



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

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

Staff present:

Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Tuesday, 12 August 2025

Rockhampton

TUESDAY, 12 AUGUST 2025

The committee met at 10.00 am.

CHAIR: Good morning and welcome, everyone. I declare open this Rockhampton public hearing for the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My name is James Lister. I am the member for Southern Downs and chair of this committee. Other members of the committee are: the deputy chair, Margie Nightingale, who is the member for Inala in Brisbane; Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore on the Gold Coast; Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville; Michael Healy, the member for Cairns; Joan Pease, the member for Lytton; and today we have joining us one of the local MPs Nigel Hutton, the member for Keppel. It is great to have you with us, Nigel.

This is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament, so it is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses can participate in these proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that to mislead the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members that the public may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. Media may be present—as you can see—and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

I want to also acknowledge our other two Central Queensland MPs who are in the room with us: Glen Kelly, the member for Mirani, and Donna Kirkland. Donna, thank you. I know you guys have advocated strongly to bring this committee to your neck of the woods.

Mrs KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr Chair. Would you mind me responding to that welcome?

CHAIR: Be my guest.

Mrs KIRKLAND: Thank you. Firstly, I would like to welcome the committee to Rockhampton. Thank you so much. I know that all of Central Queensland is represented here today with people from Biloela, from Gladstone, from Rockhampton. I welcome you here and thank you for your participation in what is a really important inquiry into volunteerism and how we can ensure the succession plan of that going into the future. I am so grateful to you for setting up camp here in Rocky and hearing what the locals here in Central Queensland—Rockhampton, Keppel and Mirani—have to say. We are all keen. I am going to be sitting here listening to all of those appearing today with great interest and I look forward to the outcome of your inquiry. Thank you for representing Queensland and thank you for representing Central Queenslanders. Thank you, everyone, for being here.

CHAIR: Thank you.

WILSCHEFSKI, Mr Don, President, Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association Inc.

CHAIR: I welcome Mr Don Wilschefski from the Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association Inc. Mr Wilschefski, would you like to make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes, I will. I will just read what I put in the submission. The CQARA is an association with 19 members. Nine members can be considered active volunteers, and all except one member are in the Central Queensland area. There are no paid staff.

CQARA is an association of radio amateurs who have an interest in amateur radio experimentation and communications. CQARA has been appointed as advisory members of the Livingstone Shire Council Local Disaster Management Group in 2016 and the Rockhampton Regional Council Local Disaster Management Group in 2025. Advisory members on the LDMGs have a liaison role with the LDMG. Members attend LDMG meetings and participate in exercises held by the LDMG.

Training has been conducted to facilitate emergency communications with voice and digital communications. Digital communications include 'email over radio' which may be utilised if normal email is not available. Loss of internet is one scenario which may trigger this requirement.

Volunteers in the association have established fixed and portable radio communications equipment that may be used for voice and digital communications. During exercises, radio communication out of the Central Queensland area has been conducted to demonstrate the ability to communicate if the internet fails.

CQARA operates a radio museum at Rockhampton Heritage Village. The museum provides a display of radio equipment including operating amateur radio equipment. Volunteers operate the museum and attend during school holidays to conduct activities with visiting school students. Volunteers provide their time in the above activities and generally provide their own radio equipment.

The number of volunteers in the association is relatively static. However, many volunteers are older and retired, and the number of volunteers will decrease if new members are not recruited to replace those who cease volunteering activities due to age.

In an emergency where communication is required, fewer volunteers may result in an inability to provide emergency communications. Members of the association enjoy experimenting with and operating amateur radio equipment. The ability to provide a service to the community provides an additional purpose to an enjoyable hobby.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Wilschefski. Well done. As I mentioned to you before, I am an amateur radio operator myself—VK4JPL. It is a great hobby, and I know each year my local radio club, the Border Ranges Amateur Radio Club, participates in a lot of community events as volunteers to provide emergency communications, which is a prerequisite to get these things going, and is able to provide it free of charge to those groups. So apart from disaster preparedness and working with local government in the event of disaster, do you as an amateur radio club support other volunteer and community activities?

Mr Wilschefski: Probably the main thing we do other than that is to operate the Heritage Village radio museum.

CHAIR: That is a great thing.

Mr Wilschefski: We have a lease with the Rockhampton Regional Council for that area and we operate and maintain it, so that is a job we do. We attend there during school holidays. We have a little arrangement there where children can come through and if they can send their name in Morse code they receive a certificate, and they get a big thrill out of that.

CHAIR: That is good. My Morse code is a bit rusty; they are probably better than me. Thanks, Mr Wilschefski.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you, Mr Wilschefski, for appearing today and obviously for the great work that your organisation does, particularly during a time of need in getting communications out to the broader community. I have a question around succession planning, if you will, or continuation of the association. You mentioned that you engage with young people in school. Do you find much of an interest in, say, the younger generations engaging in amateur radio?

Mr Wilschefski: I think it is one of those things where you would probably find about one person in 20 or 30 has an interest. We had a group come through the other day at the museum where we had 22 schoolchildren—probably grades 3 or 4—and one child was really fascinated, and that is about the ratio you get. Amateur radio had its heyday after the wars when a lot of people were operating communications then. It has slowed down a lot.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you have any younger people in your organisation at the moment?

Mr Wilschefski: Probably the youngest person would be in his 40s I think, but no. There is another amateur radio group in Rockhampton and I think they are pretty similar really. It is a job.

CHAIR: In honour of our local member here, we should go to the member for Keppel. Do you have a question, Nigel?

Mr HUTTON: I do, indeed. Thank you so much, Don, for taking the time to come and speak at the inquiry today. When the world goes silent, that is when your organisation helps make sure that the voices still get over the air, so it is a really important role that you play. Understanding that post-Cyclone Marcia the amateur radio club were brought into the Livingstone shire disaster arrangements and now are part of the Rockhampton Regional Council LDMG arrangements as well, could you speak to any of the challenges integrating your organisation into the local disaster management group arrangements for the councils or the opportunities you see that the inquiry should take note of?

Mr Wilschefski: I suppose the main challenge we have is that we work on the concept that we can provide something when everything else fails. With most of the exercises we have been involved with we have actually had activities to work on, but our main purpose comes in when there is a situation where, say, the internet fails and people just cannot communicate due to flooding or something like that or they have a disaster in a strange area and their normal systems are not working. We have not really had opportunities to do things in that area. That is probably one of the difficulties we have had. With some of the exercises with the internet failing, we have used our digital

communication systems over amateur radio using email over radio to communicate with the disaster control centres in Brisbane and the like. We have done that in a few exercises, but that is probably about all. The thing is you have to have a scenario where a major communication system has failed in some way for us to get involved.

Ms PEASE: Thanks so much, Don. It is great to meet you. It is great story. Would all of your members be amateur radio enthusiasts?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

Ms PEASE: They got involved with your club because of their interest in amateur radio?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

Ms PEASE: Your involvement with disaster management has come along after your members initially joined up for the amateur radio club?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes. In fact, we originally became involved when David Mazzaferri from the Livingstone Shire Council was setting up the Hub in Yeppoon and he approached us. We had a display at one of the emergency services days. He approached us and said, 'We've had a lot of trouble with communications in our bushfires and disasters, and we want to get you guys involved with us.' That is how we originally got started with it.

Ms PEASE: Were your members happy to move on from being amateur enthusiasts to moving into that space?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes. They are really keen, yes.

Ms PEASE: Given that the council has approached you, do they give you any funding?

Mr Wilschefski: No. The only contribution I would say that the council makes is anything associated with the facilities. For example, at the Hub in Yeppoon they have provided some cabling for us to connect our equipment and they have purchased some radio equipment, I believe.

Ms PEASE: Where do you operate out of? Do you come together to meet or do you have your amateur radios at home that you operate from there?

Mr Wilschefski: We do a bit of each. We have a monthly meeting where we get together. We also have various—we call them—nets where, for example, at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning I host a net of any club members who are around the place, so we are talking to them over the radio. We also have a weekly exercise, not an exercise but each individual tests their digital radio communications equipment just to make sure it is all working and everything is still operating.

Ms PEASE: Do you get involved with the VMR or coastguard? Do you have a relationship with them?

Mr Wilschefski: No, not really, apart from our interaction with them in the LDMGs.

Ms PEASE: Thank you for that explanation. I think that sorts it out for me. Do you have a facility where you meet? You talk about the Hub. What is that Hub?

Mr Wilschefski: There is a long term for it, Nigel, but I cannot remember it. It is the emergency communications control centre or the Local Disaster Coordination Centre, the LDCC.

Mr HEALY: They always have long names, don't they?

Ms PEASE: Yes. One of the things that we hear from people about volunteering is the red tape that is associated with that like blue cards et cetera. That would not be an impact for you? Do you have to have blue cards for what you do?

Mr Wilschefski: No, not really. One of the volunteer activities that amateur radio clubs do is to get involved with the Scouts with Jamboree on the Air. They operate radio equipment there and give all the Scouts and—

Ms PEASE: Gee, you are busy with such a small membership. That is pretty amazing in terms of the work you do.

Mr Wilschefski: There are two groups. There is probably twice that number in total. They have been involved with that, and that gives a lot of exposure to young people.

Ms PEASE: What does it cost to run your organisation? Do you have insurance costs?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

Ms PEASE: Do you have other overheads?

Mr Wilschefski: We have insurance. The Wireless Institute of Australia organises a group insurance arrangement for affiliated clubs. We have to have 25 per cent of our members in the Wireless Institute to do that. That is probably around \$300 a year.

Ms PEASE: For insurance?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

Ms PEASE: How much is the membership for the Wireless Institute?

Mr Wilschefski: Our membership fees at the moment are \$20 per year.

Ms PEASE: Is that per person for your organisation or for the Australian one?

Mr Wilschefski: For the Australian one, I think the membership is \$95 a year.

Ms PEASE: So it is not a prohibitive cost.

Mr Wilschefski: It is not for most of us.

