

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submitter Comments:

I have been a member of the Queensland community based volunteer Bushfire Brigade system for over 40 years in Class 1 (Primary Producer Brigades) and IZone Brigades) Since the reformation of the Goss Labor Government in 1990 and the then Fire Service Act 1990, the autonomy of the Brigades has been gradually eroded where as today under the recently amended Act, still 1990, the brigade autonomy and financial autonomy has been highly curtailed, giving staff of the QFD and the RFSQ control of Brigade Equipment Levy, Brigade assets that were hard fought for. I have no trust nor faith in the high management of the QFD nor Operational Staff of the RFSQ from Area level right through to the top. Staff are quick to blame or highlight short-comings in Brigade Management or have vendettas on Brigades brigade members who dare contradict staff, show how little knowledge or how inept staff are. These are manifested by formal or informal reprimands or by the silent treatment, one of the worst case scenarios in workplace bullying and harassment. The Operational Staff want lemmings. In my opinion, the RFSQ Operational Staff perceive Rural Fire Brigade Members as free labour, slaves or serf, to do their bidding for them, with tasks that should be paid contractors such as cleaning/tidying RFSQ Government facilities, moving RFSQ Government Offices, all in the name of saving money in an area or regional budget. Often Staff of QFD or its predecessors treat and speak to brigade members with disdain and condescension. The vehicle fleet and build is again a serious cause for concern in the way RFSQ design and build the yellow fleet. Also RFSQ victimizes members who bring to their attention concerns over fleet safety such as the recent GVM debacle of the older medium attack appliances. Even when asking about reports on a brigade vehicle to be told that it is none of our business. Even in the new build of medium attack appliances, the operation manual needed to be modified as the 1st Version stated the vehicle could only be driven on formed roads, great for a bushfire fighting vehicle. RFSQ Staff hide behind the Information Privacy Act when Brigade Management Committee request information about members of their Brigades so as to complete QFD/RFSQ forms such as nominations and I have been told in conversation to leave blank spaces in these for the trusted staff to complete even though I am the nominating person. Most of the information supplied to QFD/RFSQ for inclusion in their antiquated OMS program originated from the brigade and also there is on the Brigade Member Application Form a statement that information provided can be used for operational and Human Resources management, go figure!. This harks back to the bad old days of training when members were asked to sign blank forms. Volunteers are fearful of reprisals by RFSQ Staff if we speak out or are forthright in representation on matters or keep asking for answers to questions that have not been answered. Training is a vexed question with QFD and its predecessors having an Enterprise Registered Training Organisation, which we keep being told is special. However communications with the Australian Skills Quality Authority, the Commonwealth regulator of RTOs, advised that this ERTO must comply with the Registered Training Standards, has no fudge space because it is "special". It seems, and recent communications from RFSQ Tropical Coast District, that a members qualifications must be recognized by the QFD RTO, hence the RTO is not only running the compliance of training but also vetting members previously held qualifications, weeding out a person's held qualifications without explanation. Learner Management Systems have been a vexed issue with the old system SABA still being a point of reference when comparing assigned qualifications to its successor Nexus and now Axcelerate. If I could I would move a vote of no confidence in the Queensland Fire Department and its Rural Fire Service. The administration officers of RFSQ have always been courteous and helpful to us. Representation, unfortunately I cannot join an incorporated association that represents members of a community based volunteer

bushfire brigades. The Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland, an incorporated association, has as its members the "non-entities" of Rural Fire Brigades as supplied annually by the QFES/QFD. In the RFBAQ submission, I understand that because it is not a trade union then the QFD is under no obligation to consult with the association, hence the 26000 unpaid volunteers of Brigades to the Queensland Government have not say accept through the accepted methods of the Queensland Parliament. The RFSQ only exists by the goodwill given by the community-based members of a volunteer bushfire brigade. RFSQ must be overhauled with the focus on the volunteers and the brigades. The Queensland Government must return the autonomy, member management and financial management to the Brigades and take this away from an inept and untrustworthy RFSQ Operational Staff. The Queensland Government must provide legislative protection for members of Community -based volunteer bushfire brigades. I wish the Parliamentary Inquiry well in its investigation into volunteering within Queensland and especially into the QFD/RFSQ.