

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

## **RE: Submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland**

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. Volunteers are the foundation of community sport, ensuring millions of Queenslanders have access to participation opportunities that support health, wellbeing and social connection. Volunteers also play a vital role in the successful delivery of major state, national and international sporting events.

This submission outlines the current state of sport volunteering, key challenges for sporting organisations and volunteers, and an insight into existing and planned efforts to support volunteering in sport which may provide an opportunity for alignment.

### **The Value of Sport Volunteering in Queensland**

Queenslanders who volunteer in sport provide significant social, health and economic benefits to the state of Queensland. Volunteering in sport delivers individual and community benefits such as:

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Volunteers experience higher levels of physical activity and mental wellbeing, reducing healthcare costs.
- **Community and Social Impact:** Sport strengthens community connection, fosters inclusion and enhances social cohesion. The human capital and physical infrastructure of local sporting clubs also plays a critical role in supporting communities impacted by natural disasters.
- **Pathways to Employment:** Sport volunteering develops transferable skills, particularly for young people and those re-entering the workforce.

Data collected through the Australian Sports Commission's AUSPLAY survey indicates that 11% of Queensland residents aged 15 years and over are involved in sport as a volunteer<sup>1</sup>. Sport and recreation support is also the 3<sup>rd</sup> most prominent way in which volunteers in Queensland contribute to their community<sup>2</sup>.

### **Challenges Facing Sport Volunteers**

Research conducted by the ASC in 2021 found there were significant challenges for sporting organisations and sport volunteers that had been exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>. The estimated number of Australian's aged 15+ who volunteered in sport declined between 2019 and 2021, and the proportion of remaining volunteers doing three or more roles increased, leading to an increased risk of volunteer burnout.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/data/assets/excel\\_doc/0011/1165268/AusPlay-Queensland-Data-Tables-31-October-2024.xlsx](https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/data/assets/excel_doc/0011/1165268/AusPlay-Queensland-Data-Tables-31-October-2024.xlsx)

<sup>2</sup> Volunteering Queensland, State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report, p26.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Sports Commission, AusPlay Focus – How Australians' participation in sport and physical activity is adapting to COVID-normal (July 2022 update), p26.



Through sector-wide consultation the ASC heard that the sport sector's traditional ways of engaging with volunteers were not effectively responding to (or embracing) shifts in society. Many environmental challenges such as busy lifestyles, desire for more flexibility and constant distractions with technology are creating new challenges for sport and sport volunteering. Significant observations included:

- The volunteer experience in sport is not meeting individual needs
- Volunteer roles tend to be time consuming and rigid, discouraging some people from getting involved
- Club cultures with entrenched ways of operating can inhibit participation and involvement of new volunteers
- Sport clubs do not have a complete understanding of what volunteers need and how to respond to these needs
- Some sports clubs do not have the systems, tools and processes to effectively manage volunteers
- The sport ecosystem is highly fragmented and does not have clear roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting volunteers<sup>4</sup>.

Research conducted by the Australian Sports Foundation in 2023 found that local sporting clubs are struggling with less volunteers and more administration. In 2023, community sporting clubs were still more likely to be losing volunteers than gaining them, with 63% of 2,984 clubs surveyed reporting that their main challenge in the last 12 months was not having enough volunteers<sup>5</sup>.

The barriers to volunteering and the things that make volunteering harder identified in Volunteering Queensland's State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 report are also frequently cited by sport volunteers, and those who no longer volunteer in sport or have never volunteered in sport.

A key point of difference to note about the sport sector, is the absence of paid volunteer managers that are present in other volunteer involving organisations. In local sporting organisations, and some state and national sporting organisations, it is volunteers who are managing volunteers, exacerbating the challenges for these clubs and organisations.

