

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

<b>Submission No:</b>	369
<b>Submitted by:</b>	FNQ Volunteers Inc
<b>Publication:</b>	Making the submission and your name public
<b>Attachments:</b>	See attachment
<b>Submitter Comments:</b>	



## **Place-based Volunteering - the Heart of every Community**



## **Unity in Diversity – Volunteering brings People Together**



## **Volunteering Changes lives**

# **Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

Submission prepared by FNQ Volunteers. Cairns. Far North Queensland



Submission Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

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# Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission prepared by FNQ Volunteers.

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27 February 2025



Volunteer Involving Organisations that are supported by FNQ Volunteers Inc.



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## Overview of FNQ Volunteers Inc. – our direction and values

Established in 1999, we are a volunteer support centre developed in response to community needs. FNQ Volunteers Inc. is a not for profit, community-based organisation largely run by a volunteer workforce who are trained and upskilled to manage the recruitment and placement of volunteers into “jobs” that are “best fit” for the individual and the organisation they are referred to.

Our 130+ member organisations register their volunteer positions with us and carry the appropriate volunteer insurance. We monitor the organisations to ensure that our referral volunteers are protected during their volunteer work.

We are enthusiastic about volunteering and encourage everyone to have a go, no matter if they only have a few hours to spare, or want to be more involved, we will find a place that fits with the capacity for the person to contribute.

Much of our work involves supporting other volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) to engage with volunteers in meaningful ways, to increase volunteer participation, and to encourage people to embrace the notion of volunteering as a lifestyle choice.

We believe that volunteering offers opportunities for personal growth and skills development, and often is a pathway to paid employment. Finding your niche or uncovering hidden talents makes volunteering an exciting journey of discovery.

We understand that whatever the volunteer role, the volunteer needs to feel valued and part of the organisation. They need to be acknowledged for the work they do, and for what they contribute. A simple “thank you” goes a long way towards making people feel that what they are doing makes a difference.

We are excited to be involved in assisting people of all abilities to become involved in volunteering. We look for the “best fit” job for everyone, according to their interests and abilities. Success in volunteering is all about finding the right place for each person.

Our member network includes a diverse range of VIOs including those supporting families, young people and seniors, the arts, theatre and culture, Multi-cultural organisations, museums and heritage, health and wellbeing, education and training, sport and recreation, environment and conservation, animal welfare, and disaster response.

We host an annual VEXPO (volunteer expo) bringing together VIOs to showcase their organisations. People attending can participate in ‘have a go’ activities or simply talk with representatives from a wide variety of groups. This helps the public make informed decisions about groups they may be interested in joining and provides them with on-the-spot contacts, as well as seeing first-hand the benefits of their involvement.

Our annual Volunteer Awards recognise the amazing work of volunteers, drawing attention to the outstanding contributions of people in our community to a wide scope of volunteer activities. The Awards are a practical way of saying “thank you” for a job well done and without expectation of a reward. Many of our older volunteers have given decades of service and are appreciative of the recognition for their years of dedication.



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Another element of our activities is the support and training of VIOs and volunteers. We hold workshops relating to specific issues around volunteer management, and an annual symposium with guest presenters and round table conversations, relating to volunteer management and engagement, governance etc. On a day-to-day basis we are available to respond to enquiries from VIOs and prospective/participating volunteers.

As members of the LDMG we support the management of emergent volunteers during disaster recovery. We managed Care Army volunteers during COVID and are actively engaged in strategic planning in the Disaster Management space.

**With our very limited resources we outreach to the Far North Queensland ROC region and support VIOs as best we can. We have negligible funding for the above activities, essentially Commonwealth Volunteer Management Activity, project-based funding, that is distributed by Volunteering Queensland. This funding is not recurrent, and is applied for from a competitive pool, which may or may not be successful. Beyond this financial year we have no guarantee of receiving this money.**

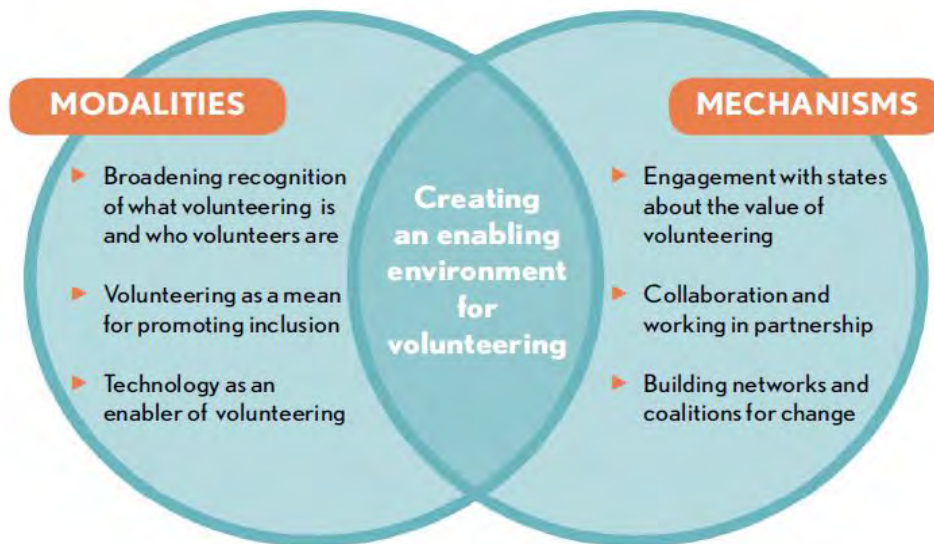
FNQ Volunteers also co-ordinates the Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme (ACVVS) in Far North Queensland. For this, we recruit, vet and train more than 100 volunteers who regularly visit people in Residential Aged Care facilities or in their own homes. Ongoing monitoring and government reporting is crucial aspects of this work.

**At present this program subsidises our volunteer recruitment and placement, and support services for VIOs. This is not sustainable into the future, and we are faced with the inevitable decision to either wind back or discontinue these activities. There is no other organisation in FNQ that is geared to pick up this valuable work**



## Creating a strong volunteering infrastructure

The International Association for Volunteering Effort (IAVE) has diagnosed six essential ingredients for an enabling volunteering infrastructure capable of responding to current societal needs and trends (see below). A strong volunteering infrastructure seeks to create an enabling environment that leverages all facets identified by IAVE – a set of arrangements that allow local Queenslanders to come forward for service into a well-managed, well-networked volunteering system that combines the best of state-wide and local approaches.



