


Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submitted by:	
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. By way of background I am an emergency service volunteer for three separate organisations:

- Queensland State Emergency Service (SES) - 15 years
- Queensland Rural Fire Service (RFS) - 9 years
- Australian Red Cross Emergency Services (ARCES) - less than 1 year

With a emergency services volunteering career spanning 40 years, I have also volunteered in the past for organisations including (Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol, NSW, WICEN NSW and St John Ambulance Australia).

This submission is made by me as an individual and I do not claim to represent any of the organisations listed above.

Summary of my thoughts:

1. Volunteer organisations and society are suffering an accelerating decline in volunteering
2. Emergency service volunteers, particularly ones like SES, RFS and ARCES are finding that their workload is increasing, with the confluence of more climate induced disasters and reducing volunteer numbers, meaning that we are increasingly being asked to deploy inter and intra state to assist other communities.
3. While local, state and commonwealth governments enjoy the benefit of millions of dollars of free labour that emergency service volunteers provide, they have failed to fund and support those volunteers properly for decades, exploiting the good will of volunteers remaining dedicated to supporting their communities, despite those governments not adequately supporting them
4. Only recently have we seen a budget uplift for SES and RFS and for SES we still suffer the “tyranny of local government”, with the provision of inconsistent equipment and facilities, often accompanied by a grumbling about how much SES costs them.
5. Government volunteer emergency services, such as SES and RFS, have become increasingly bureaucratic and “top-down” focused, rather than driven by their communities.
6. By way of perspective, when I was a volunteer SES Group Leader (in charge of a single SES shed in a small town, with a total of 8 volunteers), I was spending approximately 18 hours per week volunteering. That work included bureaucratic / administrative tasks, developing and delivering training, managing personelle, as well as operational activities. So half a full-time job doing this for a small SES Group. Bigger Groups are managed by multiple people doing the same sort of hours. This workload provides a disincentive to volunteer

or continue volunteering, particularly in leadership roles and SES struggles with a lack of good leaders.

7. Queensland SES is currently sitting under its fourth government department over the past 15 or so years. (I think, I've lost count), with it having been MOG'd from department to department, showing the volunteers how little governments of both persuasions actually value their work. The latest MOG, of course, being because the Queensland firefighters, the United Firefighters Union and the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland didn't like SES and wanted to get rid of them and pushed the government very hard for that outcome. The UFU even describing the QFES arrangement as "A three ring circus" on their public website..... A very disrespectful attitude directed towards emergency service volunteers. There were rumours that funding was reallocated from SES to Fire and Rescue, prior to the death of our dear friend Merryl Dray, but I have no evidence of that. It is often felt amongst SES volunteers that if a firefighter falls off a roof they have a big enquiry, get to bottom of the cause and implement mitigations, whereas if an SES volunteer falls off a roof they sing out, "Look out below!". I note that approaching 3 years after the death of Merryl, whom I knew personally, no report has ever been released into the cause of her death, no actions have been taken to address the root causes of her death, criminal charges against QFES were quietly dropped by Work Safe Queensland and the whole thing was swept under the carpet, as is always the case when SES, and I could provide plenty of examples to prove the point. and they wonder why volunteers leave.
8. Organisations like SES are in the process of actively reducing the number of volunteers, by their implementation of so-called "Fit for Task" regimes that reject people with disabilities from performing activities that they would otherwise be safe and qualified to perform. While I support efforts to improve the fitness and quality of our SES volunteers, nothing is being done to replace volunteers who are disqualified by this regime.
9. Volunteers in organisations like SES and RFS are often disrespected by their paid staff, as being less important or not valued. They say all the right things but when it actually comes to them doing their paid job of supporting the volunteers, that support is hard to find.
10. Voluntering has become harder for individuals, with increasing cost of living meaning people having to work more paid hours to get by, reducing their availability to volunteer.
11. Spontaneous volunteering, driven by highly connected societies are not being effectively utilised, engaged or even planned for by organisations like SES and RFS.
12. Generally, there is no support for volunteers, to cover the financial outlays they make as part of their volunteering. In other words, it often costs volunteers money to volunteer, for example fuel, vehicle costs, phone costs, expenses to

clean protective clothing and equipment

13. Apart from increasing efforts to reduce climate impacting emissions, I believe that state and federal governments should provide financial incentives to emergency service volunteers, including assisting with costs associated with volunteering. This could be in the form of a tax rebate, rates or vehicle registration reduction, or something else to show volunteers that their efforts are valued and to perhaps encourage others to consider volunteering.
14. I personally believe that the question needs to be asked, "What is SES for"? Is it achieving what the public is asking of it? Are the paid staff actually delivering for the needs of the community and the volunteers? Is the public getting value for money by the use of uplift money to employ a significant number of middle managers who justify their jobs by creating more bureaucracy, rather than purchasing equipment and other resources needed by the volunteers?

I could spend much longer providing a detailed submission, but I'm sure there is nothing in my list that you haven't seen before or that would be surprising to you. Federal, state and local governments and the community need to better support their emergency service volunteers, if they want that service to continue. That support includes financial support, but also community support, with people actually joining volunteer organisations and directly supporting their community and with agencies like SES becoming more flexible to the limitations volunteers have.

Thank you for your time.



The Committee has been asked to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly by 18 September 2025 on:

- The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the state;
- The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers;
- The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;
- The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups;
- The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;
- Opportunities for the Queensland government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery;
- First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap; and
- Any other relevant matters, including academic and other diverse sources, and any relevant reports and reviews at the national level and across other states and territories.