

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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As an SES volunteer for almost 17 years and who is questioning why I should stay in the organisation, I have been asked on numerous occasions what it is like within the organisation and the longer I am in the more this quote comes to mind. "We, the willingLed by the unknowingAre doing the impossibleFor the ungratefulWe have done so muchFor so longWith so littleWe are now qualifiedTo do anythingWith nothing" While the members of the public are generally grateful for our work as we have been there to help in some of the worst times of their lives. It feels as though the machinery of government considers us in terms labour, resourcing and cost and the appreciation by local government employees, councillors, and members of parliament seem to only be platitudes dolled out in speeches when politically expedient. As if there was true appreciation, we would have a better organised system as well as adequate resourcing rather than hearing "there wasn't a budget item for that." Within the Brisbane unit there is one group (Southern group) who in 2022 was evicted from their depot at Salisbury to make way for Cross-river rail infrastructure. This was no surprise to some as the land was resumed some years previous and the group was allowed to continue there until the land was needed. This notification came, and a rushed effort was made to pack everything up and move out as the buildings were allegedly going to be demolished only a few weeks after the group left. In February 2025, the buildings are still standing and looking derelict. At least now there is work going on at the site. The Brisbane city council despite years of notice had made no apparent effort to find a new location for our group and announced to the group that they were to relocate and share a depot with another Brisbane SES group at Richlands We were informed by the then local controller that this was only a temporary move and we would get a new depot but it would take 2-5 years to get all the planning etc. done. Since the move the group has lost many members, before the move we had over 100 members on the books across 3 training days and now there is at most 30 because the new depot is further away from our homes and some people have found it impractical to get to. Other practical issues, our group services a large area that is subject to flooding and moving our groups assets such as vehicles puts them on the other side of a flood plain which is going to make it difficult for members to reach vehicles etc should there be another flood. Members have raised concerns about the current depot location because of the travel time in to jobs as members have to travel further to pick up a vehicle, drive back to the location of the job (which is typically near their homes as they live within the job catchment area), do the job(s), complete the electronic paperwork, drive back to the depot, and then drive home. While driving "down the road" a bit doesn't sound that problematic, it can add another 1.5 hours onto a tasking and members have lost their motivation to add this extra time onto their volunteering, especially given the number of jobs that we arrive to only to find that we can't do it because, we can't get onto a roof because of solar panels, or there are no suitable anchor points for our heights safety system to attach to. When we have told the local controller about this issue we have just been told that that is the nature of volunteering and if it is a problem then maybe we could consider leaving. The dysfunction between local government and state. For an organisation called the State Emergency Service, it seems strange that local government has so much sway in the organisation and the position of local controller is appointed by council. Within Brisbane the position has been filled by a council employee who hasn't been an active volunteer within the organisation and to many volunteers doesn't truly understand what the volunteers actually do. I know in many other local government areas, local controllers are recruited from SES ranks for the role and this makes so much more sense. Another issue that has made members consider leaving has been the reallocation of assets purchased by group support

organisations. I like many other members have worked hard at various times to raise funds for the group members association, an association who has the purpose of purchasing equipment to support members within the group. Over time this has included purchasing plant equipment, vehicles and other general equipment that the members see as their groups items except higher ups will claim that they can reallocate it since it is now a unit asset and they can do what they want. Members have been told as much and while it may be true, it is still a slap in the face for those who worked hard to raise the funds. I will acknowledge that for many years the Brisbane city council has matched our fundraising efforts which has been greatly appreciated, however we have been told that this will not continue due to budgetary constraints. Also within Brisbane unit, there is another group who most recently have been told they can not enter major parts of their depot due to poor maintenance on the building resulting in water leaks and mould and that they will have to potentially share a depot with another group so who knows what that will do to their member numbers. I could go on more about other issues that have driven members away from the organisation but it would be a long list. In short: Why do people volunteer for organisations such as the SES? Because they want to help the community they live in. Why do people not stay as volunteers in organisations such as the SES? Because they find out that their ability to help the community they live in is restricted by the organisation they volunteered for. I said at the start that I had been a volunteer in the organisation for nearly 17 years and I was questioning why I stay in the organisation. I have over the years willingly given up my time to help others when they have been at their worst. These situations have sometimes affected by health both physical and mental, however I would do it all again willingly because it is the right thing to do. I also stay out of loyalty to my team, because I know that they deserve better and I want to try to make it so.