IAVE model for a strong enabling environment for volunteering

We are at our best when our volunteer base is as diverse, talented, and passionate as the communities in which we live and operate, and where our people feel included, valued and connected.

Sustainable, locally led volunteering infrastructure, that provides scaffolding which supports resilience and flexibility in strengthening local, place-based initiatives is the essence of successful volunteering programs.

Organisations such as FNQ Volunteers Inc. started in response to community need and have successfully engaged across the volunteer sector for decades. Originally in the form of Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs), we have evolved into regional hubs for volunteer activity. Currently there are three such active centres in Queensland who collaborate together, and in association with Volunteering Queensland deliver support to VIOs. This has proven to be an effective and productive relationship.

This cooperative approach enables resource sharing and capacity building and provides the scaffolding for the establishment of community centric, locality appropriate, inclusive, and collaborative volunteering frameworks, that are tailored to meet needs of local areas and regions.

**Recommendation 1: To consider a pilot project for Volunteer Hubs that are regionally based and provide volunteer recruitment, placement, training and support for volunteer involving organisations.**



### What would a Volunteer Hub look like?

#### **Collaborative • Coordinated • Place based • Community centric • Volunteer Engagement**

- A collaborative business model that provides volunteer support services within a designated region.
- A regionalised networking approach for Volunteer Hubs would enable a standardised and consistent approach to volunteer engagement and management, with flexibility to respond to local needs, and to act as a local knowledge-sharing hub of volunteering best practice.

#### **Recruitment • Referral • Support**

- The combined expertise and experience of the existing VRCs, collectively almost 100 years, would add value to the Volunteer Hub network with an already proven capacity to deliver volunteer services.
- A coordinated volunteer recruitment and placement process, where structured interviews identify skills and experience and match volunteers to specific community needs (plus conduct appropriate probity checks, including relevant insurances).
- A central point for persons to engage in mutual obligation volunteering, and a 'home base' where other people can exit and re-join the volunteering movement as their situation warrants, according to their changing circumstances, availability, and personal interests
- Generating the intrinsic value of volunteering for the individual themselves, in building confidence, gaining new skills and experience, socialising with others, developing communication skills, and improving mental health outcomes

#### **Disaster Recovery • Emergent Volunteering**

- The Volunteer Hub would offer a centralised location for the recruitment, registration, and deployment of emergent volunteering during disaster recovery and Public Health emergencies at the local level, in collaboration with the Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMG), and the State Government/Volunteering Queensland EV platform.
- Representation on the LDMGs as volunteer management and resource organisations during recovery (already in place).

#### **Capacity building • Training • Liaison**

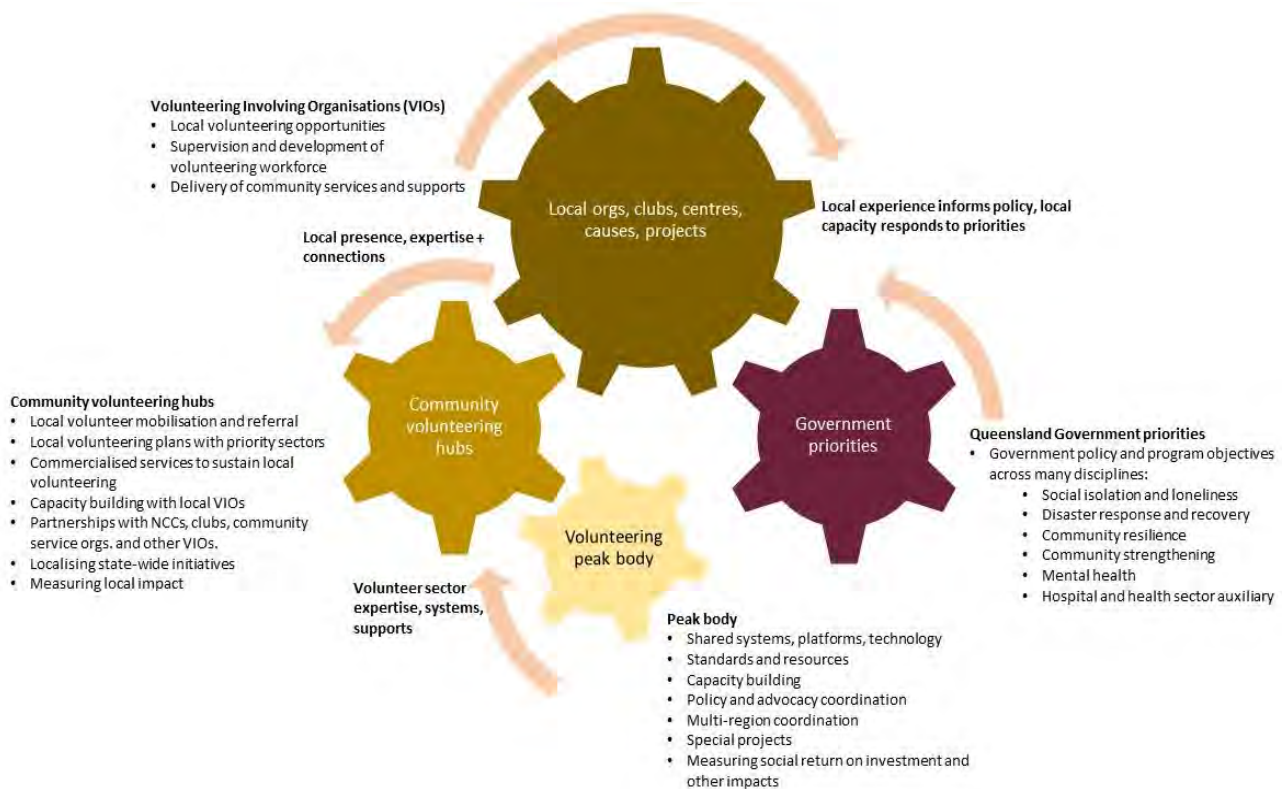
- Provides the scaffolding for the establishment of community centric, locality appropriate, inclusive, and collaborative volunteering frameworks, that are tailored to meet needs of local areas and regions.
- Expanded scope of activity specifically geared to developing a vibrant, energetic, and purposeful volunteer sector.
- Value for money, coordination of resources and standards, particularly where most staff are volunteers.
- Access to a vast network established over many years with VIOs, and the retention of smaller cause-related organisations, member/community groups like sporting clubs, environmental groups, and schools etc.
- Maintenance of volunteer support services for universal volunteering, supporting vital organisations and volunteering initiatives, and assisting smaller community-based organisations and groups to strengthen their governance frameworks and operations.

