

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Submitted by Aussie Wildlife Limited

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1. 1. Introduction

Aussie Wildlife Limited welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry on volunteering in Queensland. As a non-profit organisation dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of native wildlife, volunteers are essential to our operations. We appreciate the Committee's focus on understanding and improving the volunteer experience and sector sustainability.

2. The Current State of Volunteering in Queensland and Its Value

Volunteers are the backbone of our organisation. Each year, **Aussie Wildlife Limited supports approximately 1000 animals**, with volunteers assisting in their care, transport, and rehabilitation. The contributions of our volunteers extend beyond direct animal care, positively impacting **local communities** through education, advocacy, and environmental stewardship.

3. Wildlife Rehabilitation as a Direct Response to Human Impact

Wildlife rehabilitation is **not an optional community service but a necessary response to human activities**. The destruction of natural habitats, urban expansion, vehicle collisions, domestic animal attacks, and environmental pollution **directly contribute to wildlife injuries and displacement**.

Wildlife carers **should not be expected to bear the financial and operational burden** of rehabilitating animals affected by these human-induced factors. The **Queensland Government has a responsibility to support wildlife rehabilitation efforts** as part of its environmental and conservation commitments.

This requires **sustained financial and logistical support**, ensuring that **wildlife carers are equipped, trained, and funded to carry out their work effectively**. Without adequate government assistance, the increasing volume of wildlife casualties will **exceed volunteer capacity**, leading to **greater biodiversity loss** and increased pressure on local ecosystems.

4. Barriers to Volunteering

Aussie Wildlife Limited has observed several barriers limiting volunteer engagement:

- **Regulatory and administrative burdens** – Compliance with multiple regulations, such as wildlife handling permits and workplace health and safety requirements, can deter volunteers.
- **Costs associated with volunteering** – Volunteers often cover expenses for fuel, training, and equipment, which can be prohibitive.
- **Time constraints** – Many potential volunteers are unable to commit due to work, family responsibilities, or inconsistent shift availability.
- **Mental and emotional toll** – Working with injured wildlife can be distressing, and more resources for volunteer well-being are needed.

5. Experiences, Motivations, and Challenges for Volunteers

Our volunteers are deeply motivated by **passion for wildlife conservation and community service**. However, challenges include:

- **Lack of structured financial support** – Volunteers are expected to pay for fuel, vehicle wear and tear, and equipment, with no financial relief.
- **Reliance on competitive grants** – Grants take time to apply for, have no guaranteed outcome, and often require extensive reporting.
- **Retention difficulties** – Some volunteers leave due to burnout or the cost of ongoing participation.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Introduce **direct financial support** for volunteers, such as **fuel cards, equipment allowances, or automatic stipends**.
- ✓ Reduce the **bureaucratic burden** on volunteers, including permit simplifications.
- ✓ Increase **public awareness campaigns** to attract more volunteers.

6. Direct Government Funding Instead of Competitive Grants

Wildlife volunteer organisations currently rely on **grants**, which are:

- **Highly competitive**, meaning many eligible groups miss out.
- **Time-consuming**, requiring extensive applications, reporting, and compliance checks.
- **Unreliable**, as funding varies from year to year.

Instead of a **grant-based system**, we recommend:

- ✓ **Automatic annual funding allocations** to registered volunteer organisations.
- ✓ **Base funding on operational costs** (e.g., number of rescues, facilities maintained, volunteer hours contributed).
- ✓ **Reduce administrative burdens**, ensuring organisations can focus on wildlife care rather than grant applications.

This approach would provide **financial stability**, allowing groups like Aussie Wildlife Limited to focus on rescue and rehabilitation rather than chasing inconsistent funding opportunities.

7. Local Council Support for Volunteer Organisations

Volunteer-run organisations **struggle with high operational costs**, including **electricity, water, and council rates**.

Recommended council-level support:

- ✓ **Discounted or waived council rates** for registered volunteer organisations.
- ✓ **Subsidised electricity and water costs** to support animal rehabilitation facilities.
- ✓ **Automatic funding for core operational expenses**.

These measures would provide **predictable financial relief**, making it easier for wildlife organisations to continue operating without financial strain.

8. Government Support for Volunteering

While some support exists, there are **gaps in funding and coordination** for wildlife organisations. The government could improve this by:

- **Providing automatic base funding for wildlife rescue groups.**
- **Reducing regulatory complexity** for volunteers handling animals.
- **Creating a centralised volunteering portal** to connect Queenslanders with opportunities.

9. Leveraging Volunteering Opportunities for the Brisbane 2032 Olympics

The **Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games** present a unique opportunity to promote environmental volunteering. The government could:

- **Incorporate wildlife conservation efforts** into the Games' sustainability strategy.
- **Encourage corporate volunteering programs** linked to the event.

10. Increasing Emergency Response Volunteering

Queensland faces **frequent natural disasters** (e.g., bushfires, floods), impacting wildlife. **Opportunities to enhance response volunteering include:**

- ✓ Establishing **emergency wildlife response teams** with trained volunteers.
- ✓ Providing **government-supported emergency response training**.
- ✓ Offering **grants for wildlife shelters and carers** in disaster-prone areas.

11. First Nations Volunteering and Closing the Gap

Aussie Wildlife Limited acknowledges the **critical role of First Nations people** in environmental stewardship. Opportunities to enhance First Nations involvement in volunteering include:

- ✓ Partnering with **Indigenous ranger programs** to support wildlife conservation.
- ✓ Providing **funding for community-led conservation projects**.
- ✓ Recognising and integrating **Traditional Ecological Knowledge** into volunteer training.

12. Conclusion

Wildlife rehabilitation is a **direct response to human impact**, and **the Queensland Government has a responsibility to support it**. It is unjust to expect volunteers to absorb the financial burden of addressing issues **caused by urbanisation, habitat destruction, vehicle strikes, and pollution**.

To ensure the **long-term viability of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation**, we urge the Committee to consider:

- ✓ **Replacing competitive grants with automatic funding allocations** for registered volunteer organisations.
- ✓ **Providing direct financial assistance to volunteers**, such as **fuel cards, stipends, and equipment allowances**.
- ✓ **Local council support**, including **reduced rates and utility subsidies** for volunteer organisations.
- ✓ **Increased government funding and simplified regulations** for the volunteering sector.

We welcome further discussions on strengthening Queensland's volunteer sector and look forward to seeing the outcomes of this inquiry.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute and are happy to provide additional insights if required.

Yours sincerely,

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