Ms PEASE: Is that \$95 for the association or per person?

Mr Wilschefski: No, it is \$20 for the association for us.

Ms PEASE: For members to join your association?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

Ms PEASE: What does it cost the Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association to become a member of that peak group?

Mr Wilschefski: It does not cost us anything, apart from our insurance, which they organise. Individuals become members of the Wireless Institute of Australia.

Ms PEASE: That costs them \$95?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

Ms PEASE: Sorry, I thought it was \$95 per year for your association but it is for each person.

Mr Wilschefski: We have a fairly small budget. We have received a few donations over the years. We are cruising along fairly well. We operate a repeater and some digital communications gear. If that fails, we have to replace that. It is not a great expense at the moment.

Ms PEASE: Thank you. I could keep going, but I will not hold the floor.

Mr BOOTHMAN: In emergency situations there can be information blackouts. For instance, in 2023 a storm went through the northern Gold Coast and there were no mobile phone towers that were operational for about 10 days. Therefore, there was no information getting out. Most people did not realise their cars still had radios, so to speak. It showed how vulnerable we are in these blackouts. Also, the radio communication via the car did not really update residents about what was going on. What you are saying hits home, and it is very important that we get the next generation involved. You brought up the Scouts and how you have a bit of a partnership. Do you find there is any long-term interest from the Scouts? Is it a group you potentially could get additional members from in the future via that program?

Mr Wilschefski: We have that factor of something like one person in 20 is interested in these areas. We have probably found that some amateurs became interested originally when they were in the Scouts. Once again, it is a one to 20 ratio. If amateur radio was involved with the schools in some way, we could probably do a lot better than that. We are pulling in that one person in 20 out of the population. Bear in mind, technically minded people have a lot of other distractions nowadays. There are a lot of other things that people can do.

Mr HEALY: I think you have answered pretty much everything. I just wanted to make a quick statement. You are right: at the end of the day when we do not have electricity and when mobile phones, which seem to control our lives at the moment, evaporate, we go back to those early forms. It is impressive and it says a lot about your organisation. When did the council integrate you into the emergency response? What year was that?

Mr Wilschefski: That is a good question. That would have been 15 or 20 years ago. I think David Mazzaferri had just started in this area. He originally came from somewhere else. It was probably 15 years ago. Hang on—in 2016 we were appointed advisory members to the Livingstone Shire Council Local Disaster Management Group, so probably nine years ago.

Mr HEALY: I will be checking with my mayor when I get back to Cairns to see if we have a similar connection. It absolutely makes sense. I understand your statistics in relation to one in 20 people. How do we grow your numbers? If it was up to you and you could wave a wand, how would you grow your numbers? You did talk about the schools.

Mr Wilschefski: It would be good to expose young people up to the 10-year-old age group to this. For example, at the moment there is no involvement at all with the schools or with the education system. I do not know if something could be incorporated there. Someone would have to look at it from the education side to see what could be done. That is about all I could see—the Scouts and the education department.

Mr HEALY: The fact that you have been integrated into the emergency services area says a lot about your organisation.

Mr Wilschefski: We have to have the right people to do that sort of thing. We have to be professional, work within a group and that sort of thing. It has worked quite well so far.

Mr HEALY: Well done. Thanks for the work you do.

Mr BAILLIE: I just wanted to clarify: when we are talking about radio, are we talking about short-wave radio or are we talking about a radio station that you would broadcast on?

Mr Wilschefski: The sort of radio equipment that amateurs use is short wave and also the VHF-UHF gear, similar to what you see local taxis and police use. It is short-range gear. We use that quite a bit for local communication amongst ourselves. The email-over-wireless systems that we use will operate on the VHF short range or the long or short wave. In fact, one of the most reliable connections with the short-wave digital is to a station in New Zealand at the moment. It is just the way he has set himself up, I think. On the digital side, you basically communicate with another amateur HF station and he has a gateway to the internet. You basically get far enough away from the disaster to a gateway that can then put your email up on the internet.

Mr BAILLIE: So that email over radio is not someone reading an email out; it is a way of sending data.

Mr Wilschefski: Yes. It is done digitally. Just like Outlook, you enter the email, hit send and in another click it is off.

Mr BAILLIE: As technology continues to evolve and we have 3G, 4G and 5G, do you find you start to get interference with your equipment? We have progressed through different technologies and stages, and we now need TV antennas that are 4G compatible. Do you find that with your equipment?

Mr Wilschefski: Yes. All of television is now on the UHF band, so it is out of the way. Similarly, the telephone system is higher in frequency. A lot of other interference is caused by things like solar inverters and LED lights—just about everything nowadays has a switching regulator in it which creates interference. It is a bit challenging to operate radio equipment in a domestic or industrial environment.

Mr BAILLIE: You keep that equipment going even while everything else is up and running, and when it is not running your signal will work even better.

Mr Wilschefski: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Wilschefski, for your appearance today, for your submission and for providing the audience with an education about amateur radio, the 73s and all the good numbers. Feel free to stay and observe the rest of the proceedings because I will bet a penny to a pound that some of the volunteering difficulties you face will be shared with other volunteer groups in the community.

Mr Wilschefski: Thank you.

LODDING, Ms Lois, Chief Executive Officer, Not-For-Profit House

HANSEN, Mrs Lyndal, Director, Not-For-Profit House

McGUIRE, Ms Jennifer, Director, Not-For-Profit House

CHAIR: I now welcome to the table representatives from Not-For-Profit House in Gladstone. Ladies, thank you for coming before us and for your submission. Would you like to make an opening statement before we ask you some questions?

Ms Loding: I am Lois, the CEO of Not-For-Profit House. We are the only service of our kind. We were established five years ago specifically to address the impending volunteer crisis. This is our visionary founder. She saw the crunch coming before it happened. We are built to increase participation, remove barriers and improve the volunteer experience in ways that traditional frameworks have not. We spent the first two years of our operation developing our systems, and in the last three we have been operating them. We are not just theoretical; we are proven and we are implemented. We are not just in Gladstone either. We have done work interstate and across Queensland too.

The reason we exist is for the 90 per cent being left behind. The majority of attention and funding in the not-for-profit sector focuses on the 10 per cent of organisations that are registered charities which often also have volunteer managers. This is completely different from the 90 per cent of not-for-profits that are not charities and they are often the ones most reliant on volunteers. They are often volunteer-led yet least supported. Volunteering is changing. While baby boomers continue to give the most hours, the largest cohort of volunteers is actually people in their 30s and 40s. This is where we find the demand is—the people who are showing up but are being overlooked. We have a strong focus on intergenerational transitions. Yes, we support baby boomers but we also focus on younger potential volunteers coming through.

Our recipe works. It is a proven five-pillar framework. We have developed a replicable model for generating and sustaining volunteers across all sectors. Here is how we do it. The first step is our foundational health checks. We start with the basics. If an organisation cannot retain volunteers, there is no point focusing on recruitment. We use a streamlined, evidence-based health check to build stronger foundations for not-for-profits, improving the volunteer experience.

The second step is our task-based volunteering. We help organisations redesign roles around tasks, not titles. This makes volunteering accessible for people who cannot or will not commit long term. This is especially appealing to working-age people, students and caregivers. This alone significantly increases participation by removing the psychological and logistical barriers that often keep people away.

The third ingredient is a personalised volunteer portal. We have our own volunteer portal which matches volunteers with roles based on their individual and personalised skills, availability and interests. It is not a generic listing platform like the rest of them; it is curated. You only show people what is relevant for them, making it easier to say yes.

The fourth ingredient is our workplace volunteer program. Employees try one-off volunteering in a supported setting, and many do go on to become long-term volunteers. In the workplace it is low risk and high reward, and it tackles the false belief that volunteering must be a massive commitment. It is also often skill-based volunteering, using their skills in their workplace for a community organisation. We find that most people do not actually know that their skills are needed, and they are often flattered and very motivated as a result of this.

The last and final step—step 5—is our readiness assessment and inclusive matching. We assess each organisation's readiness to host volunteers and, on the other side, we profile the volunteers based on their skills and goals. We oversee that placement to ensure there is a quality, supported match, which is especially impactful for marginalised and under-represented groups. We work with people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, women returning to the workforce and the long-term employed.

They are the five ingredients. The secret sauce that it marinades in is, firstly, our culture of warmth. We cannot do any of this without being good, open, warm and friendly people. However, we hold people gently accountable. Everything we do has structure and is data driven. We blend the kindness with measurable outcomes.

Secondly, we are available all the time. These organisations often operate outside business hours, and we are always available to them. We are also available face to face. Online resources are useful, but people thrive when they can talk to someone over the phone or in person—with people who get it. Thirdly, we also do tailored training, so we provide mentoring, coaching and training for these volunteers and organisations.

Unfortunately, we are seeing a lot of volunteers leaving because of unresolved tensions. While we are not a formal conflict resolution support, the fourth and final part of the picture is that we are a safe haven when people are going through dramas. We then take them through the best service for them. Often it is just helping them through our services to take the emotion out of it—we go through the health check and the subsequent steps.

We know how to increase participation, remove barriers and improve the volunteer experience across ages, cultures and abilities. Coming from Gladstone, where more money has been spent on community investment in the last 10 years than probably any town in Queensland, we know that money will not solve the problem; it is the recipe. Volunteering is not broken, but the systems around it often are. We have built one that works.

CHAIR: Thank you. Deputy Chair, would you like to start the questions?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for appearing today and for your vision, Mrs Hansen. It is quite remarkable. Something we have heard during the inquiry across the state is this need for support, and it sounds like you have developed a very strong model. You talk about an evidence base, which is really important. I have some questions around funding. Are you funded? Do you have paid positions? What is the breakdown in terms of those factors?