#### **Financial Advantage**

- Expertise and experience including government and inter-sector liaison, familiarity with grants, funding applications and acquittal, budget development and financial management, ensuring the macro-economic value of volunteering in local economies
- Coordinated revenue, grant and funding opportunities.
- **Recommendation 2: A performance framework to guide the proposed Volunteer Hub infrastructure to be developed collaboratively with Government, Volunteering Queensland and other stakeholders to ensure that the goals and objectives of all relevant parties are addressed**



## How would the Volunteer Hub work?



A networked model for locally led volunteering in communities/regions supported by Volunteer Hubs

## The Model

A model that builds for the long-term, ready to be strategically linked to likeminded organisations that can capitalise on the unique community-building role of locally led, place-based volunteering.

The proposed alignment represents an evolution of the traditional functions of local VRCs. Together, they would form a locally grounded network that is supported by the shared state-wide resources and standards developed by VQ, and the Australian Volunteering Standards and Strategy.

This enables the new alignment to tap into state-wide initiatives, goals, and resources.

The model focusses on volunteering at the community level through alignment with place-based community organisations, and the already established relationships of the VRCs and their members. It leverages the irreplaceable expertise of everyday Queenslanders working in their own community, accessing the wealth of skills and abilities, whilst also creating a standing infrastructure which can support delivery of broader state-wide objectives.

**Recommendation 3: A sustainable, locally led Volunteer Hub infrastructure for Queensland that builds on the existing structures and provides scaffolding which supports resilience and flexibility in strengthening local, place-based initiatives and a universal platform for volunteering across the general population.**



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## Emergent Volunteering

The COVID 19 response experience has magnified the need for a coordinated approach to the management of emergent/spontaneous volunteers during disasters and in post disaster recovery.

During COVID 19 over 7000 Cairns region residents responded to the State government call, through its Care Army, to assist with various activities in a volunteer capacity. This is not unusual during times of disaster, and requires collaboration and coordination on many levels, to deploy people effectively and efficiently to areas of need within the local community. FNQ Volunteers Inc. took on responsibility for the management of Care Army volunteers during this time.

Spontaneous Volunteers are individuals, groups or organisations (including staff time offered by corporate and professional entities) that offer to assist a community affected by a disaster. Volunteers provide crucial support to disaster affected communities and individuals. They can help build community resilience and assist with disaster response and recovery.

Coordinating and managing these offers of assistance, including spontaneous volunteering, can be challenging. In the past, whilst the activities of spontaneous volunteers during disasters have produced positive results for the community, they also at times have unfortunately caused additional stress for communities, as well as significant challenges for the effective coordination of the response and recovery processes. The effective use of spontaneous volunteers is essential in the response and recovery phases of any emergency.

As per the Queensland Disaster Management arrangements, Councils are required to have plans in place for the management of spontaneous volunteers.

Volunteer management includes (but not limited to):

- Screening, recruitment, and registration of volunteers
- Maintaining Personal Accident and Public Liability Insurance for all staff, coordinators, team leaders and volunteers
- Volunteer inductions, briefings, and debriefings
- Training and supervision of staff, team leaders, coordinators, and volunteers
- Workplace Health and Safety policies, procedures, and volunteer obligations
- Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Transport
- Communications
- Reward and Recognition of volunteers
- Policies, procedures, codes of conduct
- Direct management, supervision, and coordination of activities



Whilst the EV portal is useful for the registration of emergent volunteers, its use is to collate and disseminate the data to the relevant outlet for action. It is the job of those on the ground to coordinate the deployment of the volunteers.

Government at all levels have been under closer scrutiny in terms of accountability, areas of responsibility and culpability with regards to damage (personal and property) caused through ignorance or negligence. This has been borne out in the outcomes and recommendations of various recent Royal Commissions and Investigations.

*Volunteer management carries inherent risks, particularly emergent volunteering. These willing helpers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and with a range of skills and expertise. Most have little experience in disaster response or volunteering under duress. With capable coordination an effective response can be deployed into areas of need. In engaging with emergent volunteers, strong leadership is required to facilitate their successful and safe participation during emergencies.*

The personal safety of volunteers is paramount. Appropriate insurance is essential. Pre-deployment briefings and orientation must be carried out, including WH&S and the issuing of appropriate PPE. Clear instructions regarding what they are permitted to do must be given. Management and monitoring of all sites is essential for the safety and wellbeing of participants. A line of command must be identified.

Given the associated risks in engaging with emergent volunteers a strategic approach is required to address any complications that may arise during their deployment. Currently the approach, at both State and local levels, has been reactive rather than responsive. A Volunteer Strategy is needed.

Funding from both State and Local Governments is required to ensure the effective and efficient deployment of emergent volunteers if the risks are to be addressed. Expectations are becoming more sophisticated, and the demands increasingly more onerous. Local volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) are not funded or equipped to respond to these situations. Their insurance covers existing volunteers not emergent volunteers who are only there for the duration of the emergency response. SES and other organisations such as Red Cross and the Salvation Army have specified response roles and responsibilities and generally do not deploy untrained volunteers into disaster areas.

During the COVID 19 response the difficulty was in finding VIOs that were willing to take on Care Army volunteers, and to operate in areas outside their constitutional boundaries. Without an insurance guarantee organisations were reluctant to engage with Care Army. This will be an ongoing problem that must be resolved for organisations to participate during emergencies.

