

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission Regarding: The Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

I am authorised by Mackay Conservation Group Inc. (MCG) to make this submission on behalf of the group. MCG is the lead community-based environmental organisation in the Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday Region. MCG has been actively involved in on-ground environmental work and advocacy for environmental protection in the region since 1984. We provide support to community members who are affected by actions that cause environmental harm. We also conduct environmental education activities and support a number of other groups working in the field of environmental protection and monitoring in the region.

MCG welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland and provides the following insights:

1. Volunteers in MCG: When MCG was established in 1984, it was run entirely by volunteers. Today, volunteers remain central to the organisation's operations. Some of our volunteers have been with the organisation since its inception, contributing for almost 40 years, while others have joined more recently. Our management committee and properties trust group is entirely volunteer-run, and we currently have only have three paid staff members—one full-time and two part-time.

While we now have paid staff, MCG continues to rely heavily on volunteers to conduct its advocacy, organising, and campaigning efforts. Our volunteers are crucial to our ability to execute the core work of the organisation - including environmental monitoring, education, and community outreach, creating social media content, helping run events, representing MCG at community reference groups and meeting with local leaders.

2. The Role of Volunteers: Volunteers within MCG perform a wide range of tasks, from administrative and organisational support to hands-on work in environmental projects. They offer valuable knowledge, experience, and passion, all of which contribute significantly to MCG's success and sustainability.

3. The Decline of Volunteering: We have observed a decline in volunteer numbers, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis. This has had a direct impact on our ability to sustain operations at the level we have historically maintained.

When people are facing financial difficulties and struggling to meet basic needs, there is far less capacity to volunteer, even if the passion for the cause remains strong. We have seen that material circumstances, such as economic insecurity, have diminished the ability of community members to contribute their time to voluntary work. This shift in priorities has been significant and has directly affected our volunteer numbers.

4. The Consequences of Fewer Volunteers: If volunteer numbers were to continue to decline, MCG would face substantial challenges in maintaining the scale and quality of its work. Our ability to conduct environmental advocacy and support community members in need would be severely limited, and the long-term sustainability of our environmental campaigns would be at risk. Volunteers are truly our greatest asset, and without them, the future of MCG's mission would be uncertain.

5. Valuing Volunteers: We recognise that volunteers are a vital resource, and we strive to ensure they feel valued and supported. Volunteers bring not only their time and effort but also a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the organisation. We believe that volunteers should be provided with the recognition, training, and resources they need to feel empowered in their roles.

6. Barriers to Volunteering: The economic challenges facing individuals today are a major barrier to volunteering. When people are focused on survival and securing their financial well-being, the time and energy available for volunteer work are often limited. Additionally, there is a lack of affordable and accessible volunteer opportunities in certain sectors, which may discourage people from volunteering. The increased time demands of paid work, coupled with pressures like high living costs, have made it more difficult for many individuals to volunteer.

Recommendations

1. Provide ongoing operational funding for a number of Volunteering Hubs across the state, particularly in regional places. This would help to better match people who want to volunteer with volunteer opportunities, as well as more localised support for volunteer managers.
2. We Provide a cost-of-volunteering reimbursement fund to assist volunteers cover out-of-pocket expenses that arise from their volunteer activities, particularly in this cost of living crisis.
3. A feasibility study to explore the possibility of a statewide volunteer insurance framework to help address rising insurance costs & challenges in accessing suitable insurance.

In conclusion, the importance of volunteers to MCG cannot be overstated. They are the backbone of our organisation, and without their continued support, we would struggle to carry out our mission effectively. We urge policymakers to consider the challenges that affect volunteerism, particularly in the face of economic pressures, and to implement strategies that can better support and sustain the valuable contributions made by volunteers in Queensland.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Sincerely,
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