Mrs Hansen: That has been a difficult point. That has been the hardest thing of all to set this up. Our funding model at the moment is that we apply for grants, but that is not sustainable because it is very much a one-off, so we do what every other not-for-profit does. We have a commercial arm where we are helping industry and organisations, so there is a fee-for-service from some of that industry. We go anywhere where we can find support and assistance. That is how we have modelled it and it is not sustainable. We have survived for five years, but we have put a lot of dedication and a lot of our own time and resources into that. We know it works and we know that with more support it could go even further. We have not even marketed things because we did not have the resources to. We now know that we have the systems that work and we now know what can actually help people.

Ms McGuire: Building on Lyndal's feedback is that most grants, sponsorship and funding processes are designed for assets. Every single one of you would like to stand in front of a sports field's Colorbond shed or their mower, or you want the soccer team behind you as you hand the jerseys over, but you are not investing in the innovation and the human factor—the people. That is what the massive gap is as to why we are in the position we are in.

The young volunteers you all cry out for in terms of succession are there, but they are not going to step up to be the president, secretary or treasurer. Instead, our solution is that they can volunteer as the accountant in their lunch hour at their desk virtually and Lois's team can link them up with five different organisations to teach them a budget framework and a cashflow. We are susceptible in the same way as every other not-for-profit because we are applying to these archaic asset-driven grants and funding processes. I will leave Lois to talk about her remarkable team.

Ms Lodding: We have five staff members, which is about three FTE because we are part-time. It costs about \$400,000 a year for us to operate.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: What is a fee-for-service for an NFP to receive your support?

Mrs Hansen: We try not to have a fee-for-service for NFPs.

Ms Lodding: It is industry that we charge.

Mrs Hansen: We try to do that commercial work or we will apply for a grant to do that work for those not-for-profits. Not-for-profits are not prepared to pay money. I have worked for federal government and state government over three decades, and I can tell you that I have seen so many programs come and go. I have had my own consultancy working with local government for 20 years, and we are repeating the same mistakes. Hence, this is my legacy to the community where I live because I can see how this can work. We are not learning from those mistakes; we are just perpetuating all of it.

Ms McGuire: In the Gladstone region there are over 500 not-for-profit organisations, and how many would NFP House have audited so far?

Ms Lodding: It would be about 100 that we have actually audited, but 250 have worked with us in different capacities.

Ms McGuire: Close to 100 have had the health check and it is across numerous components. I will not bore you with the technical detail. I am happy for you to be handed the report cards for you to see for yourself or it is on our website. Basically, let's say we can score those 100 organisations in their financial management, yet how many millions of dollars have industry handed over in Gladstone?

Mrs Hansen: It is \$400 million in the last decade in community investment.

Ms McGuire: We can go to industry, through their usual process, and seek funding to say, 'We want to uplift the health check score across those organisations.' What is the most current score for financial management?

Mrs Hansen: That score is a D. It is the same as a school report card—A, B, C, D, E.

Ms McGuire: We are handing over money to organisations that are financially managing to a D rating. I do not know how many of you have children, but I would be taking my children off to a tutor for that. We go off to industry. When I talked about the tutoring, we take the money from industry and run programs. It can be in multiple forms. Lois talked about that accountant volunteering from their desk working in an alumina refinery in their lunch hour to teach five different organisations for an hour how to budget and cashflow. It can be one-on-one in person; it can be workshops. I did deliberately pick financial management to show that score. Another component that we help them with is their volunteer management because we want to create healthy, capable organisations where people want to volunteer. Apart from the Colorbond shed and the soccer club's mower, we need to invest in the people and the innovations so that volunteers actually want to go there.

Mrs Hansen: We are doing more harm by getting volunteers to go into these organisations that are not ready to have volunteers, and we have seen it happen before. What happens is that the volunteer will not come back again, so we have actually done a disservice. We have to make sure that, when we are creating these new young people to come into volunteer, it is a good, strong, positive experience. Otherwise, they are never going to volunteer.

Young people are volunteering—listening to the radio club there—but they are volunteering in different ways now. They are not volunteering like mum, dad and grandma used to volunteer. It is different to our perception of volunteerism. We work a lot with Volunteer Queensland and Volunteer Australia, as you can imagine. Young people want some more social justice issues and they want it to be short and sharp. The volunteering that you might have done is like a dedication or a commitment, as Lois's statement said. They want to do lots of different things. By task orientating volunteerism as we are doing, we are creating that opportunity for young people to come in and do a number of different things in a number of different organisations.

Ms McGuire: The volunteer portal that Lois mentioned is not like a normal skills platform where you load up your resume and a great cover letter. No. We have designed it so you put up there what your interests are. They might be sporting, conservation, fishing or radio—who would know? You load up your interests and you load up your availability—whether you are available Monday through Friday, or Saturday and Sunday, or after 5 pm, whatever it might be. You also load up how long you might want to volunteer for. I get on there usually on a Friday afternoon. I have my profile loaded up and it will throw me what is available over the weekend. While I am not young, I am time poor, so I will pick up an hour at Gladstone PAWS to help take photos of animals or I will pick up an hour at a sausage sizzle to help fundraise. That is the way younger people are wanting to volunteer.

We are better off having those volunteers being matched through the analytics in the background. Once these organisations do their health check, they have a shopping list as long as your arm but Lois's team focuses on their top 5. They will then put up their top 5 items on the volunteer portal so that someone like me logging in on a Friday afternoon can see that they need risk management and I know I can do that with one arm tied behind my back. I have put in that I want to volunteer virtually and they have put in their position that they have available that it is volunteer virtually for risk management. I will arrange to connect with them and set up a calendar request, and I am helping them put together their risk management document for their entire organisation in my study in my own home. They are getting the benefit and I am filling my cup. That is what the volunteer portal does in the background.

Mrs Hansen: We could talk forever. If you do not want to ask questions, we are more than happy to keep talking.

CHAIR: It is always great to hear things we have not heard before when we go on this journey of exploration. Your insights will be very helpful to us in reporting to parliament, so thank you.

Mr HUTTON: Firstly, Mayor Matt Burnett of Gladstone speaks very highly of your organisation and the role that you play, so thank you for contributing not only to Gladstone but to CQ as a whole. I love on your website where you talk about not only generating but sustaining volunteers. That is something that is very close to my heart. In your last response to the deputy chair's question, you got to the crux of the difference between membership and volunteering. We see in a lot of our community organisations that those who are taking on the burden of membership and potentially leadership end up spending their volunteering no longer providing a community service—which is what they may have intended to do—but rather coordinating others to have an opportunity to serve. I was hoping to gain an understanding from your experience of how we lift that dial. Mrs Hansen, you spoke very strongly around repeating volunteering versus spontaneous volunteering. How do we shift that dial? Is it through the use of a portal or is it through converting volunteers to members?

Mrs Hansen: We know that we have some runs on the board, so we can tell you from our experience what has worked so far, but I am also here to say that there is not just one solution. There is a multitude of solutions, but it has to be done in a sequential way. If we do not work with the organisation so that they are a safe, great place to go and volunteer, it does not matter how many volunteers we put in there and it does not matter how many times; it is not going to stick. We need to work as a balance across-the-board. We need to work with people who are not volunteering to encourage them to volunteer. We are working with the current volunteers to say, 'This is easy. We'll take some of the burden away from you,' because it can be very difficult and a lot of them are struggling.

What we have seen since COVID is less tolerance between people within committees, so that angst is increasing. We need to work with those existing volunteers to make sure somebody is there supporting them and they know that somebody cares. That is the biggest thing we have found. There is a plethora of things on the internet you can look at, but someone will say, 'Lyndal, can you come and talk to us and help us through this?' That is what they want. They want that connection.

Ms McGuire: Whenever we survey people, in a nutshell the No. 1 reason people want to volunteer is the happiness factor. It shines through every time. That is why it is so important for Lois and her team to work on the organisation's capacity and capability. Like Lyndal said, if you send a 22-year-old woman to that cranky organisation that does not have a strategic plan—

Mrs Hansen: I would have said Men's Shed but I am not going to be sexist.

Ms McGuire:—is not financially managing and does not have any policy for volunteers, then what happens is that person gets burnt out and will never come back. What I like about our system is that we build the capacity and capability of the organisation so that they have alignment and a strategic plan to hopefully have a happiness factor.

That online portal tool is getting the next generation. You should watch us when we go out in public with it on an iPad. Kids are all over it like a rash. It is designed for minors as well because there is a whole process there for their guardians and parents. Those analytics in the background are basically sorting out all the things you might not be interested in and finding you a shortlist of things that you are interested in based on your availability. We also have the Next Gen Volunteering program that the team has started on with high school students to try to groom them for the opportunities of what is available. My simple answer is that it is just about happiness. You need to create happy organisations where people feel welcome, or they will go.

Mr HUTTON: Mrs Hansen, I want to go to your comment around longevity of leadership in organisations post-COVID. It is an interesting reflection that a lot of people who may have turned over in leadership roles remain static because they were just trying to hold onto something until we got out of the COVID bubble and moved beyond it. It also links to Ms McGuire's comments around happiness. We find that a lot of the leadership teams within community organisations are burnt out because they have invested so long just trying to hold it together and keep it going until someone arrives, yet the first interaction with someone may not be so positive. What work can be done in the space of supporting and reducing that burden on those people who are taking on those leadership roles within organisations to not only sustain them but prepare them for the opportunity to grow?

Mrs Hansen: Culture is the biggest thing with any organisation. Some people have established that organisation and they are going to hang onto it. I get phone calls all the time: 'I've worked with this organisation for 30 years and now somebody wants to change it and do something different,' and they are in tears and there is drama. They are really feeling it, so we need to look at the culture of the organisation. When we do our health checks, we work with the whole committee. You would all be

sitting here and we would be working as a collective, not taking one person and then expecting them to go back and influence that culture as an individual. That does not work. We need to work with the whole committee. We work with them to understand what their culture is. Perhaps sometimes we play devil's advocate and good cop, bad cop usually.

CHAIR: That is the ordained arrangement between the two of you; is that right?