**Recommendation 4: That a standardised framework for emergent/spontaneous volunteers be developed that can be reoriented to local conditions for disaster response and recovery, and that appropriate funding be allocated for planning and implementation.**



## Strategic directions for Volunteering in Queensland

There have been various strategic documents developed within Government supporting the activities and involvement of volunteering in Queensland including *Communities 2032*; *Communities 2032 Action Plan 2022 – 2025*; *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 etc.*

The Neighbourhood and Community Centres network has been well supported by previous Government initiatives with significant allocated five-year funding and support. Volunteering is built into the framework with particular focus on Neighbourhood Centres as a hub of volunteering. Strategic documents include *Neighbourhood Centres Our shared vision for a vibrant Neighbourhood Centre system in Queensland*; *Qld Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Monsoon Resilience December 2020 - 2023*; *Qld Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023 – 2026 etc.*

The purpose here is not to denigrate the work of Neighbourhood Centres, rather to draw a distinction between the activities of the Centres in relation to the wider volunteer landscape, and their mandate to respond to locality-driven community need.

The Neighbourhood Centres are an invaluable resource for local communities and generally cater for the immediate demographic which varies from place to place. Whilst they interact and at times collaborate with other community organisations, their role is more inwardly focused on their programmes within their own centres. They utilise volunteers for their own needs.

In contrast the role of the VRC/Volunteer Hub is to collaborate, cooperate, interact and work with the wider VIO community supporting their volunteer needs. They recruit, train and match volunteers with VIOs, provide training and support to VIOs, conduct workshops, seminars and symposiums to address critical volunteer related issues and generally assist the volunteer sector to survive and thrive.

**Currently the state of volunteering, across the Queensland and Australia wide, is a dramatic decrease in volunteer numbers and very little focus on resourcing, recruitment and retention of volunteers.**

Where tens of millions of dollars have been allocated to strengthening the Neighbourhood Centres network, there has been no allocation towards addressing the critical deficit in funding for strengthening the volunteer space. VIOs are desperate for volunteers to support their activities.

**Recommendation 5: That a substantial allocation of funding is needed to ensure that volunteer participation is made a priority in the strategic planning process for the Volunteer Unit through the provision of funding for the recruitment, training and placement of volunteers, and the support and training of VIOs in volunteer management and governance.**



## Conclusions

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland is timely and much anticipated by the volunteer sector. It is an opportunity for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to have meaningful input into the future of volunteering in this State. The sector is appreciative of this initiative.

Across the State volunteers are the lynchpin in the delivery of community activities and are critical to the success of local, state, national and international events.

There is an impression that volunteers are free. At every level there are costs in deploying volunteers depending upon the type of activity. Many people choose not to volunteer because they simply cannot afford to do so. Organisations struggle to meet the basic cost of their volunteer program including insurance, probity checks, appropriate Policies and Procedures, safety etc. **The value in dollar terms to the economy is immeasurable, but the investment is miserable.** There is an expectation that VIOs will shoulder the cost within their existing resources. This is limiting and repressive in the delivery of services and activities and restricts access and constrains innovation in the volunteer space.

The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 report determined:

- The labour costs to replace volunteers across Queensland is estimated at \$31.3 billion
- The total value of volunteering is \$117.8 billion
- Every \$1 invested in volunteering returns \$4.70

People are enthusiastic about volunteering however the volunteer landscape has changed radically, especially post COVID where we find that people are not returning to volunteering in pre COVID numbers. We need to reorientate to this unfamiliar territory and find innovative ways to address the changes. People are time poor, and cost of living pressures regulate people's ability to volunteer. Increasingly, because of the downturn in volunteer numbers, many of those who do volunteer are overworked and suffer volunteer fatigue.

Volunteering is as challenging as it is rewarding for individuals. Often people want to do it but are afraid to take the first step. VRCs/Volunteer hubs provide a welcoming environment for people to explore the opportunities available to them, match making them with organisations that are "best fit" for the individual considering their education, experience, skills and capability, and offering a range of volunteer "jobs" for consideration.

Innovative funding solutions need to be found to address the findings of the Inquiry. Rationalisation of current funding distribution, redirection of funds where appropriate and perhaps a rethink of the distribution of monies from the Gambling Benefit Community Fund towards operational funding for key organisations that support VIO/volunteer resourcing.

**Recommendation 6: Operational funding allocations need to be made for key organisations supporting the resourcing of VIOs and volunteers.**





## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** To consider a pilot project for Volunteer Hubs that are regionally based and provide volunteer recruitment, placement, training and support for volunteer involving organisations.

**Recommendation 2:** A performance framework to guide the proposed Volunteer Hub infrastructure to be developed collaboratively with Government, Volunteering Queensland and other stakeholders to ensure that the goals and objectives of all relevant parties are addressed

**Recommendation 3:** A sustainable, locally led Volunteer Hub infrastructure for Queensland that builds on the existing structures and provides scaffolding which supports resilience and flexibility in strengthening local, place-based initiatives *and* a universal platform for volunteering across the general population.

**Recommendation 4:** That a standardised framework for emergent/spontaneous volunteers be developed that can be reoriented to local conditions for disaster response and recovery, and that appropriate funding be allocated for planning and implementation.

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**Recommendation 6:** Operational funding allocations need to be made for key organisations supporting the resourcing of VIOs and volunteers.

- **FNQ Volunteers Inc. supports the Volunteering Queensland submission**




Signed: Annette Sheppard

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President FNQ Volunteers



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## EMERGENT/SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERING

Submission prepared by FNQ Volunteers Inc.

