

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

<b>Submission No:</b>	355
<b>Submitted by:</b>	Michael Hetherington
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G'day at the Volunteer Enquiry. ,

As there will be a lot to wade through I will present a few scenarios illustrating why volunteering as a Rural Firefighter is becoming just a little less than impossible.

Sunday lunchtime... Fire call out! ... Grass fire along Brisbane Valley Highway north of Wivenhoe Dam Wall. The First Officer of three local Brigades turn out. Other Firefighters turn out. Jobs are left undone on properties, hay dries... when it does not work by a five day week, so jobs have to wait. Cattle escape, crops go unwatered causing lost production. Shift workers can make a choice: blow a shift or fail to fulfill their commitment to their local Brigade.

Costs to Grazier – lost cattle at a \$1000 a head. (Serious)

Fodder farmers have Hay ready on ground – Go to fire then get rain overnight – Costs \$15 a small bale – How many \$'s lost.

Fruit and Veg growers – missed irrigation , disarrangement of next days work and work force. \$ here can be a serious loss of income. A single operator farmer can lose a few hundred cases of Zucchini because a breakdown in the organisation of the harvest. \$15 a case is lost.

Shift workers – blow a Sunday shift in times of High cost of living, \$300 lost if you turn out, loss of pride and place in community.

At the fire ground; fire appliances arrive, red trucks with paid fire persons arrive. The fire front is inaccessible to Red Trucks. Red Trucks sit on the road. Rurals stagger about in broken country and do their best to follow the Incident Controllers directions. Meals of some sort arrive. Red truck crews pull out camp chairs and enjoy lunch. Well, what else can they do?

Sundown and it's a job for the Controller to make up the night roster.

Result –Volunteers get to patrol all night because paid people (firefighters, National Parks, SEQ Water, property employees,,,,) all have to leave due to too financial constraints of penalty rates.

Is this getting the image across?. Volunteer Firefighters are the only people paying for the privilege to keep life and property safe.

Onto some Administrative points. Incident Controllers are unpaid if it is a Rural fire task. People in the work force with their level of responsibility would be \$100,000 salary earners. Risk of failure in the Fireground can be fatal. How long can anyone keep up this level of work stress for a Thank you? And that is provided the property are not hostile. So many Support Staff so far away doesn't help.

Training for Firefighting is ad hoc. The fact that so many Rural Fire Brigade are a team of well-meaning and committed non-Rural people makes training a big ticket item. On the Job training is not allowed any more. When rural brigades were truly rural, most fireies were home trained, taught by the family farm. This is not common now. Training new people is just the same cost to the volunteer as fighting fires... See above.

Support : What has prompted me to make this submission is the email from way up there in the City relating how 'everything is all on track'. Having recently been reading "The Vietnam War, an intimate history" (Authors Geoffery C. Ward & Ken Burns), It is a tad frightful to see how progress was described by people who needed progress. And how it is possible to describe fairly serious [REDACTED] as a win.

Volunteering is alive, not anything like volunteering as seen in other parts of the world, but it is there for now.

Making a system whereby more hazard reduction burning is done, by paid contractors , would reduce the load on Rural Volunteers. This is a sensible solution.

The consequence of burnt out Firefighters will be a sort of smokey anarchy where people will "Light 'er up on a good windy day to get in before that [REDACTED] neighbour burns me out".