Mrs Hansen: We need to make the organisation understand. We had an eisteddfod committee. People had been there for 60 years so that culture was entrenched in them. Then we had a whole group of very young vibrant women who were teaching dance, song and all the rest of it. We got them in the committee, we talked and went through our health check. There were times when the young people said, 'We can do that.' The older people were saying, 'We cannot do that.' They said, 'But we can.' We said, 'How about you let go of the reins a little bit and let them do that?' It is through a self-determination process that they actually come to an understanding, 'Wait a minute, we can let these young people do that.' A lot of the organisations that have baby boomers are still probably not using technology at all. We still have 93-year-old treasurers who are working on a handwritten ledger.

CHAIR: It seems to work alright still, doesn't it?

Mrs Hansen: When it comes to the succession plan that you mentioned before, there is no hope for a succession plan based on that 93-year-old being replaced by someone using a handwritten ledger. I am sorry, but there is no 30-, 40- or 50-year-old—let alone a 20-year-old—who is prepared to do that. So it is that culture that we need to address. During our health check where we benchmark them, if they score poorly in some of those areas—change management is an area that we assess and their problem-solving skills is an area we assess—we can make them all aware how they can improve. We give them a plan for that improvement and we ask them to come back in two years—if we find the funding—to do their assessment again in two years.

All of a sudden somebody cares. Some organisations have asked to have it done earlier than two years because they want to get better than what they had. We had a group of school teachers who are saying getting Ds and Cs was just horrendous. It works differently for all the different organisations. We have not had one where we have done a health assessment—initially people have gone, 'Oh my God. It is so overwhelming,' but then have been enthused as a collective. That is a critical aspect to having this done. Then there is a benchmark there for them to be measured against for that enthusiastic approach. At the next committee meeting, it is like: 'What does that plan say? What are we going to do? Who is going to do this?' All of a sudden we have created a different culture where people are starting to look differently at their organisation.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will go to the opposition side for questions.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: We have heard that the sessional task-based momentary volunteering is something that is needed. I am interested in your onboarding processes. We often hear that prohibitive onboarding prevents that opportunity for quick little grabs for people to look up to see what is there and offer an hour here or there. Can you talk us through how you get around that?

Mrs Hansen: Before I let the ladies do it because the technical questions will be over there.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: The vibe of it will be this side. Perfect.

Mrs Hansen: Absolutely. That is the technical side. I was smart enough to get smart people to join the organisation! The onboarding for charities, which you will hear a lot about, is completely different to the football club, so we have to be careful what we are talking about. Charities have a very complex volunteer system. They have to have volunteer managers. In a lot of cases that is their bread and butter nationally, but for the smaller—mind you, all of these small not-for-profits that are charities are the fabric of our society. They are absolutely the connection of our communities. I will let you answer in respect of the onboarding.

Ms McGuire: With the volunteer portal, the analytics are designed so that the community organisation puts their public notice up for what they are seeking. Let's say it is your local soccer club, a coach or someone for the canteen—whatever it may be—I put up my profile to say that I can tick those boxes and the analytics will match. Those prerequisites that that club could put up there might be that, yes, you need a blue card because I will be dealing with a bunch of 13-year-old boys. It might be that you need a first aid certificate. The way we have designed it is so that whatever prerequisites that club needs as a part of their volunteer management I have to tick those boxes with my blue card, my first aid certificate—whatever it might be: you imagine what they are—and those are the candidates who then can be aligned with that. Does that answer the question simply enough?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes. We often hear concerns around public liability and maintaining their insurance by having risk processes in place which means that for even a lot of smaller NFPs there needs to have been some kind of workplace health and safety onboarding for each organisation.

Ms McGuire: That is right. At the club level the organisation loads up their prerequisites as well. In order for them to be active on the portal they have to gone through the health assessment across their governance and their insurances. While they might be scoring Ds in financial management and are desperate for funding, when it comes to what the legal compliance requirements are in order for them to register on the portal and then put their tasks and activities up there, they have to load up all of their insurances for volunteers—their public liability. We cover 200 organisations and they vary from the Maritime Museum to the Men's Shed where you could chop a finger off with a bandsaw, so it is covered.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: If a person wanted to, say, do an hour's work at the Men's Shed, how do they then make sure that they have met the organisation's profile and training?

Ms McGuire: Yes, that is exactly how the analytics are. They load up that they want blue card, first aid and how to operate a bandsaw. I have ticked my boxes going through my profile set-up. Lyndal will hate this, but I call it 'Tinder for volunteering'. I have seen that as an attractive organisation. I tick the boxes of everything that they are looking for and it matches us.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: You swipe right or left, or whatever side it is, and go from there.

Ms McGuire: That is right. It then matches us. When I hop on there on a Friday afternoon, I see the things that my profile meets, so I can choose to go to the Men's Shed or the soccer club because of the skill set that I have.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: What you are saying is that it is the generic skills that can then be applied rather than a location context specific—this is where the evacuation point is.

Mrs Hansen: There will still be a one-on-one induction if you are going to work in the canteen. There will still be, 'This is how this works. Thank you for volunteering. We know you have a blue card. We know you have done this safety course. We know you have done that. Now we will give you an induction of that workplace.'

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do they register their blue card and all of that information with you or do they need to still do that?

Ms McGuire: No. It is directly with the club.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So that induction still would take place with the club?

Ms McGuire: Correct, because you have to have the human contact. Even when you are virtually volunteering, I will sign a confidentiality agreement to be handed over everything from that organisation to help them with whatever policies they need or whatever budgets.

Mrs Hansen: It is kept simple.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Perfect.

Ms McGuire: The legal obligation still resides with the club, the not-for-profit, but it is about sorting through the hundreds of people who want to volunteer to match them with their risk management profile and interest.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That is fantastic. Thank you.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I am on a quest at the moment when it comes to insurance. The Insurance Council of Australia appeared at the Gold Coast committee hearing. You have an organisation that has quite a large client base. With respect to workplace health and safety and all the other requirements we have, are you aware of any claims for indemnity insurance when it comes to these organisations? Obviously your insurance costs are increasing continuously. I am curious to know whether you are aware of anybody because it is becoming almost unaffordable for a lot of organisations.

Mrs Hansen: I am not aware of any claims over my 30 years plus.

Ms McGuire: When we work with not-for-profits in this area of insurance, this is where I spend time on their risk management profile because you are only as good as the risk that you manage for your insurance. We have found competitive pricing once they demonstrate that they have policy and they have risk management tools in place. I cannot say that it has been a huge issue, and we deal with rodeos, for goodness sake.

Mrs Hansen: It is an issue when you do not understand what you are being insured for. I would suggest after my experience out there that there are many organisations that do not understand their insurance. It does not help with the insurance organisations changing their terminology on a fairly regular basis. Now there is an associations insurance. I am just being facetious because it changes. Trying to get people to keep up-to-date with all of that is very difficult. Most of these organisations do not even comply with their leases, let alone understand their insurances. It is such a big basket of responsibility that we tend to ignore it and hope it goes away.

Ms McGuire: It is fair to say that if those high-risk organisations that are hosting high-risk events have good risk management and good policy then they are in a way better position to negotiate better insurance premiums. That is what we have experienced.

Mrs Hansen: Some organisations are choosing not to be insured now. They are taking the risk, which is a worry.

Ms PEASE: Great work. It is really interesting what you are doing. I am interested to hear about the portal—who wrote it, who owns it, who owns the intellectual property?

Ms McGuire: We do.

Mrs Hansen: We wrote it.

Ms McGuire: We did it from scratch.

Mrs Hansen: We developed it.

Ms PEASE: You developed it from scratch and you use it?

Ms McGuire: Yes, because the only thing that was available was those big recruitments—I am not going to give them advertising. You load up your resume and load up your cover letter. We were actually in Canberra at the volunteer conference for Australia wandering along. This young man came up beside me. I introduced myself and we were talking about it. He said, 'Oh, volunteering? That's something that my mother does.' I thought, 'Okay. I'm old enough to be your mother.' I am thinking I need to take this on board. Then we sat in all of these conferences listening to all these big charities that have volunteer managers and all these processes and systems. I am a systems process strategist.

We were sitting at dinner and I was just really mulling over it. Lyndal was doing her emotional mulling: 'These young ones are not coming through to be presidents, secretaries and treasurers.' It just came up and we just said: 'No. It needs to be task-based. We need to flip this whole ecosystem on its head and I need to digitise it'—because Lyndal is not into digitising. I said, 'I need to digitise it so it can be on your mobile phone. If you are rushed and you are sitting on a plane waiting to board or whatever, you can look up where you might go and volunteer on Saturday morning.' That is why we have designed it the way that we have designed it. If you can get the people in the door, they might find the place happy enough that they want to be the future secretary or treasurer or president.

Mrs Hansen: It can be multi-tenanted so we can have it for different locations.

Ms PEASE: Given that you own the intellectual property, is there any interest in perhaps sharing that with other organisations or selling it?

Ms McGuire: That is where we want to head. To me, the digitisation is the tool. In person is needed because eight out of 10 people who walk in the front door of Lois's office are in tears because there is no strategy, the financial management is poor and the report card is bad, so they need patching up. The other part to this is to be able to provide that electronic tool to everybody because it is the miners, it is the people who are under 18—they want to volunteer without going through this massive process—and it is also multicultural.

Ms PEASE: Given you have created an organisation—NFP—doing all of that, who do you see would be best positioned to manage or oversee that? Should it be led by government?

Mrs Hansen: The portal or volunteering?

Ms PEASE: If it was to be replicated and used.

Mrs Hansen: There are so many examples where this has not worked. There are so many examples where we want to put a bandaid on something, so we contribute to it. This is a complex sector. It is not an easy sector. Otherwise we would have had the answers before now. It is really complex. What we have to do is work out where it is going to in the first instance.

We had an example a couple of years back where the state government at the time wanted to help, so they threw some money at it. They put people in neighbourhood centres for one year. Can I tell you that that is the greatest waste of money, and it makes me feel so sad that we have wasted

that money. One year will not be enough for a person to be able to develop relationships and sort out the systems. They were put into neighbourhood centres who did not have the resources to support it. After the one in Gladstone finished up, we employed that person to continue the work that they were doing because I did not want to see that money wasted. We probably did not need a new person at the time, but I could not bear the thought of why are we just trying to bandaid this? The best solution for me is to set some little ones up that you might know that are in—what was it?