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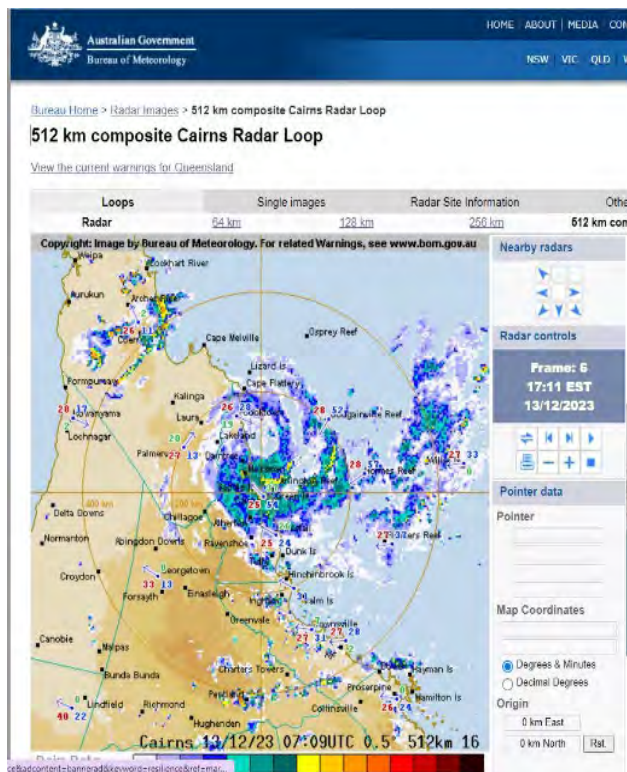
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Contact person: Annette Sheppard

6 March 2025



Cyclone Jasper devastates Far North Queensland Christmas – New Year 2023 - 24



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## Emergent Volunteering

Emergent/Spontaneous Volunteers are individuals, groups or organisations (including staff time offered by corporate and professional entities) that offer to assist a community affected by a disaster/emergency. Volunteers provide crucial support to disaster affected communities and individuals. They can help build community resilience and assist with disaster response and recovery.

Coordinating and managing these offers of assistance, including spontaneous volunteering, can be challenging. In the past, whilst the activities of spontaneous volunteers during disasters have produced positive results for the community, they also at times have unfortunately caused additional stress for communities, as well as significant challenges for the effective coordination of the response and recovery processes. The effective use of spontaneous volunteers is essential in the response and recovery phases of any emergency.

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Government at all levels have been under closer scrutiny in terms of accountability, areas of responsibility and culpability with regards to damage (personal and property) caused through ignorance or negligence. This has been borne out in the outcomes and recommendations of various recent Royal Commissions and Investigations.

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***coordination an effective response can be deployed into areas of need. In engaging with emergent volunteers, strong leadership is required to facilitate their successful and safe participation during emergencies.***

The personal safety of volunteers is paramount. Appropriate insurance is essential. Pre-deployment briefings and orientation must be carried out, including WH&S and the issuing of appropriate PPE. Clear instructions regarding what they are permitted to do, and what they can't do, must be given. Management and monitoring of all sites is essential for the safety and wellbeing of participants. A line of command must be identified.

Given the associated risks in engaging with emergent volunteers a strategic approach is required to address any complications that may arise during their deployment. Currently the approach, at both State and local levels, has been reactive rather than responsive. An Emergent/Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy is needed.

Funding from both State and Local Governments is required to ensure the effective and efficient deployment of emergent volunteers if the risks are to be addressed. Expectations are becoming more sophisticated, and the demands increasingly more onerous. Local volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) are not funded or equipped to respond to these situations. Their insurance covers existing volunteers not emergent volunteers who are only there for the duration of the emergency response. SES and other organisations such as Red Cross and the Salvation Army have specified response roles and responsibilities and generally do not deploy untrained volunteers into disaster areas.

**Recommendation 1: That a Statewide Volunteer Insurance Fund be initiated and made available to VIOs to ensure volunteers have protection during their deployment during disaster/emergency response and recovery.**

**COVID:** The COVID 19 response experience magnified the need for a coordinated approach to the management of emergent/spontaneous volunteers during disasters and in post disaster recovery.

During COVID 19 over 7000 Cairns region residents responded to the State government call, through its Care Army, to assist with various activities in a volunteer capacity. This is not unusual during times of disaster, and requires collaboration and coordination on many levels, to deploy people effectively and efficiently to areas of need within the local community. FNQ Volunteers Inc. took on responsibility for the management of Care Army volunteers during this time.

**During the COVID 19 response the difficulty was in finding VIOs that were willing to take on Care Army volunteers, and to operate in areas outside their constitutional boundaries. Without an insurance guarantee organisations were reluctant to engage with Care Army. This will be an ongoing problem that must be resolved for organisations to participate during emergencies.**



## Recent Experience Far North Queensland – Cyclone Jasper

The impact of Cyclone Jasper was both unexpected and unprecedented in terms of the devastating flooding post cyclone. As a long-term resident, and former Councillor (Mulgrave Shire 1992 – 95 and Cairns City Council 1995 – 2008) in my personal experience, the last time I witnessed extensive inundation was in 1967 and the early 1970's when the Barron Delta was a sea of water. Subsequently there has been extensive development on what has previously been flood overflow areas, resulting in flooding of residential areas not previously affected.

Interestingly, the current Cairns LDMP states in relation to the Delta: ***While flooding causes inconvenience and some dislocation in Cairns on average about once every two/three years it poses a relatively limited threat to people and buildings because urban development has largely been excluded from the most flood-prone areas of the Barron River delta. This exclusion reflects the community's experience of at least nine episodes of major flooding since the establishment of the Trinity Inlet settlement in 1876. The loss of sugar cane and damage to roads and other infrastructure on the delta and along Freshwater Creek carries with it a significant economic loss. The most significant inconvenience caused by moderate to major flooding in the Barron River system is the isolation of the northern beachside suburbs from downtown Cairns, with its critical facilities such as hospitals and airport.***

History shows the inaccuracy of this statement and the lack of preparedness to respond to community need. In the aftermath there was effectively little or no formal planning for the deployment of emergent volunteers. What happened, was an overwhelming community volunteer response without oversight that set up a "mud army" to clean up flood affected properties, food banks/ clothing/furniture/white goods distribution centres. Council belatedly responded using EV Crew recruited volunteers.



Unexpected and unprecedented inundation of the Barron Delta - Kamerunga/Lake Placid/Caravonica  
Looking back to the Barron Gorge and towards the mouth of the river



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Unfortunately, the community-led “mud army” volunteers (Addendum 1) were at serious risk given that there was no volunteer insurance, and a lack of risk assessment, induction process, and provision of appropriate PPE. Additionally, householders were at risk of jeopardising their insurance because of ill advised clearance of “evidence” of damage and loss. Sending volunteers into contaminated flood areas without appropriate risk assessment and PPE is dangerous on many levels, particularly water borne diseases and infections. Eg. Melioidosis, Leptospirosis and Cellulitis etc.

