

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No: 33
Submitted by: Len Mitcham
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: No attachment

Submitter Comments:

I have listened in on some Town Halls and Meetings about retention within Volunteering organisations. I am currently involved in Queensland State Emergency Services (SES), Coast Guard (CG) and regeneration of native vegetation on K'gari (Fraser Island). I am hearing the rhetoric "recruitment, recognition and compensation" and find it hard to believe that recruitment is one of the target issues. The SES when I joined in 2021 had people knocking at the door. There is no need to do a big recruitment drive when the organisation cannot keep the new members, I will expand on this topic at the end of this submission. Recognition is good, but I am disappointed that most of the awards go to office-based members, yes, they do a lot of work and deserve recognition, but the field workers are where the real action should be focused on. Compensation, Brisbane City Council give a small contribution, and it is much appreciated. Looking at the country units they do not have compensation, and they seem to keep their members longer than the city units. I spent 12 and a half years in the Australian Army Reserve and the reason I stayed so long was that I could do and learn things I can't do at home or anywhere else. The reason I left in 1999 was that no new equipment was being purchased until 2003 to 2004. I was in a maintenance unit for most of my time then a transport unit with Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) for the remainder. So, my point here is that, yes, the work can be routine but there needs to be some new learning / challenges about twice a year to keep the interest up. I have plenty of ideas from previous experience of volunteering groups, which can be explored later. If one major topic can be fixed first, retention will improve, and recruiting could be every second year. Training is the most important issue to be addressed. My training experience in SES has generally been terrible. The majority of trainers are also volunteers, there seems to be an uncertainty about issuing the joining instructions in a timely manner. Members will apply months in advance for a course and won't know if they have been accepted until about 1 week before if they are lucky, sometimes 4 days and sometimes 24 hours in advance (if you don't think this is true, just ask the members that are leaving). I am mostly retired so it does not matter that much to me, but our time is still valuable to us and if you have held that time available for SES to do a course and get rejected up to 3 or 4 times for the same course or given instructions to do an online course or briefing 24 hours before the course, it becomes a bad experience. My submission is to address the training issues and 50% of the retention problems will be solved. After that there needs to be a little variety and spice to keep them involved. Like using Whyte Island QFES facility to practice variations of sand bagging skills and then test in the water channel facility. We are now part of QPS so this may be more difficult to achieve.