Ms McGuire: The digital solution and the people presence could go to the areas of great need like the government funding that is Stronger Places, Stronger People. Basically, the digital tool is the way to make this way broader, but it needs the people to do the health check and to work with the community organisation. You cannot have one without the other.

Lyndal talks about it being multi-tenanted. We could set up all seven of your electorates with a person who is present to work with the organisation to do their health assessment. It gets loaded into the portal so they can see their profile and see: 'We did that in year 1. In two years time we graded better. Two years after that we graded even better. Here is our action plan of our top 5 items across those years. Here are our activities and tasks that we have matched with volunteers.' They would be able to see their own profile as to their growth.

For the volunteers in each of your communities, they can then lean into it, load up their profiles and, just like Tinder, be matched up with what their possibilities are. It takes a human and that digital solution. The digital solution is there, but it just needs funding to expand and, of course, people cost money for you to have some kind of a presence beyond 12 months at a neighbourhood centre as a volunteer coordinator.

Mrs Hansen: Let's set up some real ones, resource it properly, see how it works and then build off that. If this is about leaning and continual learning from our leaders in our state. Honestly, it is what I was saying about repeating the mistakes. Let's just set it up, let's learn from it, let's set the benchmarks in there, let's understand what we are doing strategically and then build on it rather than trying a scatter-gun approach, putting it all out there and everybody wins a prize, because that does not work.

Another thing that does not work—and I have seen so much money go into this area—is where we run workshops and we think, 'Yes! We're going to get all those people in. Twenty people to run a workshop. I'm going to teach them about governance. They're going to walk away and improve their organisation. Fantastic!' It does not work. We are putting so much effort into that type of process that, again, is not measurable. We do not understand how that works. That person has to go back and influence all of you who are probably not my supporters because I have gone out to try to train myself up and you are going, 'We're all fine the way we are.' It is things like that. The reason that does not work is that it is just hit and miss. It does not have the bigger longer impact that we need it to have.

CHAIR: We have to wind up your session now. We did give you an extra 20 minutes and I think it was time very well spent with you. I am sure that the committee is very impressed. You are experienced, passionate and articulate, and those qualities have not passed unnoticed. Thank you very much for your appearance before us. We look forward to providing our report to parliament. All those who have submitted will receive a copy of the report when it is done in about a month's time. Thank you again, NFP House in Gladstone. I am sure I will come across you again in some way, shape or form.

Mrs Hansen: We would love to come to all of your locations.

CHAIR: Today is the last one.

CREES, Ms Dana, Secretary, Keppel Coast Arts

SMITH, Ms Leanne, President, Keppel Coast Arts

CHAIR: I now welcome to the table representatives of Keppel Coast Arts. Thank you very much for coming to Rockhampton today to participate in this inquiry. Would you like to make an opening statement, after which we will have questions for you?

Ms Smith: First, I commend the previous witness. I listened to her and that was really valuable.

CHAIR: Hear, hear! I saw a lot of heads nodding in the background when they were speaking.

Ms Smith: Keppel Coast Arts Council is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit community organisation based on the Capricorn Coast. At the core of everything we do is the goal of strengthening the cultural and artistic life of our local community. Our mission is to encourage diverse artistic expression, to provide opportunities for participation in cultural experiences and to act as an enabler for a dynamic, inclusive and vibrant community.

We have a successful track record over the past 25 years. Our management committee at the moment comprises nine positions and we have eight of them filled. One of our committee members decided to head off to the Torres Strait for 12 months to work. We run core activities and we support a range of subcommittees. The core activities we focus on include our Fig Tree Creek Markets. We run 12 events each year, hosting between 80 and 120 stalls, focusing on stallholders who make and sell unique, handmade, locally designed, homemade and homegrown products. We encourage an atmosphere that celebrates creativity, so we engage local musicians and pay them to perform. We often provide art workshops as well and pay the artists. The proceeds from those stall fees give us an independent income stream that is not grant dependent. It is completely at our discretion how we spend that money and it has been an absolute gift to our organisation.

We also host an annual event called the Creek Sessions, which is an opportunity to showcase local original performers and materials—so no covers, no songs you have heard before, no poems that have come out of other people's books. It is all original material. We have found that those two core activities have actually been really successful in helping build the development of local businesses. Many stalls that start at the markets now have shopfronts in our main street and are successful businesses. Many of our local performers who started trialling their own performance material now have regular work supporting touring artists and have performed in other parts of Queensland and interstate. It is a nurturing sort of environment.

As well as those core activities, we have 10 subcommittees. I think the subcommittees are what I would really like to focus on explaining to you today, if I can take a moment. We discovered 13 years ago, by reading our model rules that an organisation could have a subcommittee that could have its own focus. We built on that structure and we have developed 10 subcommittees, which is a bit scary.

We have a ukulele movement. They jam 96 times a year, they perform 15 times a year and they have two meetings a year. We provide all their governance. They do not have to have their own management committee. They do not have a president, a secretary and a treasurer. We manage their funding, we provide their insurance, we give them guidance on how to do what they do and they go off and do it. We have a camera club. They meet 20 times a year. They workshop twice a year and they have two field trips that they organise each year. We have a blues music club that has 11 jams a year and does an average of three performances.

We have a writers' festival. The Capricorn Coast Writers Festival meets six times a year, has four workshops a year and runs an event every second year. We have the Sandy Krak Reef Festival, which is a biennial youth focused event. It intertwines art, music, culture, sustainability and looking after the reef. They have 18 meetings and one event every second year. They focus on a wide range of genres of music and they attract a lot of younger people who are a little bit alternative perhaps in their outlook but passionate and really creative to the core. We have a group of practising artists called Latitude 23, who hold four exhibitions a year. They have a couple of social get-togethers, planning workshops and a retreat.

We have the Fig Tree Galleries and workshop space, which is a space owned by the Livingstone Shire Council, which was a little bit of a white elephant, to be honest, for a couple of years after it was built. It sat there empty. It was not used. No-one on council had the training, the curatorial skills or really the understanding to bring the gallery to life. In 2023, we approached our local council and asked them if they would consider letting us manage it. It was a really steep learning curve for us, but I can honestly say that I think we have given our local council the best bang for their buck that

they could have possibly expected for their investment. They fund us to the tune of \$50,000 a year. We have 13 exhibitions, 13 opening events, about four meetings of a subcommittee and a couple of workshops. The gallery is open seven days a week and it is solidly booked through until 2027. It has been great. We are also selling about 30 per cent of the work that is exhibited in the gallery, so it has been really successful. I do not think council could have done that as well as we have been able to do it.

I cannot forget CQYTE, the Central Queensland Youth Touring Ensemble. They are our most recent subcommittee. They joined us last year and promptly took 120 young musicians on tour to Japan for two weeks. They are a very brave subcommittee. That was very successful. They are now planning a national tour for 2026 before they head overseas again in alternate years.

For all of those committees, we provide them with the governance, their insurance and the experience that we have in grant writing and how best to organise and manage events. In a regional community like the Capricorn Coast, we only need one management committee—so that is one president, one secretary and one treasurer—instead of 10 of those. In a small community, you are not likely to get those 10 people in 10 different organisations. We have become kind of an umbrella and a bit of an enabler.

I know I have given you a lot of numbers there but I would like to tie that together. When we recently put in our request for insurance coverage, we found that we were actually offering 623 activities in a year—that is, 12 per week—for a total number of event hours of 4,957, which is like a 100 hours a week of events and activities. We are really proud of it. We are totally volunteer run. We get very little funding, apart from a few RADF grants from our local council.

At the moment we are a bit disheartened because we just put many hundreds of hours into an application for organisational funding through Arts Queensland and we were not successful. We did not think we would be successful because we really did not tick any of their boxes, but I think Arts Queensland needs new boxes to be ticked. It was an arduous process for a group of volunteers—hours and hours and hours of our time and the feedback that we got was basically, 'You need to do more.'

CHAIR: That was the extent of the feedback, was it?

Ms Smith: Yes. They felt that our risk management process was not in-depth enough. We did the best we could as a group of volunteers.

CHAIR: Maybe they should speak to NFP House.

Ms Smith: The other advice that they had for us was that they would like to see the activities of our subcommittees innovate and do more things and to be more cohesive across the subcommittees, which we would like to see too but, as volunteers, really?

Ms Crees: That particular grant, as I was working through it, was written for Opera Queensland. It asked how many members were in our ensemble.

Ms Smith: How many paid employees do we have?

Ms Crees: It was not appropriate for us.

Ms Smith: It would not accept 'zero'.

Mr HEALY: It is hard telling the truth, Leanne, isn't it, sometimes?

Ms Smith: I love telling the truth. If you want feedback, we have had very little engagement with Arts Queensland over 20 years. There was a little bit. I find that any funding that we have been able to get is very sticky. We end up having to devote a lot of it to reporting back to Arts Queensland. If we had been successful with this most recent funding, we would have found that a large percentage of it went back to telling Arts Queensland how good they were for giving us the money. Did I say that?

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will go to questions now. Deputy Chair, would you like to ask a question?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes, I would. I am really excited by your umbrella approach with your multiple subcommittees sitting underneath. I can see the real value that that would bring. I have some questions about governance in terms of bank accounts. Does each subcommittee have a separate bank account?

Ms Smith: No. We have one bank account. We pay a bookkeeper. We have fairly robust processes. We need to because we are looking after money for 10 different groups, but we manage it all through Xero with a great bookkeeper and with a lot of work from Dana supporting our treasurer. We track each subcommittee's activities through one bank account.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: That sounds like it would be a lot of work for the executive with so many activities.

Ms Smith: It is, yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I can imagine all of the risk assessments for each activity to meet insurance needs et cetera.