### **Supporting the Future of Volunteering in Sport**

In response to challenges that the sport sector was facing in recruiting and retaining volunteers, the ASC joined forces with Volunteering Australia in 2020 to help tackle this most pressing challenge facing the sports industry. In 2021 the ASC released an industry-first insights report - The future of sport volunteering, and a new national plan for the future of sport volunteering<sup>6</sup>. The national plan identified a dual-pronged role for the ASC in *connecting partners* and *enhancing capability* across the sport sector. Recognising the power of collective action, the Sport Volunteering National Plan called upon the ASC to establish a Sport Volunteer Coalition and support the Coalition to develop a 4-year action plan.

The Sport Volunteer Coalition was formed in January 2022 to provide expert advice and guidance on development, implementation and evaluation of a four-year Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan. The Coalition comprises of 10 changemakers from the sports industry, government, and volunteering working together to advocate and drive change in sport volunteering. A representative from the Queensland

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Sports Commission, The future of sport volunteering, p10 – 13.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Sports Foundation, Your Sport Your Say, Clubs Under Pressure, Australian Community Sport Research Findings, May 2023, p16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Sports Commission, Sport Volunteering National Plan



Government was a founding member of the Sport Volunteer Coalition and remains a member of the Coalition<sup>7</sup>.

The Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022 – 2026<sup>8</sup> was launched in September 2022 with a vision for the future of sport volunteering:

*People from all walks of life see and realise opportunities to contribute to individual, club and community goals in a way that suits them.*

The Sport Volunteer Coalition declared an intent and a plan to enable more Australians to experience volunteering in sport, creating inclusive and accessible opportunities to volunteer, and fostering positive, safe and fulfilling experiences that put people and communities first.

Since the launch of the Action plan, the ASC and Sport Volunteer Coalition have been working hard to deliver the plan, driving change across sport, government and volunteering to support sporting organisations to enhance the sport volunteer experience. The achievements of the Coalition in implementing the plan can be found in the Sport Volunteer Coalition Year One<sup>9</sup> and Year 2<sup>10</sup> Reports.

The ASC and Sport Volunteer Coalition are currently delivering the third year of the plan with a focus on enhancing the sport volunteer experience through the activity pillars of Reimagine and Innovate. From a broader policy perspective, the Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan is identified as a key activation channel for the current National Sport Strategy – Sport Horizon 2024 – 2034<sup>11</sup> and is a key Horizon 1 activity of Play Well, Australia's first dedicated sport participation strategy<sup>12</sup>. Importantly, at a meeting of Federal, State and Territory Sport Ministers on 8 November 2023, Ministers noted progress made on implementing the Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan and endorsed continued collaboration on its implementation.

The ASC has a continuing partnership with Volunteering Australia through a formal Memorandum of Understanding. The ASC was a key contributor to the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023 - 2033 and is a lead implementation partner on the National Strategy for Volunteering Action Plan 2024 – 2027.

### Driving Collaborative Action

The leadership of the ASC and Sport Volunteer Coalition has led to a greater recognition across sport, volunteering, and government of the need to reimagine how we engage volunteers and deliver rewarding volunteer experiences. This recognition is also leading to the formation of new partnerships and collaborative action both within and across sectors.

- **Northern Territory Sport Volunteer Action Plan 2023 – 2025<sup>13</sup>**: Released on 12 September 2023 by the Northern Territory Government (NTG), the Action Plan outlines how the NTG will support sporting organisations through volunteer workforce promotion, support and grants. The Action Plan is explicitly aligned with the ASC's Sport Volunteering National Plan and Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022 – 26<sup>14</sup>. To support implementation the NTG have formed a collaborative

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<sup>7</sup> [Coalition Spotlight - Jess Cook | Australian Sports Commission](#)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Sports Commission, Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022 - 2026

<sup>9</sup> Australian Sports Commission, Sport Volunteer Coalition Year One Report 2022-23

<sup>10</sup> Australian Sports Commission, Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan Year 2 Report

