

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee - Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission from the Queensland Police Service,
encompassing Marine Rescue Queensland and
the State Emergency Service

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Queensland Police Service (QPS)'s written submission addresses the terms of reference for the Queensland Parliament's Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee *Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland* (the Inquiry) to inform its deliberations and findings.

The Commissioner of Police, and the Chief Officers of MRQ and the SES appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.

This submission reflects factual information from the QPS and related services only and is not a whole-of-Government submission.

2. BACKGROUND: THE QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

The QPS is Queensland's primary law enforcement agency. Under the *Police Service Administration Act 1990* (PSAA), the functions of the QPS are:

- preserving peace and good order in all areas of Queensland;
- protecting and supporting the Queensland community;
- preventing and detecting crime;
- upholding the law;
- administering the law fairly and efficiently; and
- bringing offenders to justice.

The QPS supports several essential volunteer-centric services and programs that build safety, resilience and trust across Queensland. These include:

- The Queensland State Emergency Service (SES), which helps Queensland communities prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and emergencies, through the support of its staff and volunteer members.
- Marine Rescue Queensland (MRQ), which helps keep Queenslanders on coastlines and waterways safe through educational and water rescue and emergency operations.
- Volunteers in Policing (ViPs) who assist the Queensland Police Service with customer service, community safety and crime prevention administrative activities through local police stations.

In June 2024, through administrative orders and the commencement of the *State Emergency Service Act 2024* and the *Marine Rescue Queensland Act 2024* (MRQ Act), the SES and MRQ transitioned to QPS. The Commissioner of the QPS is also the chief executive for the purposes of the *Disaster Management Act 2003* (DM Act), making the QPS the lead agency. As such, in addition to law enforcement, the QPS is responsible for:

- establishing and maintaining arrangements between the State and the Commonwealth for effective disaster management;
- ensuring disaster management and operations are consistent with the State's disaster management plans, standards, guidelines and strategic policy;
- ensuring persons performing functions under the DM Act are appropriately trained; and
- providing advice and support about disaster management and disaster operations to the local, district and State groups.

The Chief Officers of the SES and MRQ are responsible for the strategic and operational functions of their respective entities, and for the day-to-day operations and management of volunteers and employees.

As such, Queensland's volunteer community plays a crucial role in helping the QPS and the wider community, helping to not only prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and critical incidents, but to engage with the community through community safety and education activities.

The engagement of volunteers by the QPS, SES and MRQ is underpinned by the QPS Volunteerism Strategy and the QPS Guiding Principles for Volunteer Involvement. These documents provide an overarching framework to create opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of volunteerism across the organisation and enhance QPS strategic and operational priorities.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

3.1 THE CURRENT STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND AND THE VALUE IT CONTRIBUTES, INCLUDING BENEFITS TO VOLUNTEERS, ORGANISATIONS, COMMUNITIES AND THE STATE

VOLUNTEERS IN POLICING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH QUEENSLAND

The Volunteers in Policing (ViP) and Neighbourhood Watch Queensland (NHWQ) schemes are both operated by the Crime Prevention Programs Unit within the QPS.

The aim of the ViP program is to recruit and train local community members to conduct a range of voluntary tasks that complement but do not compete with the established responsibilities of police officers and other paid staff members. In general, these tasks assist police in delivering a range of services designed to enhance community safety. ViPs are based in local police establishments where they work with police to address customer service, community safety and crime prevention needs in the local area. ViPs also support victims of crime, often attending with police to speak with and provide support to people who have gone through difficult and traumatic experiences. ViPs also assist Police Recruiting with the overall recruiting process. There are approximately 200 ViPs throughout the state.

NHWQ is a partnership between the QPS and the Queensland community to enhance community safety. It encourages communities to join together in small informal groups to improve the safety of their families and other people who live, visit and do business in their neighbourhood. NHWQ is focused on enhancing home security, reducing the fear of crime and reporting suspicious activity to police. There are approximately 248 NHWQ groups located throughout Queensland.