Ms Smith: It is not sustainable as it is which is why we went down the road of trying to procure some funding to engage an administrative position. We will keep trying.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is certainly an exciting idea in essentially auspicing a group of organisations so that then removes that onerous insurance cost. Also, we know across the board that it is significantly difficult to attract executives. By limiting the number of executives that you need and those on-costs with each committee, there is certainly a big saving there, and it means that they can just go about carrying on their activities.

Ms Smith: They just go and do their thing and it has created a great vibe.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: If you had a paid administrative position that could oversee that, it could then alleviate it and allow those 10 committees to be able function? Instead of one administrative position per not-for-profit organisation, you have one for an umbrella association pocketing a lot underneath them. That is very exciting. Thank you for that.

Ms Smith: I think it is a model that we have proved works. It is just a model that does not work as efficiently as it could purely as a voluntary one. It needs that support.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes.

Ms Crees: It was a bit too popular.

Ms Smith: Yes, a bit too popular.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes, it sounds like it.

Ms Crees: We got to 10 and went, 'Oh my!'

Ms Smith: We cannot do any more, yes.

Ms Crees: For me the beauty of the model is it unlocks scale. Each individual group could not have achieved what they have achieved if they all had to then use some of their resources for management. The umbrella model is awesome, but I think we need a level of management—board management—and then the subcommittees.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It does sound like that if you had some of the skills and capacity building and moving up the report card, so to speak, your opportunity to attract funding would be significantly higher given the number of committees and the type of great work with what is a very needed arts sector, so I wish you luck with that.

Ms Smith: I think the other option that we are exploring is, as I say, over the years we have had very little support from government sources. We have self-funded a lot of our activities through our market's income, and we possibly will just look at expanding that.

CHAIR: You seem to rejoice in the independence that that source gives you.

Ms Smith: The flexibility that our model gives us means that we can respond really quickly to opportunities, and that is a gift. In a local community it is a gift to be able to say, 'Hell, yes, we can do that,' not, 'Let's go off and check with the state government if we can find some funds,' or 'Let's try and track a councillor down who might have a few dollars in the budget.' We can just say, 'Yes, we can do that.'

CHAIR: We are almost at the end of time. We have time for one more question and I wondered whether the member for Keppel, as the local MP, has a question.

Mr HUTTON: I definitely do, and I would like to acknowledge the amazing work that KCA do. I met Leanne close to 20 years ago and she said, 'I'm not an artist but I am an arts worker,' and what we see with the work of KCA is that they are creating the opportunity for our arts community of artists, arts workers and arts appreciators such as myself who have no creative skills. It allows our community to grow and to flourish, so I am really grateful for that.

Leanne and Dana, what you have expressed in terms of the umbrella organisation is the way that it allows it to be responsive to community need but also responsive to community growth in different art forms over time, but do you think the professionalisation of your model—you are getting to a point now where you have an accountant who is providing the accountancy work, and I know that it is taking more and more of Dana's time that could otherwise be spent in her consultancy and

business work space—reaches a point where you have any concerns around the loss of the integrity of what you are trying to achieve, or is this the next opportunity for you to have that flexibility and the resilience?

Ms Smith: That is a really good question and it is honestly one that keeps me awake sometimes at night just wondering. I think when you scale anything you lose some of that flexibility. It is probably a sacrifice that needs to be made because I think the benefits of this model outweigh that. I would hope that KCA will always be able to maintain an independent income stream that gives us that little bit of ability to respond in a timely manner when—

Mr HUTTON: Your philosophy from the very start has been around basically reducing the burden of governance so that creative people can create and also so that these groups can exist and provide for community exposure experiences et cetera. In terms of the governance that you have attached, how many hours of management—I know you have some figures around the outputs that you are providing to the community—is actually being put on to the shoulders of what is a very small working committee of hardworking volunteers?

Ms Smith: I would expect at the moment it would be for probably three of our committee members a total of 25 hours a week.

CHAIR: We have one very brief question from the member for Lytton.

Ms PEASE: Yes. Thank you so much for coming and for the great work that you do. You talked about the Livingstone Shire Council giving you the gallery space. I have a community centre owned by the Brisbane City Council. They charge our local arts group to make use of that space. Do you get charged?

Ms Smith: No, we get paid.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: They give you \$50,000.

Ms PEASE: I know that, Margie, but I am just wanting to hear the answer.

Ms Smith: Yes, so we approached council—

Ms PEASE: And they give you that space and they actually fund it?

Ms Smith: We had to beg for it. We had to say, 'It's empty at the moment. It's been empty for three months. What are you going to do? We've got an idea. Will you give it to us for 12 months? Will you fund a curator and will you let us work out a model that might work and at the end of 12 months we'll come back to you and we'll say what we think will work?'

Ms PEASE: How wonderful that the Livingstone council has done that, because that does not happen with the Brisbane City Council.

Ms Smith: No.

Ms PEASE: They charge the local arts foundation to use their space.

Ms Smith: Yes, and at the end of it we have been able to help them understand that we are not a community group that is hiring one of their spaces for our own benefit. We are providing a service that council is not able to provide for the whole community, so we are managing the space for them.

Ms PEASE: Well done.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Smith and Ms Crees, for your appearance today. You are another very impressive set of witnesses and you segued very well from the presentation by NFP House, so thank you very much for that.

SHIPWAY, Ms Lou, Volunteer

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you very much for coming before us today. I ask you to state the capacity in which you appear here today and invite you to make a brief statement before we ask you some questions please.

Ms Shipway: Good morning, everybody. I want to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to share with you my historical and ongoing journey as a volunteer and a community advocate. It is both an honour and a privilege to share insights, celebrate achievements and consider the future of volunteering in our vibrant and diverse communities.

I first started volunteering in the Livingstone LGA around 2002 when I was approached by a friend who was involved with the Village Festival. The festival was in its second year and they were desperately looking for a volunteer stall coordinator. I had no idea or previous experience in any event management role. I had attended the event the previous year and I loved it, and I still do and still wish it was the way it was but, anyway, I digress. I was also lucky enough to know many of the volunteers who were already involved in the event and, after being assured that I would be supported by others, I took the role on. I stayed in that position for a few years and I then moved on to the position of secretary.

Shortly thereafter I was approached by the Capricorn Coast Community Events Committee. This group hosts Carols by the Beach and the Great Australia Day Beach Party annually. I stayed with Capricorn Coast Community Events for 13 years and in that time I held the roles of stall coordinator, secretary and site manager, and the majority of that time I undertook those roles concurrently. I was also a member and the president of the Capricorn Coast Forum Communicators and I was also a founding member and the founding president of the Keppel Coast Camera Club.

While I was a part of Capricorn Coast Community Events I was approached by the Yeppoon Lions Club to become a member and to take on the role as a stall coordinator for their annual Pinefest event undertaken by a subcommittee being made up of Lions members and interested members of the community. After the first year I then accepted the role as chairperson as well as the stall coordinator and site manager positions. I was also the second vice-president of Lions and I was a member for approximately four years. For a few years I was the secretary, bar attendant and event coordinator for the Yeppoon RSL Sub Branch organising Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and their 100th anniversary dinner, as well as donating my time on a weekly basis. Since 2024 I have been the secretary for the Yeppoon & District Show Society.

As you can see, most of my Queensland volunteering experience has been in event management and it is something that I obviously enjoy. For me volunteering is not simply an act of kindness but the very heartbeat of our communities. Whether you are in the bustling streets of Brisbane or whether you are in a remote or a rural setting, volunteers are the forefront of creating change, fostering inclusion and nurturing resilience. They are the ones who step forward in the moments of crisis and in the times of celebration, striving to weave the social fabric which binds us all together.

Volunteering is a two-way street. While communities benefit from the energy and the dedication of volunteers, the volunteers themselves are transformed in many ways. Being a volunteer fosters a sense of belonging, purpose, skills development and social interaction. Volunteerism is a powerful tool for community development, social inclusion and personal fulfilment. Unfortunately, volunteerism does not come without hurdles and barriers, and in my 20-odd years as a volunteer I have jumped many and stumbled at a few. I find that volunteers are often easy targets to be bullied and, in my experience, regularly bear the brunt of disempowering behaviour and misogyny. Some people feel intimidated by those who are perceived to be people in power. Let us remember that volunteers are not paid for their time—they willingly give—nor are they often paid for the fuel used to transport them so they can fulfil their role and, more often than not, they have to supply and pay for their own uniform. In essence, volunteers pay to be a volunteer.

It is often governing bodies that, due to their lack of understanding or experience in the volunteer or community sectors, seem to want to manage volunteers by exclusion. By making the systems too difficult for volunteers or groups to comprehend, it gets too challenging and people give up. This then leads to that volunteer group or that volunteer closing their books and no longer being part of the community fabric that they have worked so hard to create. In my event management experience I have been pressured to cancel or postpone an event due to a predicted inclement weather event three or four days prior to an event. What is not understood is the group of volunteers have given their all for perhaps six months to make the event happen and then be urged to shut it down because it might rain in four days time. Ninety-nine per cent of the time, the event has gone ahead as scheduled.

Funding for events through local authorities is now also very bureaucratic. The funding is now completed through a grant portal instead of just a letter of application. While I understand there is a need for governance and compliance, there needs to be something more than the one-size-fits-all approach. For example, while applying for funding for the Yeppoon show last year, one of the questions asked was: can you please tell us more about your event? This year our event celebrated its 70th anniversary. In reality, everyone knows what the event is about because it is part of our community cohesion. More often than not, a simple and well-thought-out MOU would suffice and save everybody the precious time and money that has gone into that grant process.

Volunteers should be equally respected regardless of whether the person you are working alongside is getting paid to assist you or not. It is often hard for a paid employee to understand that you, the volunteer, have the intellectual ability to fulfil the volunteer role you have undertaken, but you are limited by the support that is offered. Volunteers do not have an endless budget, admin support, personal development. We do not have decent training opportunities and nor do we have legal advice at our fingertips.

