

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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The South East Queensland Catchments Members Association (SEQCMA) is an alliance between community, government and industry focused on finding solutions to issues affecting South East Queensland's environment. SEQCMA is an owner/member of Healthy Land and Water (HLW), the official natural resources management body for South East Queensland. The Association's purpose is to improve and protect our lands, forests, bushland, waterways, wetlands and coastal regions. SEQCMA works closely with HLW project teams to identify and develop solutions that build resilience into our landscapes and waterways. SEQCMA has over 200 member organisations, including catchment, landcare and coastcare groups, agriculture, tourism and local government bodies, Traditional Owners and community members. The catchment, landcare and coastcare groups consist almost entirely of volunteer community members, usually with between 3 and 100 members. An exception is those catchment/landcare groups that have a commercial arm to their business, such as Bulimba Catchment Creek Catchment Coordination Committee and the Oxley Creek Catchment Association, each with a commercial environmental rehabilitation or plant nursery business that carry out commercial on-ground activities. Most of the groups find it relatively easy to mobilise community volunteers for hands-on activities such as in a plant nursery or major bushcare and planting activities, eg, National Tree Day. Young families, university students and other community members have shown a willingness to "get their hands dirty" doing something positive and visible for the environment. A number of the member organisations take advantage of the opportunity to attract corporate volunteers for "team building" on-ground activities. These corporate volunteers are usually highly motivated, work hard and find it a fun and exhilarating experience to work in the bush, providing a recreation and health benefit to participants. Several member organisations are also members of Volunteering Queensland to help gain exposure to corporate volunteering opportunities and take advantage of the great support and guidance available through that organisation. However, we find that attracting volunteers to on-ground activities does not usually translate into a more regular commitment to volunteer with the organisation to carry out administrative and management roles. One of the most problematic issues faced by this sector is the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Many environmental conservation groups rely on an increasingly older cohort of community volunteers for leading/coordinating the on-ground and community education activities and also the group management functions. With the increased focus now on ESG, many of these community-based groups really struggle with the more onerous requirements for good administration, reporting and governance essential for those groups, eg, receiving and acquitting grant funding. The need for good governance is paramount, especially where the grant recipient organisation is an Incorporated Association registered with ACNC with Deductible Gift Register status. The recent decision by the Queensland Government to remove the need for dual reporting to the Office of Fair Trading and the ACNC was a huge step in the right direction to simplify reporting requirements. It would be a tremendous benefit to all Incorporated Associations if similar red tape could be identified and removed. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.