Criticism is not of the volunteer effort which was spontaneous and generous. The problem was the lack of appropriate planning and execution of a strategic response at Government level. In previous cyclonic events FNQ Volunteers Inc. has provided leadership in the management of volunteer teams deployed into affected areas. Currently there is no such arrangement in place.

Emergent, spontaneous volunteer response must be managed with appropriate processes in place. This response happens in the immediate aftermath of a cyclonic event, when people respond to the very real and desperate needs of their fellow citizens. Adequate funding and volunteer insurance are urgently required to address these issues.

There are three other spaces for comment.

Firstly, the Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) respondents. Theoretically it is expected that they will be involved with the recovery efforts. However, they are generally not deployed until 12 - 14 days post disaster declaration, well past the critical recovery time. Essentially, they are not involved in the cleanup of local properties, or they come in at the tail end when the most urgent response has already happened. Their role is more post emergency cleanup and focuses on specific more organised projects. They are well funded, and utilise volunteers to do their work, and charge Local Governments for their involvement, however they are usually not available to respond at the critical time post cyclone.

Secondly, Givit. There is usually an overwhelming community response to community need for household goods, clothing and food that is instantaneous. This generosity is discouraged, and requests are made primarily for money donations through the officially Government sponsored organisation Givit. Feedback from community is that they resent the intrusion of an outsider organisation and the rejection of local response. Whilst this partnership may ensure the checks and balances are in place for fiscal responsibility, in practice it inhibits community response. Not everyone is positioned to give financially.

In outsourcing things that could be done by the local community, the community is deprived of their sense of self-worth. Resilience and community empowerment are discouraged. People need to feel some degree of control over their own destiny.

The reality is that many people become desperate in the face of disaster and need those things basic for survival, they can't wait for a bureaucratic response that may take days or weeks or even months for action. Community response, volunteer based and, on the ground, fulfils that need even if the donations are substandard, they are good enough to assist the recipient to make do for the



interim. Yes, there is often an overload of donations, however this can be managed by the local community if the resources and processes are in place.

Thirdly, currently the State Government has invested heavily in Neighbourhood Centres and have identified them as hubs for volunteering with strategic direction for volunteering during disasters. The *Qld Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Monsoon Resilience December 2020 - 2023* and *Qld Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023 – 2026* identify Neighbourhood Centres as the key organisation for volunteering *Chapter 5 The Role of Neighbourhood Centres in Community Disaster Resilience in Queensland*.

The purpose here is not to denigrate the work of Neighbourhood Centres, rather to draw a distinction between the activities of the Centres in relation to the wider volunteer landscape, and their mandate to respond to locality-driven community need. The Neighbourhood Centres are an invaluable resource for local communities and generally cater for the immediate demographic which varies from place to place. Whilst they interact and at times collaborate with other community organisations, their role is more inwardly focused on their programmes within their own centres. They utilise volunteers for their own needs. *Neighbourhood Centres Queensland – 2023 Sector Impact Report. Chapter 3 Community Impact*.

In contrast the role of the VRC/Volunteer Hub is to collaborate, cooperate, interact and work with the wider VIO community supporting their volunteer needs. They recruit, train and match volunteers with VIOs, provide training and support to VIOs, conduct workshops, seminars and symposiums to address critical volunteer related issues and generally assist the volunteer sector to survive and thrive. FNQ Volunteers Inc. provides this resource. (Addenda 2 and 3)

We need to become more resilient to disasters, because communities need long term support to develop their capacity to bounce back. Deeper structural reform is required that considers local capacity, knowledge and experience of local geography and demographics, and community pride.

**Recommendation 2: That a standardised framework for the management of emergent/spontaneous volunteers be developed that can be reoriented to local conditions, and managed by locally based Organisations, for disaster response and recovery, and that appropriate funding be allocated for planning and implementation**



Barron River flooding – Western Arterial Road Caravonica/Lake Placid  
Bottom corner of photo is Caravonica Waters Aged-care Facility





## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That a **Statewide Volunteer Insurance Fund** be initiated and made available to VIOs to ensure volunteers have protection during their deployment during disaster/emergency response and recovery.

**Recommendation 2:** That a **standardised framework** for the management of emergent/spontaneous volunteers be developed that can be reoriented to local conditions, and managed by locally based Organisations, for disaster response and recovery, and that appropriate funding be allocated for planning and implementation.

## Reference Documents

*Queensland Recovery Plan – Sub-plan to the Queensland State Disaster Management Plan*

*Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience - Boots on the ground: Raising resilience Chapter 3 The decline of Volunteerism*

*Qld Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Monsoon Resilience December 2020 - 2023*

*Qld Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023 – 2026*

*Neighbourhood Centres Queensland – 2023 Sector Impact Report. Chapter 3 Community Impact.*



**Addendum 1 A Facebook post from one of the coordinators of the “Mud Army” referred to above.**

This was a fabulous effort, and credit where credit is deserved.

However, I feel it is still such a shame there has been no formal acknowledgement for the 100's (1000's ?) of volunteers of Cairns Mud Army and Cairns Flood Appeal. They hit the ground running, literally as the event was still going and ensured people didn't starve, had clothes on their back, Christmas provided and in some cases, were actually rescued.

This was at a crucial time when there was little formal response.

I remember when the below organisation rocked into the Fred Moule pavilion and we were so grateful for seeing them, literally ANYONE, after 10 days working all day all night.

The Premier, at the time got a great photo op with the paid Ergon workers as he handed them free beer but didn't walk the 100 meters to our pavilion, to see first hand the sweaty, exhausted volunteers literally putting their own time and money into their vital efforts.

I note the absence of the Mayor at the time who instead had tantrums when we clarified who Mud Army actually were (certainly not from council)

It took some very emotional phone calls to Warren Entsch to get some generators to vulnerable sites such at Lake Placid. This finally happened and wouldn't you know it, the council and state, who DIDNT organise them, held a press conference on site to take credit.

It was all very disheartening.



Anyway, it wasn't why any of us did what we did and I personally, will never forget the faces that turned up day after day asking "how can we help".

It just would have been nice to have been acknowledged formally by government, local, state or federal.