QPS considers these services to be highly valuable in relation to the actions undertaken by volunteers, but also values the community network created through these services. QPS utilises these networks to inform the community regarding crime matters in their local area to keep the community safe and minimising the number of victims impacted by crime. These networks also strengthen QPS links to community and ensure the community and QPS continues to work together to keep the community safe.

MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND

MRQ is Queensland's volunteer marine rescue service and operates as part of the QPS's coordination of Queensland's disaster and emergency services response.

In 2020, the Queensland Government announced its commitment to establishing the MRQ as the single, integrated and legislated state-wide marine rescue service. MRQ was established with the commencement of the MRQ Act in July 2024, and brings

together the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard (AVCG) and Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland (VMRAQ) which have been operating for five decades. As of 13 February 2025, MRQ has 456 volunteers across its seven operating units. Following the transition of the AVCG and VMRAQ into MRQ, MRQ will have around 2700 volunteers operating across 47 local rescue units.

MRQ volunteers must be 16 years of age or older. Approximately 3.8% of MRQ volunteers are under 25 years of age. This is not reflective of the total of all Marine Rescue Volunteers (2700).

The functions of MRQ are established under section 7 of the MRQ Act:

- to perform marine search and rescue operations;
- to provide marine assistance to persons or vessels in difficulty;
- to provide other marine assistance to any entity in the performance of its functions and to the community if the assistance is reasonably requested and another entity is not reasonably able to assist;
- to support other entities providing emergency services to help communities respond to and recover from an event or a disaster;
- to perform activities to raise the profile of MRQ, promote marine safety or raise funds to be used to support MRQ in the performance of its functions;
- to provide services or assistance by a member of MRQ if required under any Act or law or the reasonable expectations of the community;
- to perform any other function given to MRQ under this or another Act.

During disaster response and recovery, MRQ provide an on-water capability which can be used for a range of support functions. These include transport of disaster frontline responders, evacuations and assisting with resupply to isolated areas.

MRQ plays a vital role in rescue operations and there is a degree of community dependence. This makes the MRQ workforce profile and sustainability incredibly important. MRQ also plays a critical role in supporting other agencies including Water Police, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Queensland Fire Department (QFD), the Department of Transport and Main Roads and Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ).

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA) are implemented through partnerships between the community and disaster management groups at the local, district and state levels to deliver coordinated, cooperative, and integrated outcomes. The arrangements are outlined in the Queensland Interim State Disaster Management Plan 2024-25 and include the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government agencies and organisations.

Queensland's disaster management arrangements are heavily dependent on the contribution of volunteers. This includes:

- volunteer-involving emergency service organisations including the SES, Rural Fire Service Queensland and MRQ;
- volunteer-involving non-government organisations including Surf Lifesaving Queensland, the Australian Red Cross and Salvation Army; and
- informal and spontaneous volunteers mobilised and coordinated through Volunteering Queensland and local arrangements.

Volunteer contributions in disaster operations are wide-ranging and include, but are not limited to, critical first responder emergency response and rescue services;

supporting community resupply, management and support into evacuation centres, recovery hubs and places of refuge; psychological first aid; and debris removal and clean-up operations.

The recruitment and retention of volunteers is a critical enabler to sustaining Queensland's disaster response capability, as reported in both the 2021 KPMG Independent Review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and the 2020 SES Review. However, the Australian Government's Report on Government Services indicates that formal volunteering rates in Queensland have been in decline for the past decade, including within organisations that support disaster response.

To supplement State-based volunteer resources during disaster events, jurisdictional resource sharing arrangements are available to support state and territory disaster response and recovery operations. These arrangements enable Queensland to access interstate resources including trained emergency service volunteer members through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) National Resource Sharing Centre. When deployed into Queensland, these resources are coordinated through State-based emergency service agencies and integrated into the QDMA.

Further to cross-jurisdictional support, the QDMA includes arrangements for accessing Australian Government non-financial assistance available to states and territories under the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan. Following the Defence Strategic Review 2023 and the 2024 National Defence Strategy, the Australian Government is seeking greater utilisation of volunteers to fulfil these requests for assistance and has funded the volunteer-involving organisation Disaster Relief Australia to increase their capability to support disaster response and recovery.