<sup>11</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health and Aged Care), Sport Horizon, National Sport Strategy 2024 – 2034.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Sports Commission, Play Well – Australia's Sports Participation Strategy, November 2023

<sup>13</sup> Northern Territory Government, [Northern Territory Sport Volunteer Action Plan](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Volunteer development | Department of People, Sport and Culture](#)





partnership with Volunteering SA/NT and provided funding of \$200,000 towards grants, initiatives, and activities.<sup>15</sup>

- **Sport Volunteers – Thrive With Support:** Commencing in 2022/23, VICSPORT partnered with Volunteering Victoria and Regional Sport Victoria to create sporting club focused resources and a volunteering support network<sup>16</sup>. The partnership was supported with funding of \$225,000 from the Victorian Government<sup>17</sup>.
- **Sustainable Volunteer Workforce Program (2024-27):** Sport and Recreation Victoria are providing grants for initiatives which aim to build a sustainable volunteer workforce, supporting volunteer engagement, retention and ways to better support the workforce to deliver sport and active recreation in regional Victoria. Funding of up to \$450,000 over 3 years (2024–25 to 2026–27) is available to eligible organisations<sup>18</sup>.
- **NSW State of Volunteering – Volunteering in Sport 2024:** Collaboration between the New South Wales (NSW) Government and The Centre for Volunteering has led to publication of the first dedicated supplementary report on sport volunteering in NSW as part of the NSW State of Volunteering 2023 project<sup>19</sup>. This report analyses volunteering trends among people who volunteer in sports in NSW, and aims to provide an understanding of the motivations, challenges, and societal benefits associated with volunteering in sports<sup>20</sup>.
- **NSO/D Volunteer Leaders Network:** The ASC established this network in February 2024 for leaders of volunteering in National Sporting Organisations and National Sporting Organisations for People with Disability. The network is now supporting connection and collaboration amongst volunteering leaders from 20 NSO/Ds and has prompted 5 NSO/Ds to develop their first ever Volunteer Action Plan<sup>21</sup>.

Continuing collaboration and alignment are critical for maximising our collective impact, and the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023 – 2033 and the Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022 – 2026 provide a valuable guide for aligned and collaborative action in Queensland.

## Strengthening Sport Volunteering in Queensland

With the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games on the horizon, there is a pressing need to continue investment and collaboration to support sporting organisations and volunteers in sport.

The Future of Sport Volunteering insights report<sup>22</sup> highlights six key opportunity areas for collaborative action and investment:

- Encourage partnerships between community sports clubs and local organisations to leverage diverse skills, experiences and resources.
- Facilitate collaboration between community sport clubs to share knowledge and resources and reduce needless duplication.
- Reframe sport volunteering, using engagement methods, collateral and tailored messaging to appeal to different volunteer groups.
- Redesign volunteer roles so they are more accessible and bring new skills and diversity to sport volunteering.

<sup>15</sup> NTG Media Release: [Article | Northern Territory Government Newsroom](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Sport Volunteers - Thrive with support — Vicsport](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Ramping up support for community sport volunteers — Vicsport](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Sustainable Volunteer Workforce Program 2024 to 2027 | Sport and Recreation Victoria](#)

<sup>19</sup> [2024 NSW State of Volunteering Supplementary Reports - The Centre for Volunteering](#)

<sup>20</sup> <https://volunteering.freshdesk.com/helpdesk/attachments/51180032977>

<sup>21</sup> [Volunteering now a focal point for the sector | Australian Sports Commission](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Sport-Australia-The-Future-of-Sport-Volunteering-Insights-Report-2021.pdf](#)



- Stimulate innovation, creativity and new ways of working to respond to changing individual and societal shifts.
- Use shared systems to streamline recruitment and support the volunteer experience

The ASC looks forward to continuing to collaborate with the Queensland Government, and the sport and volunteering sectors in Queensland, to enhance the sport volunteer experience for all Queenslanders.