Local economies are significantly boosted by volunteer organisations as well as the volunteers themselves. Without those groups and individuals there would be no annual shows, beach parties, sporting carnivals, eisteddfods, fetes or markets. There would certainly be no free-to-attend community events if the volunteers did not step up to the plate. It is vitally important to set the structure and the level of appreciation for the current volunteers so that we can encourage young people to get involved themselves and take the mantle off the current aging population of our volunteers and so that we can move into the future. Perhaps it is time to create a volunteer respect act or an all-encompassing body to empower and enhance volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism.

Volunteers often have a paid job as well as their nonpaid volunteer role. I believe it is time the old, 'Ah, you're just a volunteer,' is put to bed. It is time that volunteers are enabled to be the best they can possibly be by empowering them, entrusting them and supporting them. Let us continue to nurture a culture where giving, sharing and helping are woven into our identity. We must invest in our volunteers and in the organisations that support them. We must celebrate their achievements and learn from their challenges. Above all, we must ensure that every Queenslanders, regardless of age, background or circumstance, has the opportunity to participate in this grand and fulfilling tradition with great esteem and respect. I believe it is vital we address these challenges with inspiration and determination, and we must ensure that volunteering remains accessible, inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of all of our communities. I would further like to recommend partnerships with universities, LTOs and the like to engage with volunteer groups to assist with data collection to enhance our ability to apply for funding opportunities.

I absolutely love what I do and I appreciate the time offered to me today to share with you my experiences. I hope that my feedback and vision will offer a positive step and direction for the future of all volunteers and the very integrity of our community structure and volunteerism as a whole in not just Queensland but across our diverse nation.

CHAIR: I think the room is very impressed by your contribution.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: What you read out then is an encapsulation of what we have been hearing across the state. It is the same messages coming through. If you were to identify one key thing that you hope will come out of this inquiry, what would that be?

Ms Shipway: I think we really need more support from government, particularly probably local government. It is very hard to be put with people whose first answer to everything is 'no'.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: What would that support look like? What kind of support?

Ms Shipway: I am the secretary of the show society, although I have only been there 10 minutes. I have done one show. Our president is 87 years young and I say that because he is a remarkable man. We lease the showground off the council but we own the buildings. It is their asset but the buildings are our assets. We get absolutely no help whatsoever from anybody to maintain those buildings. We have been through cyclones, rain events, hailstorms. If we cannot get the insurance money, we need to get money to fix the rusting roller doors or all of the leaking taps. There is one council building on the showground that has a men's urinal and the cistern is broken. They will not come and fix it because under the lease it is our responsibility. It is things like that we could really use a hand with.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Would you like to see legislative changes around what local governments can be responsible for or can charge to organisations that are leasing their land?

Ms Shipway: I think we need a little bit more in-kind assistance and that probably goes for all sorts of things. When you get in-kind funding from council there is a limit, but really there does not have to be. It could be made that they have to go and help do this. There are probably so many things. That is just one thing. It is a tough gig sometimes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is important to hear. Sometimes the first things that come to mind can be something that is important for us to hear. Thank you for that.

Ms Shipway: There are other things I have done such as the traffic management plan. The state government of the day—and I do not remember the year because it is many traffic management plans ago—changed the legislation so that a council worker could no longer do that because of the level of qualification that they had. We then have to seek outside TMP staff, and that costs us, the community. We have no money. We are getting money because volunteers are raising money. We then have to go and pay thousands of dollars for a qualified person to come and deliver that. We have to have the TMP. We have to close the road because council said we had to do it. Things like that are really frustrating when you go to the support workers at council.

Mr HUTTON: I know you could hear the spirit of Lou at 4 am on Australia Day when she is there standing in the rain, often in cyclonic conditions, putting up the stalls. That takes a lot of effort. Lou, from your time with the Capricorn Coast events group, can you talk about the event management framework they use in terms of the development of the manual and the opportunity that provided? I think it is an interesting one to share.

Ms Shipway: It was before my time that that came into place. We were given a grant and somebody came in and did up a workbook on how to run an event on the beachfront—what you needed to have to do that, how to set up the stalls, how to get the stage going, the government requirements and all that kind of thing. I guess it was a framework that anybody running an event could slip into. You just needed to change the name, I suppose. It was quite helpful for someone like me who had never really done anything like that. I had done the Village Festival but it was a completely different thing as that ran over three days, whereas this was fitting everything into a 16-hour day event.

Ms PEASE: With regard to your commentary around assets and the show society in particular, that is a common problem. I am from Brisbane. The Brisbane City Council owns the asset, yet it costs the sporting club a fortune, particularly if the building is heritage listed. That would be a very big cost for your show society.

Ms Shipway: It is a huge cost and where does that money come from? We are not down the street selling tickets. We are not down the pub on Friday nights selling meat trays or anything like that. We have tenants. We have sublessees in our buildings so we get income from that, and I guess that goes into the maintenance of the buildings. The income that we get from the show goes back into the show because they are really costly to run, particularly when you live in a regional area like we do. We do not have entertainers on our doorstep like you have down in Brisbane or on the Sunshine Coast. The entertainers all live down there. You either have to fly them here or they have an eight-hour trip up and an eight-hour trip back. It is not usually one person; there will be a couple of them. We have to put them up for the night. All of these other things come into play.

Ms PEASE: At the end of the day, given all of the money that you invest in that asset, if you walk away then the organisation does not get the money back.

Ms Shipway: That is right.

Ms PEASE: It is now a highly maintained asset that belongs to the council. Thanks for everything that you do, by the way. Good on you.

Ms Shipway: My pleasure.

Ms PEASE: Do you have a paid job?

Ms Shipway: No.

Ms PEASE: You would not have time.

Ms Shipway: I do not have time. Just to give you an idea, at Pinefest I was extremely busy. In the lead-up to Pinefest I was doing 60-hour weeks. In the lead-up to the show I was doing 50-hour weeks and that was just in the show office itself. That was not the phone calls and the computer work I did once I got home.

Ms PEASE: You must have a good supportive family.

Ms Shipway: At one stage my husband was a FIFO or a DIDO worker, which was fantastic. He is now retired, which has possibly made that a little bit more difficult. He has been a great support. He is a tradie and he comes in and gives a hand where needed.

Ms PEASE: Thank him for us.

Ms Shipway: I will do that for sure.

CHAIR: I am sure the whole committee echoes those sentiments. Ms Shipway, thank you very much for your appearance today. We really appreciate that. I now call forward members of the public who have registered to appear today.

TURNER, Mr Eric, Private capacity

CHAIR: Mr Turner, I understand you have come from Biloela, which is a fair way.

Mr Turner: I came down from Biloela. I work at the mines. The biggest thing about being a volunteer with the SES and the bush fire brigade is that if we get a big disaster then we have to take our holidays or sick leave, whereas permanent workers get two weeks a year for it. They get two weeks a year for the Defence Force and jury service. Why can't we get that so we do not have to use our holidays?

I have been all up and down the coast for cyclones, floods and bushfires. I have even been to New South Wales. I had to take my holidays. When I want a holiday I have none—or sick leave. We are losing volunteers. I have spoken to a few members around mining and they could not go because they are labour hire. I have been fighting for it for a while, trying to get paid to go away to help the public out. My biggest concern is getting paid. Is there some reason why, for labour hire workers, it isn't a mandatory thing?

CHAIR: How long has your labour hire arrangement stood between you and being able to volunteer effectively? Is it something that has been going on for a long time?

Mr Turner: A long time. I started in the Burdekin in the SES. I have to take all my holidays when I am on labour hire, whereas permanent workers get two weeks a year to go away. It just does not seem fair because I am out there saving lives and property but I have to use my holidays. If I get sick or something, I cannot support my family. That is my biggest argument on the matter. If there is some way someone can step up and do something about that, it would be appreciated. I know a few fellows who could not leave their jobs to go to Brisbane or Grantham or anywhere. I have been to cyclones Larry, Yasi, Debbie and bushfires in New South Wales. I had to use up all my holidays just to go and volunteer. That is where we are losing members. This needs to be addressed. Put it in legislation for all labour hire and contract workers. That is what I came here to talk about.

CHAIR: Thank you. Are you happy to take some questions from the committee, Mr Turner?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Mr Turner, thank you for volunteering and for your help during those times of disaster and need. I really appreciate the time that you offer. I am sorry to hear that you need to do that at an additional cost to you, which is not the case for permanent employees. I understand, from what you are saying, that your concerns are around the working conditions and arrangements that a volunteer who is a labour hire worker has compared to a permanent employee. Would that be right?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: You have a lot of concerns about those working conditions, particularly the impact and the impost, as it means that you cannot engage in volunteering to the same capacity or it costs you significantly more to do so than a paid employee?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So you would like to see better working conditions for labour hire employees?

Mr Turner: Yes, labour hire and contract because they just brought out the same job, same pay. When I fronted the CFMEU about it, they did not want to really know about it. I pay \$2,300 a year and they are not going to stand beside me.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is really about those working conditions, wanting to make sure that there is increased improvement and support for working conditions if you are employed under a labour hire arrangement?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So that you can have the same kind of working conditions that are offered to people who have a permanent contract?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you have any kind of permanent arrangement within the labour hire company themselves?

Mr Turner: No, because when I—

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is purely just casual or contract based?

Mr Turner: Yes. When I rang Workpac, they said, 'You have to take your holidays. We can't do anything about it.' It does not seem fair.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: You do not get paid holidays being casual? Do you have any paid holiday arrangement?

Mr Turner: Now I do, but that is why I got a new—

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: But they will not allocate that to you for the purposes of volunteering?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for that. I am sorry to hear that you are disadvantaged in such a contrasting way for your volunteering, which is just as valuable as the work and volunteering that people do in paid employment. I would really like to see that those conditions could be more equal. Thank you for that contribution.

