective difficulties. I think you described it as there being some 'wicked' problems. They were quite consistent for many. It is great to see large volunteering outfits and organisations coming together and sharing their stories, particularly for our benefit. I am sure my colleagues on the committee will join me in thanking you for your appearance today. What has been taken down will be available for us all, which is a good thing because I have been a bit distracted with the ABC. I am sure you will be interested to see the committee's report, which will be tabled by 18 September. Thank you very much indeed.

The committee adjourned at 2.31 pm.

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