

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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I have been a member of my local Rural Fire brigade for over 12 years. I have been self employed for over 20 years so my volunteering has a direct impact on our business. When I joined the RFS I completed all my FMS training, and completed other training modules like Crew Leader training, chainsaw certifications and several other units of training. Several years later I was informed that there was no record of me completing FMS in spite of the fact I had a field log book that was signed by the training officer on the day. I was made to re-sit the FMS test so that a box could be ticked somewhere. This took me away from my business for a full day. During the early stages of my participation in our brigade I took on the roles of secretary and treasurer for our brigade and was tasked with arranging for an extension to our fire shed. I spent many hours preparing documents and completing grant applications, only to be told that the paperwork had been "lost" and I would need to re-submit. This happened 3 times before there was the appointment of [REDACTED] as our district manager and he ensured the process was followed through and gave great support in seeing a positive outcome. I estimate I would have spent over a week in total doing this work only to have my efforts "lost" repeatedly. I have been involved in many major fires over the years and the thing that frustrates me more than anything is the attitude of paid staff towards the volunteers. At one major fire I was yelled at to get out of my own fire shed by some quite junior paid staff and was ready to leave my gear at the shed and never return. It was only the intervention of one of the local area commanders that stopped that from happening. At another incident I sustained an injury whilst on the fire ground. This incident was reported and I had to spend several hours being interrogated by one of the support staff on the off chance that I would put in a work cover claim. This was quite a demoralizing process to go through as I was made to feel like I was trying to defraud the RFS. I certainly did not feel "supported" by this process. The most recent insult was during the [REDACTED] fire in late 2024. I live near the point where that fire was started by a lightning strike some 10 days earlier. 3 days before things went bad I spoke to my first officer who told me head office was aware of the situation and it was under control. The day before while this was still a small fire albeit in a very inaccessible area, I again spoke with [REDACTED] and my first officer and was told to butt out as it was being monitored. On the morning of that fire, with terrible weather conditions predicted, due to my involvement with several other local organisations, I contacted the local council disaster manager, the local Main Roads manager and the local police sergeant with a view to having road closure signage in place should the fire impact the [REDACTED] Highway. As an admin of our brigade Facebook page I did a post advising the community of the possibility of the highway closure. 100% of what was predicted in that FB post came to pass. I was then reprimanded at a brigade level and from a management level because someone in the main roads ministers office that follows our FB page complained to the fire service. Every day I am away from my business working with my local brigade costs me between \$1500 and \$2000 in lost productivity/revenue. To then be spoken to like I am beneath them by the paid staff just adds to the frustration. To this point I have advised our first officer I will not be attending any further controlled burns in our area. I am happy to attend and wildfire call out BUT as soon as the paid staff setup incident control and take command of the fire I will be removing myself from active duty and leave them to it. The lack of respect shown to volunteers over my more than a decade of involvement saddens me as I can see the decline in the morale of not only our brigade but many others that experience the exact same treatment from the paid staff. Nobody knows their local area better than the locals but to watch the disrespectful, condescending and dismissive attitude of the paid staff (many of whom boast of the overtime and benefits from a major incident) is a major

contributor in the massive decline in volunteers. I am nearing 60 years old myself and there is little interest from the younger generation in giving up their time to put themselves in harms way to protect rural areas and quite frankly I don't blame them. I hope that the re-structre of the rural fire service has a positive impact but I hold little hope that anything will improve after the dogs breakfast of empowering Kedron and the fire service unions with dictating to volunteers how to manage a fire on the side of a mountain while they sit in air-conditioned luxury in Brisbane with not a clue of what is happening on the ground but over riding the directions of the incident controllers on the ground with real local knowledge.