I would have thought the upcoming Australia Day celebrations would have been the perfect time to acknowledge formally the efforts of some incredible men and women, who went above and beyond to help out their community. But as I understand it, there isn't anything in the wind.

I just get sad, the recovery effort was politicised after initial failures by government and I note there is still no inquiry as of yet.

However the efforts of [David Raymond](#) and to my memory, Bree James just showed how much that thank you function and certificates meant. And of course, I guess it all pales into insignificance, when you remember the raw gratitude of the people affected by such a traumatic event.

I have a message for the people in local and state government who have been elected now... DO BETTER!

The absence of your predecessors was noted.

I was asked, after co-ordinating Mud Army, to go into politics. I declined due to personal commitments at the time. Plus, I was still mega pissed off with the whole lot of them.



I'm rethinking that now - so if anyone has got a good pitch and a platform where you think I can actually get something done, I'd be happy to talk.

Anyway we will never forget who you are, and I will always be grateful to you ...always.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]





## Addendum 2

### POSSIBLE FRAMEWORK FOR EMERGENT/SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERING – PROPOSAL PUT TO CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL POST COVID

The COVID 19 response experience has magnified the need for a coordinated approach to the management of spontaneous volunteers during disasters. FNQ Volunteers Inc. in association with Volunteering Queensland are well placed to respond to this need.

During COVID 19 over 7000 Cairns region residents responded to the State government call, through its Care Army, to assist with various activities in a volunteer capacity. This is not unusual during times of disaster, and requires collaboration and coordination on many levels, to deploy people effectively and efficiently to areas of need within the local community.

This proposal outlines a potential partnership between Cairns Regional Council, through the Local Disaster Management Group, and FNQ Volunteers Inc. for the management of Spontaneous Volunteers and related activities, at times of emergency situations.

### BACKGROUND

Spontaneous Volunteers are individuals, groups or organisations (including staff time offered by corporate and professional entities) that offer to assist a community affected by a disaster. Volunteers provide crucial support to disaster affected communities and individuals. They can help build community resilience and assist with disaster response and recovery.

Coordinating and managing these offers of assistance, including spontaneous volunteering, can be challenging. In the past, whilst the activities of spontaneous volunteers during disasters have produced positive results for the community, they also at times have unfortunately caused additional stress for communities, as well as significant challenges for the effective coordination of the response and recovery processes. The effective use of spontaneous volunteers is essential in the response and recovery phases of any emergency.

As per the Queensland Disaster Management arrangements, Councils are required to have plans in place for the management of spontaneous volunteers.

#### Models for the management of spontaneous volunteers

The following models for the management of spontaneous disaster volunteers have been identified as being suitable for potential adoption by local government authorities.

**Model 1:** LG led management of spontaneous volunteers. LG is accountable and responsible for the management and coordination of spontaneous disaster volunteers.

**Model 2:** One key partner with the responsibility of managing spontaneous volunteers. Managed by one key nominated agency or organisation, which is then accountable and responsible for the management and coordination of spontaneous disaster volunteers. This organisation would work in partnership with the LG.

**Model 3:** A consortium of partners with the responsibility of managing spontaneous volunteers. Managed by a consortium of agencies or organisations who are then accountable and responsible for the management of spontaneous disaster volunteers



## What does Volunteer Management involve?

Volunteer management includes (but not limited to):

- Maintaining Personal Accident and Public Liability Insurance for all staff, coordinators, team leaders and volunteers
- Screening, recruitment, and registration of volunteers
- Volunteer inductions, briefings, and debriefings
- Training and supervision of staff, team leaders, coordinators, and volunteers
- Workplace Health and Safety policies, procedures, and volunteer obligations
- Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Transport
- Communications
- Reward and Recognition of volunteers
- Policies, procedures, codes of conduct
- Direct management, supervision, and coordination of activities

## OUR CAPABILITY

FNQ Volunteers Inc. has over 2 decades experience, working and supporting Volunteer Involving Organisations and volunteers, in the Cairns Regional Council LGA and across the FNQ region.

As a result of our work, FNQ Volunteers Inc. can demonstrate:

- Strong understanding of volunteer management frameworks
- Use of established volunteer management practices in its existing volunteer programs
- Strong connection to local Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIO's) and volunteers
- Long standing relationship with Volunteering Queensland (VQ) and its EV CREW
- Use of the centralised EV database for the management of volunteer registrations and deployment
- An openness to working in collaboration that enhances locally lead approaches e.g. We are currently testing new models for sharing data of volunteers registered through Care Army to support the placement of local volunteers.

NB. Care Army database utilises EV CREW frameworks.

NB. Support will also be provided by Volunteering Queensland within their capacity as lead volunteer agency in the recruitment and deployment of volunteers through the centralised EV database

## POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

There is potential for partnership with other Local Governments within the FNQ ROC cohort of Councils. All face similar disaster situations which attract emergent volunteers from time to time.

It may be a cost-effective measure to train an **FNQ ROC Response Team** of Team Leaders who have capability to respond to the management and coordination of emergent volunteers throughout the Region. During emergencies Councils historically have assisted each other with specialist expertise and personal. This is an opportunity to explore the possible effectiveness of a joint volunteer response strategy, taking into consideration local capacity and need.





Based on the organisations self-assessment re its capability to undertake this role, FNQ Volunteers Inc. have noted key gap areas including:

Gaps	Solutions
Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek insurance to cover activities of Spontaneous Volunteers during disaster response</li> </ul>
Risk Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification of risks associated with spontaneous volunteering activities</li> </ul>
Team Leaders for Spontaneous Volunteer crews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit and Train Volunteer Workforce to undertake the key roles of Team Leaders of Spontaneous Volunteers</li> </ul>
Skills mapping (Team Leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills mapping to determine the requirements for Team Leaders</li> </ul>
Organisational mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisational mapping to identify their potential roles in emergency situations</li> </ul>
Volunteer mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mapping of the requirements for volunteers, including health information that might preclude them from engaging with specific activities</li> </ul>
Provision of PPE equipment and uniforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and source the provision of appropriate PPE for various emergency situations</li> <li>Provision of an identifiable uniform for Team Leaders</li> <li>Provision of identifiable T-shirt for Volunteers</li> </ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport of Spontaneous Volunteers to and from their assigned volunteer activity</li> </ul>
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phone line/s dedicated during emergency</li> <li>Appropriate communications equipment for Team Leaders E.g. Smart phones</li> </ul>
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify associated costs in the engagement of Spontaneous Volunteers including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insurance</li> <li>Communications</li> <li>Transport</li> <li>Recruitment and Training</li> <li>PPE, uniforms</li> </ul> </li> <li>Establish a budget</li> <li>Explore the potential for grants and sponsorships</li> </ul>
Limited experience and knowledge of working within the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership on the LDMG</li> <li>Membership on the Local Human and Social Recovery Group</li> <li>Undertake QDMA training provided by QFES</li> <li>Participation in exercises to increase the organisations knowledge to support this role</li> </ul>



## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

### Preliminary work:

1. Identify work to be undertaken by spontaneous Volunteers.  
Examples of tasks being planned for by other LGAs for Spontaneous Volunteer activities include
  - Clean-up operations (green waste removal, household and yard waste removal, general household cleaning)
  - Assistance at community centres
  - Transport and/or delivery
  - Letterbox drops
  - Assistance at evacuation centres
  - Assistance at community events, following disasters
2. Volunteering Queensland to define how they manage Spontaneous Volunteers during disasters. There may be some process already utilised by VQ that can be easily adapted to local circumstances
3. FNQ Volunteers Inc. to determine information required for Public Liability and Personal Accident insurance coverage for Spontaneous Volunteers and the Leadership Team

**NB.** provide clear information to the Insurer on the tasks and activities volunteers will be undertaking and how the organization will be managing this workforce - screening, induction, supervision and work health and safety. Suitable and appropriate insurance coverage for Volunteers is imperative for the establishment of a volunteer response during emergencies.

### Potential Costs

FNQ Volunteers Inc. is a small non for-profit organisation with limited access to funds, we would not have the capacity to meet all costs connected to undertaking this role. Potential costs connected to this role would include:

- FNQ Volunteers Inc. currently carries the relevant levels of Public Liability Insurance and Personal Accident Cover for their volunteers.
  - Additional insurance would be required for Spontaneous volunteers and the Leadership Team
  - Insurance (Liability and Personal Accident) for Spontaneous Disaster Volunteers. These costs cannot be identified until the organisation is aware of the tasks expected to be undertaken by Spontaneous Volunteers and provided to the insurer
- PPE clothing and equipment, identifiable uniforms for Team Leaders + T-shirts for volunteers
- Any costs connected to screening Team Leaders E.g. Criminal History Checks, Blue Card
- Costs connected to training Team Leaders in the management of Spontaneous Volunteers during disasters.  
NB. Volunteering Queensland has developed Team Leader training for Spontaneous Volunteering  
Costs will be associated with the organisation being able to deliver this training and will include transport (Brisbane – Cairns – Brisbane) and accommodation
- Any essential resources identified as being required that fall outside of what is currently available within the organisation and identified as part of this process, including transport and communications resources





## RISK

Government at all levels have been under closer scrutiny in terms of accountability, areas of responsibility and culpability with regards to damage (personal and property) caused through ignorance or negligence. This has been borne out in the outcomes and recommendations of various recent Royal Commissions and Investigations.

***Volunteer management carries inherent risks, particularly emergent volunteering. These willing helpers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and with a range of skills and expertise. Most have little experience in disaster response or volunteering under duress. With capable coordination an effective response can be deployed into areas of need. In engaging with emergent volunteers, strong leadership is required to facilitate their successful and safe participation during emergencies.***

The personal safety of volunteers is paramount. Appropriate insurance is essential. Pre-deployment briefings and orientation must be carried out, including WH&S and the issuing of appropriate PPE. Clear instructions regarding what they are permitted to do must be given. Management and monitoring of all sites is essential for the safety and wellbeing of participants. A line of command must be identified.

Given the associated risks in engaging with emergent volunteers a strategic approach is required to address any complications that may arise during their deployment. Currently the approach, at both State and local levels, has been reactive rather than responsive. A Volunteer Strategy is needed.

Funding from both State and Local Governments is required to ensure the effective and efficient deployment of emergent volunteers if the risks are to be addressed. Expectations are becoming more sophisticated, and the demands increasingly more onerous. Local volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) are not funded or equipped to respond to these situations. Their insurance covers existing volunteers not emergent volunteers who are only there for the duration of the emergency response. SES and other organisations such as Red Cross and the Salvation Army have specified response roles and responsibilities, and generally do not deploy untrained volunteers into disaster areas.

During the COVID 19 response the difficulty was in finding VIOs that were willing to take on Care Army volunteers, and to operate in areas outside their constitutional boundaries. Without an Insurance guarantee organisations were reluctant to engage with Care Army. This will be an ongoing problem that must be resolved for organisations to participate during emergencies.



## AGREEMENT

Once agreement is reached the following would be undertaken to formalise the arrangement:

1. Council develop and adopt a Management of Spontaneous Volunteers during disasters sub-plan document
2. Identify and access funding sources
3. Establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Cairns Regional Council and FNQ Volunteers Inc. to formalise the partnership, apportion responsibility, and outline mutually agreed arrangements including funding
4. Establish an Agreement with Volunteering Queensland regarding training and any other assistance relating to emergency volunteering
5. FNQ Volunteers Inc. document their volunteer management practices, including relevant Policies and Procedures as an addendum to the MOU
6. Work in collaboration to develop Standard Operating Procedures, including lines of communication and command, to support coordination activities between the LDMG, LDCCC, and other partner agencies.
7. Provide relevant forums to assist FNQ Volunteers Inc. to be prepared to perform their role
8. Access insurance
9. FNQ Volunteers Inc. to commence recruitment of Team Leaders for Spontaneous Disaster Volunteers. Propose 50 are recruited in the first instance. Potential sources – Former ADF and similar personnel
10. Training of Team Leaders and Coordinators with Volunteering Queensland, and other identified training delivered by appropriate organisation/s or trainer/s
11. Coordinate monthly training meetings with Team Leaders





### Addendum 3. Flowchart for Emergent/Spontaneous Volunteer Management