Mr Turner: Yes. If I get called in Bilo for grassfires or whatever, I get backup of the red trucks and I get paid. I have to swipe off, ring Workpac and say, 'I'm going to a callout.' They send an email and I get paid. What is the difference between me getting paid from there than going to Brisbane or Sydney?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Turner: That is my biggest argument I have been having for a while. It is good to come in here and talk to you about it, and you can put an opinion on it later on.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for that. It is a perspective we have not had directly before, so we really appreciate you appearing here and giving us that additional perspective. Thank you again for your service.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Turner. We are short of time. We only have five-minute blocks for the individuals coming before us from now on. If you wouldn't mind hanging around, we can have a yarn with you over a cup of tea at the end of the proceedings. Thank you very much for coming all this way. We came by road from Emerald yesterday, so you have made a real trip and we thank you for it, Mr Turner.

MUSCAT, Mr Johnny, Private capacity

CHAIR: I now welcome Mr Johnny Muscat to the table. Thank you very much for coming before us today. I invite you to make a short opening statement and then we will have some questions for you.

Mr Muscat: I have been a Rural Fire Service volunteer for 35 years. I live on a cane farm, so I have a fair bit of experience with the fire side of things. I have been part of the Eton Management Committee for 20 years, I have been chair of that committee for 15 years, I have been a first officer for 18 years with our brigade, I have been a fire warden for 20 years, and I am a two-year representative for RFBAQ. So I have been around for a long time.

What is concerning me greatly is the new uplift that happened in July last year. The biggest problem I see with that is there has been no consultation with volunteers. It has been rammed down volunteers' throats. Volunteers are not happy out there at the moment. I am getting phone calls every week as the RFBAQ rep of people wanting to resign, and it is a shame because such a great organisation is going to go down the gurgler if we are not very careful. One of the things they have not consulted with is the boundary issues in the brigades. I live just outside of Eton, and five minutes up the road belongs to Emerald. It is not working. People are very unhappy. The blue cards cause a lot of issues. A lot of experience has just disappeared.

Some of the other issues we have involve staffing. There is a lack of staff in regional areas. People in Brisbane who have been employed at Kedron with very little experience and then trying to tell experienced people what to do is causing a lot of unhappiness. The Mackay office has only recently been filled with the number of people it should have in it, but we have been short-staffed in there for about five years. It is appalling to see what is happening.

With regard to training, since the uplift, if we want to do training, we have to go to Townsville. It is just not on. We are volunteers. For a young person to join my brigade, he has to do extensive training. We used to be able to do it on a weekend, whereas now it is several weekends long. All it is doing is chasing more and more volunteers away, and nobody is replacing them.

In relation to the uplift, as far as I am concerned, we are going backwards. It was a great thing when it was introduced to us, but it has not followed the protocol they told us. I have a lot of questions in that area.

That is all. I wanted to make you aware that there are big issues with volunteers. I get around all over Queensland and everybody is in the same boat. I know the people in the higher-up positions say, 'Oh, no, there are no problems,' but there are a lot of problems out there, and if they are not fixed shortly, we will not need to worry about volunteers. There is one thing to remember: we volunteer our time, but we can un-volunteer it just as quickly.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Muscat. You have echoed concerns expressed by other rural firefighters we have come across in the course of our hearing. It is very good of you to come before us today and I thank you for your time.

McLACHLAN, Mr Mark, Private capacity

CHAIR: I now welcome Mr Mark McLachlan. We thank you for coming before us today. As you can see, time is limited. We need to wrap up at 12 o'clock. I invite you to make a brief opening statement and the committee may have some questions for you.

Mr McLachlan: I prepared 15 minutes worth of notes, so I am sorry.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Perhaps he could table them.

Mr McLachlan: I was not made aware until a couple of days ago that I could apply to make a full submission, but I did yesterday.

CHAIR: Is leave granted to table Mr McLachlan's material? Leave is granted provisionally, as long as it complies with standing orders, and I am sure it will. If you would just like to give us a summary and we will take on board what you are tabling with the inquiry.

Mr McLachlan: I will try to be as quick as I can. Thank you for the opportunity. I hope I can add some value to the discussion. I come from a small community in Central Queensland which has a population of about 300. It is an interesting community because it demonstrates such a high level of volunteer commitment: two rural fire brigades, three community organisations which might be termed progress associations, the CWA, historical museum and organisation, community built and operated accommodation and an entertainment centre, two schools with P&Cs, two churches and so on. We have a rail trail which runs straight through the centre of the valley and down onto Gayndah. I would like to talk a bit about that if I can.

CHAIR: Please, be my guest.

Mr McLachlan: That rail trail is unique. I moved a motion that we try to operate the old rail corridor as a bike-riding, horse-riding and walking trail at a public meeting of 75 people in Mungungo. I was chair of the organisation for the first five years. I only mention that because it is key to how community organisations work in that area. An interesting thing is that we work with a lot of little organisations along the trail—I am not in the organisation now; I have retired—and we struck a Rotary Club. We said, 'Would you like to come and work with us on the rail trail?' They said, 'Yep, we would love to.' 'Listen, what about seeking some funding for this part of the work?' 'We don't do that. We don't seek funding. If we want to do something, we raise our own funds.' It is old-fashioned.

As a very young person, I was grabbed by the chair of our UGA branch, a precursor to AgForce, to stand for chair at the next meeting. I was literally a boy among adults, but I went and got some training. That is the essence of my submission. I believe the way volunteering is organised in Queensland is upside down. There are little, very effective organisations in the Boyne Valley. Those three community halls provide those halls at no cost to any other organisation in the valley. The toilets are open and provided to the public year-round. Council gives us some help for funding the cleaning. We maintain them. We build them. They are absolutely first quality. There is an entertainment and accommodation centre there that I worked on for 10 years. The toilet and shower facilities can run 1,000 people for over three days. They hold a concert there each year that brings in up to 400 caravans. It is all self-done. The historical cottage is a full museum. It is in immaculate condition—the building, the organisation and the way everything is recorded.

There are a lot of people on the same committees, but there are a lot of different people on different committees. It is a deeply embedded culture to do it yourself, to run your own organisation. It comes from older generations who knew that, if they did not do it, nobody would.

I have to skip over, I am sorry. One of the major problems with volunteering today is that so many people just have no knowledge at all about running a meeting or having the confidence at a meeting to be able to speak up from the floor of the meeting. The reason those local organisations in that valley are so effective is that a lot of the kids who were educated there grew up there and still live there, and they were trained at primary school in meeting procedure. Ours was a big club and we had elections and we had meetings, and we were taught meeting procedure. I have chaired many organisations across a wide variety of themes and, when the management committee thinks that they govern an association, volunteers leave. The key is that the membership of the organisation runs and owns, and the management committee serves the volunteers.

I am going to skip over this. I am just going to speak. If I read this, it will take too long. I am taking too long anyway. I have done a lot of reading since looking at this. I was fascinated by the submissions to the committee from the peak bodies. Submission after submission after submission of, 'Fund me, please.' Those peak bodies have the expertise and the paid people to do that. Small organisations do not. The system is not working. It is top down; it needs to be bottom up. If the incorporation act can be changed to include a simple set of meeting procedure rules, you will build

the power of the members who do not know. If the school system can go back to civics and educate the kids at primary school how to run an organisation, when they grow up they will know.

It is quite surprising that the number of submissions into the volunteer inquiry is approaching 600, when the previous inquiry only took information from about 100. It is not surprising that 60-odd of those submissions come from very disgruntled RFS volunteers. It is quite possible to group those submissions with a circle—58 in the middle of the circle and two outliers. I will leave out my criticism of one, but I will state the other. I am afraid that the other submission that is untrustworthy comes from QFD itself. The submission says—

The Department is aware that concerns have been raised that implementation of the blue card requirements caused a subsequent drop in RFSQ membership. While reductions in membership were recorded at the time of implementation, this largely reflected the outcome of data refreshing and record cleansing activities.

That is totally disingenuous. I would like to be able to say it to the commissioner, I really would, and the people who wrote that act.

CHAIR: Your comments are on the record.

Mr McLachlan: It is demonstrable swill. I was chair of my brigade when that was going on, and I had members who were—pardon me—flipping the bird. They were gone. I had to spend time with each of them to convince them to stay. The only thing that convinced them was a very decent letter written by an assistant commissioner who put the proposition of a blue card in an entirely different way.

CHAIR: Mr McLachlan, we really—

Mr McLachlan: Can I just say a couple of things?

CHAIR: All right. We will give you one more minute. We just have one more witness after you.

Mr McLachlan: My submission is about empowering organisations through giving them the knowledge to be able to control their organisation from the meeting floor. I have a quote here from a professor at QUT—he is a KC. He wrote this 22 years ago, 'The situation has changed. The community needs the knowledge to be able to maintain control of their own organisations from the floor of their meetings.' The government can do that by making some amendments to the acts. I would like to submit a document, if I may. It is a Rural Fire Service Volunteer Brigades' Charter.

CHAIR: Yes, is leave granted to table that? Leave is granted.

Mr McLachlan: It was signed by the president of the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland, the commissioner of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and the then minister. It was never honoured.

CHAIR: Mr McLachlan, thank you very much for coming before us. As it turns out, I was mistaken—there are no more witnesses after you. You are the very last witness to come before our inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. It has been quite a journey. We have had contributions from people from all walks of life, from all volunteering endeavours, from local government and from small organisations and also from concerned citizens. I am sure I speak for the committee when I say that we are most grateful for that.

We have had 15 public hearings throughout the state in the last six months. As you alluded to, Mr McLachlan, we have had 571 submissions, plus the information you have tabled today. We must have spoken to 100 witnesses in that time. We will be reporting to parliament next month. I know everybody here will be interested to see that report, and it will be available on the committee's website then. Also, the transcript of today's hearing will be available on the committee's website in due course.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for their work on this inquiry so far. I acknowledge those members who have come on to the committee from time to time—that is you, member for Keppel—and the MPs who are in attendance today: Donna Kirkland, the member for Rockhampton, and Glen Kelly, the member for Mirani. I particularly thank everyone for being here today, for being a great audience and for participating. That brings these proceedings to a close. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 12.04 pm.