

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

<b>Submission No:</b>	477
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<b>Submitter Comments:</b>	



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## Robbie Katter

Member for Traeger

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Ref: RK-JH

28 February 2025

Mr James Lister MP  
Chair of the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld  
4000

Dear Chair,

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

As the Queensland Member for Traeger, I provide this submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland with a focus on the rural fire brigade volunteers and informal volunteers assisting during rural bushfires.

I submit this document to highlight the critical challenges facing rural fire brigade volunteers and informal volunteer responders to bushfires in Queensland. Despite their essential contributions, volunteers face growing bureaucratic hurdles, inadequate financial support, and a decline in brigade membership. These issues must be urgently addressed to recruit and retain firefighting volunteers and to safeguard Queensland communities.

Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteer numbers have nearly halved in the past two decades, decreasing from approximately 44,000 in 2004 to 26,000 in 2023. This decline has left outback Queensland at an indefensible risk. These volunteers not only protect 93% of the state but also contribute significant time, skills, and resources. Informal volunteering, such as local landowners and private aircraft operators, plays an essential role in emergency response, yet these contributions remain largely unrecognised and unfunded.

**Barriers to volunteering:**

- The centralisation of fire bureaucracy has disempowered rural brigades, reducing their autonomy and effectiveness.
- Excessive legislative requirements, such as mandatory Blue Cards for volunteers, deter participation.
- Poorly managed government-owned land has led to increased bushfire risks, requiring prolonged firefighting efforts. This unnecessarily raises bushfire risk putting a lot of pressure on the limited resources that rural fire brigades have.
- Underfunding leaves volunteers reliant on personal resources such as vehicles and equipment, without reimbursement.
- Inefficient communication between Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) and local brigades impedes fire response coordination.



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### Challenges and recommendations for improvement:

The establishment of the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) has exacerbated issues by centralising decision-making in Brisbane, disregarding local knowledge and expertise. Fire mitigation efforts by RFSQ receive significant funding, yet local volunteers receive little direct support.

Informal volunteers frequently serve as first responders, creating containment lines and conducting backburning before official services arrive. Despite their pivotal role, family-owned operators struggle financially without reimbursement. Legislative changes should facilitate fair compensation for these essential services.

### Recommendations:

- To strengthen rural fire brigades, fire bureaucracy should be decentralised, ensuring departmental oversight empowers local autonomy, knowledge and decision-making and provides direct support and funding for rural brigades.
- Reduction of bureaucratic barriers - removing the Blue Card requirement for volunteer firefighters would increase participation.
  - Increased funding for volunteers - establishing reimbursement schemes for private aircraft and equipment used in firefighting response
- Improved fire mitigation on state-owned land - proactive hazard reduction burns to lower fuel loads and reduce fire severity.
- Enhanced communication and coordination between local fire fighting volunteers and RFSQ during firefighting efforts
- Recognition and support for informal volunteers - providing financial reimbursement for private aircraft operators and landowners actively involved in fire containment.
- To optimise emergency response volunteering in Queensland, the following needs to be prioritised:
  - Strengthening partnerships between rural brigades and agencies
  - Directly funding local firefighting efforts
  - Allowing rural landowners to lead fire response strategies with appropriate government support
  - Upgrading communication infrastructure to improve coordination among emergency response teams.

Rural fire brigades and informal volunteers are the backbone of Queensland's fire response efforts. However, bureaucratic hurdles, declining volunteer numbers, and inadequate funding severely hinder their effectiveness. Urgent reforms are needed to support and sustain rural fire services. I urge the Parliamentary Inquiry to adopt the recommendations outlined in this submission to strengthen Queensland's emergency response framework.

Yours Sincerely,



Robbie Katter  
Member for Traeger