The benefits of volunteering in support of disaster operations are wide reaching, with the Queensland State of Volunteering Report 2024 indicating the highest motivator for persons wanting to volunteer is to help others and connect with people and the community. These findings are echoed in the New South Wales (NSW) Review of Emergency Volunteering Reports which highlight the positive benefits to volunteers of building their own experience and resilience for future disasters and the positive human social outcomes for both volunteers and impacted communities.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

The SES is a well-recognised and respected volunteer organisation within the community. As of 30 June 2024, there were approximately 5,000 volunteers across 76 units and 298 groups in Queensland, which represents a gradual decline over the past 10 years.

SES volunteers are currently supported by 194 FTE SES staff members, along with additional corporate support services provided by QPS, and various roles in local governments across disaster, fleet and facilities management.

The SES is supported through a partnership between the State Government and individual local governments. The State Government provides management and support services along with uniforms, personal protective equipment, operational equipment, flood boats and trailers. Local governments support their SES unit through the provision and maintenance of facilities, vehicles, ongoing equipment and fleet maintenance, utilities and other recurrent operating expenses.

The value of volunteering to individuals varies widely depending on personal circumstances, goals, and motivations. SES volunteers provide significant value and benefits to Queensland communities including:

- Enhanced community safety and resilience – SES volunteers play a critical role in responding to natural disasters, emergencies and community crises such as floods, storms and search-and-rescue operations. They protect lives, property and infrastructure, contributing to overall safety and preparedness of communities.
- Immediate and scalable support during emergencies – SES volunteers provide support for non-life-threatening situations during floods, storms or other similar events, and provide additional surge capacity through agency support to other emergency service organisations during disaster events.
- Builds stronger communities – SES volunteers foster a spirit of community cooperation and mutual support, strengthening relationships amongst residents.
- Economic value – supporting SES volunteers reduces financial pressures on government, the community, and emergency services by providing a well-trained, coordinated, capable and mobile volunteer workforce.

Volunteering for the SES provides a range of benefits to members including:

- Social connection and belonging – making friends and meeting new people after a move or another significant life-transition, such as a change in relationship status, children leaving home and/or a career change.
- Skill development and training – SES volunteers gain valuable and formally recognised training and certifications in area such as first aid and public safety. This can support future job applications through transferable skills and experience.
- Personal fulfilment and purpose – giving volunteers a sense of pride, knowing they are making tangible differences in their communities.
- Leadership opportunities – where they can hone their skills in decision-making, team management and crisis leadership.
- Opportunities for adventure – facing unique challenging situations, providing an opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and experience new adventures.
- Recognition and achievement – fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.

The value to the community of volunteers within the SES is demonstrated through the delivery of a broad range of services to the community. From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, SES volunteers completed 136,083 operational hours, more than 333,356 hours in preparation and training and received 16,133 requests for assistance, or one request for every 910 Queensland residents¹.

From a baseline of 4,867 requests for assistance received in 2015-16, the number of requests has significantly increased over the years, with 2022-23 the only year having a lower number of requests; and 2021-22 the highest at 23,170 requests, representing a 376.1% increase from 2015-16 (**Figure 1**). At the same time, the SES volunteer workforce has steadily declined from 6,200 members in 2015-16, to 5,000 members in 2023-24. The decline in the volunteer workforce, compounded by an increase in requests for assistance from the community has resulted in increased demand on existing volunteers.

¹ Based on ABS estimated population of 5,586,322 as of 30 June 2024.

