

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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26 February 2025

**Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee**  
Queensland Parliament

**Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland**

Dear Committee members,

Mackay Regional Council (MRC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. Council is a proud volunteer-engaging organisation, with a significant volunteer workforce that supports our service delivery across multiple community sectors, including parks and environment, arts and culture, libraries, and heritage. Additionally, Council's Community Programs team works closely with the volunteer sector, providing capacity-building services, connection, and networking opportunities.

This submission outlines MRC's perspective on the current state of volunteering, the challenges faced by volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, and recommendations to enhance volunteer engagement and sustainability in Queensland.

**The Current State of Volunteering in Queensland and Its Value**

As of December 2023, Mackay Regional Council had 366 active volunteers, whose contributions equate to over \$900,000 in service value annually. Volunteering is crucial to service delivery in Mackay, and without volunteers, Council would face limitations in meeting community needs.

Beyond economic contributions, volunteering enhances community well-being, fosters social connections, and provides essential services. Volunteers play a key role in improving liveability by supporting recreational, sporting, and cultural activities. Volunteering also provides individuals with skill development opportunities, social inclusion, and a sense of purpose. However, volunteer participation is steadily declining, which presents significant challenges.

**Barriers to Volunteering**

MRC acknowledges several barriers that impact volunteer participation and engagement, including:

**Cost of Volunteering:** Rising costs of living, fuel, and transport expenses deter potential volunteers, particularly in rural and regional areas such as Sarina.

**Regulatory and Administrative Burdens:** Blue card and police check requirements impose financial and bureaucratic barriers, particularly affecting individuals seeking volunteer roles for employment pathway purposes.

**Digital Accessibility:** Many volunteer onboarding and training processes have shifted online, creating accessibility challenges for older volunteers and those with limited digital literacy.

**Lack of Coordination and Awareness:** There is no centralised, widely accessible system for volunteer opportunities, leading to a lack of awareness among potential volunteers.

### **Challenges and Recommendations for Improvement**

MRC has identified several challenges in volunteer management and engagement:

**Declining Volunteer Numbers:** Volunteer participation has dropped by 44% since 2015. A coordinated strategy is needed to improve retention and recruitment.

**Limited Support for Volunteer Coordinators:** Many organisations lack dedicated resources for volunteer management, affecting recruitment and engagement.

**Insufficient Physical Volunteer Support:** without appropriate resourcing to support for adequate volunteer management, volunteer engaging businesses and volunteer organisations lack the capacity to grow and enhance volunteering opportunities.

**Insurance requirement and risk aversion:** The reluctance to engage volunteers, particularly youth volunteers, or offer opportunities beyond strictly defined volunteer roles limits the flexibility and adaptability of volunteer programs. This rigid approach restricts volunteers from responding dynamically to the community's evolving needs, ultimately hindering their ability to make a broader impact.

### **Options to address barriers**

**Increased Government Funding and Support:** Funding for volunteer coordinator roles to support recruitment and retention efforts.

**Streamlining Volunteer Onboarding and Compliance:** Reviewing Blue Card and police check requirements to ensure they do not unnecessarily restrict participation while maintaining community safety.

**Expanding Volunteer Recognition Programs:** Enhancing volunteer appreciation initiatives to acknowledge contributions and encourage continued participation.

**Developing a Centralised Volunteer Hub:** Establishing a state-wide platform that provides a single-entry point for volunteers to find opportunities, training, and resources.

Improving Access for Diverse Groups: Creating alternative language onboarding processes and reducing insurance barriers to support youth, culturally diverse individuals, and those with disabilities.

Standardised Insurance Option: Introduce a coordinated approach to volunteer insurance. A widely publicised and easily accessible option that could reduce the financial burden on organisations, providing them with a straightforward, cost-effective means of volunteer insurance.

### **Opportunities for Growth and Emergency Volunteering**

MRC sees significant opportunities to expand volunteering participation, particularly in emergency response roles. By better integrating local governments with emergency volunteering efforts, such as community disaster recovery programs, the Queensland Government can enhance resilience in disaster-prone regions.

Furthermore, leveraging major events such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents an opportunity to promote and expand volunteering culture across Queensland. A state-wide volunteer legacy program could provide structured pathways for long-term volunteer engagement beyond the event itself.

Volunteering is an essential pillar of Queensland's communities, and its sustainability is critical to service delivery, social cohesion, and resilience. Mackay Regional Council urges the Queensland Government to take proactive steps to reduce barriers, increase support for volunteer management, and create sustainable pathways for volunteer engagement. By investing in volunteer coordination, simplifying compliance requirements, and expanding recognition programs, the state can ensure a thriving and inclusive volunteering sector for years to come.

Mackay Regional Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and looks forward to ongoing discussions on strengthening volunteering in Queensland.

Yours sincerely,

**David McKendry**

*Acting Chief Executive Officer*