

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE  
INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND**

**SUBMISSION – 28 February 2025**

**Introduction**

I joined a Queensland Rural Fire Service (QRFS) Brigade as a volunteer almost ten years ago now and have seen some significant changes in that time, many of them particularly of late, since the reformation of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) and the Union backed Queensland Fire Department (QFD), retaining the Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) as a service to the detriment of the QRFS as it became entity of QFD.

Much of the rhetoric in relation to the amendments to the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990 which supposedly gives more protection to the volunteers has in fact given the Commissioner, QFD open slather to treat us as unpaid public servants which we are not nor did I join the QRFS to be one. The other major issue under the guise of promising us QRFS volunteers we would have our own Service with our own Chief Officer but nothing is further from that reality. Our QRFS Chief Officer reports the QDF Chief Fire Officer and the Commissioner QDF not the Minister.

The union driven QFD simply fails to understand the ethos of the QRFS volunteers yet on paper and in the thinktank at Kedron they believe they do and the former government made much ado about what a great opportunity it was for our volunteer service. But by stealth disallowed our Association and individual members time to write a submission to the Community, Safety and Legal Affairs Committee before the legislation was passed into law. It appears though on the other hand the Union representing QFR were able to do so and were quite scathing about our service.

**Membership, Recruitment and the Blue Card**

My experience as a new member in the brigade is totally at odds with the current recruitment process. I joined the brigade and within a month had everything approved by the First Officer and, rubber stamped at Area Office, assessed by him as competent to attend fires under the mentorship of a more experienced firefighter.

The mentoring is still extant as it should be but getting approval for a new recruit to even take part in most menial of activities in the brigade is forbidden until the recruit has a blue card and a service ID Number. The First Officer or another of the brigade executive now merely signs off on the application once the member has been voted in by the membership at a General Meeting and forwards it to Area Office, rubber stamped there and passed on up the chain for approval. There it stagnates.

We are advised now that the time frame has improved and they have got it down to three months. This is after some applications taking up to nine months for approval as happened with one of new members, another one took five months and in the interim we lost four

new recruits due to the onerous process. Another one of note is that on 13 May 2024 an application for membership was forwarded to Area Office. Despite our numerous enquiries about where this application sat in the system, we were advised on 3 October 2024 that it could not be found. A new application form has now been submitted and still not processed the reality is that this member could be waiting close to 12 months, or more, before receives his membership.

We are advised that recruitment is up but I think the reality is yes it may be on paper, but we know many leave frustrated with the convoluted process to become a member.

The introduction of the Blue Cards was extremely poorly handled by QFES and as a result the QRFS lost many very experienced members who resented in being belittled by the whole process. My brigade lost two such members both with 18 years of loyal and distinguished service, what an absolute waste.

Many members now still cannot fathom out the rationale why we have to have them. We do not work with children. Although it is accepted that youths of 16 years of age may join a brigade and that they technically are classed as "children" and we may then have exposure to children in that regard but in reality, not under any circumstance where they are not without others or being supervised.

It is my opinion that the Blue Card for QRFS volunteers needs to be scrapped. I have had no requirement nor see any in the future to have one.

The brigade I am with has been in existence since October 1968 and even with the formation of QFES in 1990 has largely managed its own affairs, operationally, financially and administratively for over 55 years without much oversight at all with a membership elected First Officer, Executive and other officers. The power was with the brigade to hire and fire, and make decisions on distribution of funds etc. All that changed on 1 July 2024 now the Commissioner QFD, or his representative has that power under the badly amended legislation.

Why is it now so complicated. Volunteer membership must rest with the brigade members, the First Officer and Executive in deciding who is suitable or unsuitable for service not the Commissioner who is so far removed from the grass roots matters of brigade membership and volunteering.

### **Training**

The introduction and ever evolving of the AXcellerate training system is definitely not suited for volunteers, although many members have encouraged to do their foundation skills (FS) and now to be introduced brigade induction and yet again the firefighter's minimum (FMS) and advanced skills (FAS) and crew leader (CL) courses are being update and it goes on and on.

Initially we had 11 members putting their hands up to do the FS having already qualified as FMS. We ended up with six finishing the work books and including two others who conducted the training clocked up an additional 1,800 hours in the almost 12 months it took to complete the modules.

Most longer courses are conducted at weekends by paid staff and recently they have been told to hold back and the volunteers expected to do more hours. The whole training system needs to be overhauled to suit volunteers the QFES now QFD basically the same management which fails to understand that the vast majority of volunteers hold down



regular jobs, have family commitments and hobbies (their own and their kids) and what time they have for the brigade needs to be gainfully employed on learning how to be a firefighter not a public servant.

What is also not clearly understood or any use made of and that is the skills and professions members bring to their brigades. In my brigade alone we have electricians, fitters arbalist, doctors, nurses dangerous goods professionals, IT specialists, electronics engineers, farmers, miners to name but as few.

**Other**

Unfortunately, I find I have run out of time to write too much more although I would like to but would add that the submission from the Rural Fire Brigades Association Qld (RFBAQ) is fully endorsed and agreed that WE NEED our own Service with our own Chief Officer not reporting to QFD but to the Minister.

We also need to manage our fleet of appliances better than this: -

To our Area Office - The matter of the suspension and safety of this appliance has been outstanding for some time now and still no resolution in sight. Notwithstanding, this matter was brought to your attention on 9 September 2024 in discussion with one of our Officers and this was followed up with an email to you later that day.

We eventually received notice that the matter had yet again been forwarded to Fleet but we still await resolution.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to make a small submission for the committee's consideration.



Lee Hayter

QRFS Brigade Member