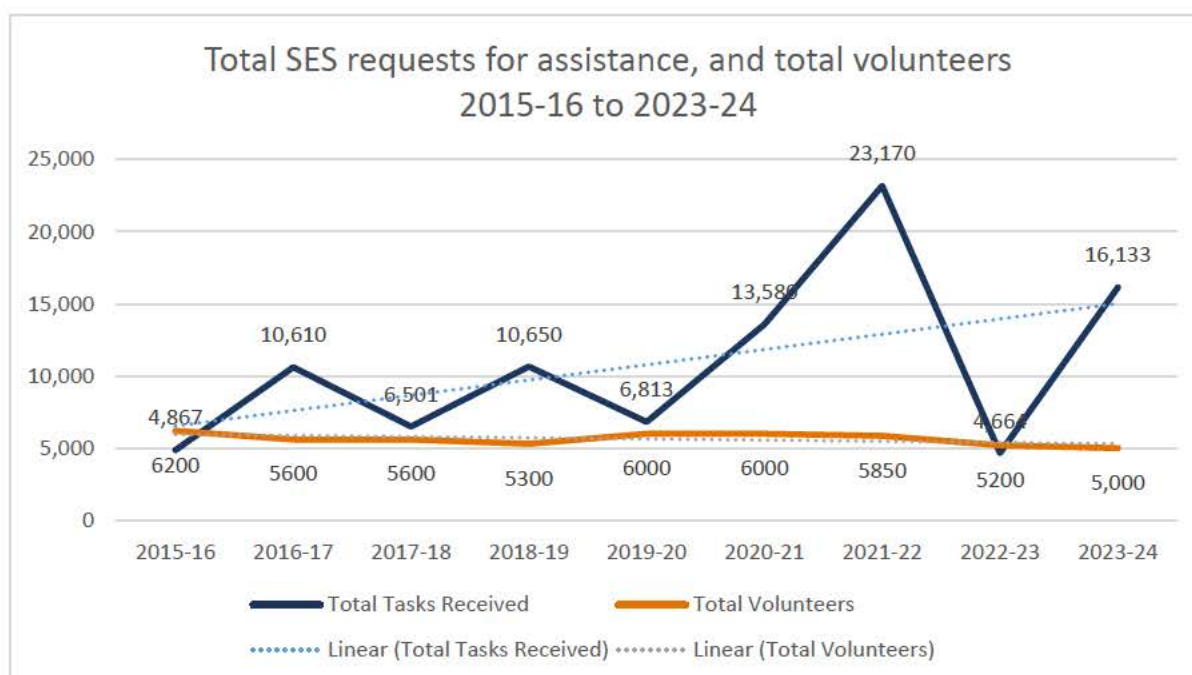


Figure 1: Total SES requests for assistance, 2015-16 to 2023-24.

3.2 THE VIEWS OF VOLUNTEERS, PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEERS AND THE VOLUNTEERING SECTOR ON THE CURRENT BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING, INCLUDING EXCESSIVE LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY BURDENS AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS ADVERSELY LIMITING ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEERS IN POLICING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH QUEENSLAND

The following barriers have been identified for ViP and NHWQ volunteers:

- aging volunteer workforce;
- time restriction on volunteer availability;
- volunteer resources;
- limited volunteer supervision resources;
- volunteer capacity at locations;
- onboarding and vetting time requirements.

MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND

MRQ has a training pathway for volunteers and is in the process of applying to become a Registered Training Organisation. Training pathways for volunteers require an investment in training and a time commitment for both volunteers and trainers. It is important for volunteers to maintain competencies to enable delivery of critical rescue services to Queensland communities. There are also challenges that relate to Recognition of Prior Learning and lateral entry into the volunteer workforce. Training is a critical link to safety where MRQ must comply with the regulations from Australian Maritime Safety Association.

In 2018, the Review into Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations in Queensland (the Blue Water Review) was authorised by the then Commissioner for Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. The Review examined and identified key issues in the provision of marine search and rescue services by the AVCGA and VMRAQ. Of note, the Review identified that the marine rescue sector volunteer workforce has an average age of approximately 69 years old and states that the on-call requirements of

the role is more suitable to a retired person than someone in full-time employment. The minimum age for the AVCGA is 18 years old and MRQ welcomes volunteers from the age of 16 years old (subject to parental approval).

Attraction and retention of volunteers presents challenges that are varied across Queensland. MRQ continues to attract and recruit new volunteers and received a total of 36 new expressions of interest in transitioned locations in the first six months of operation.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 report notes of the 64.3% of Queensland residents aged 15 years and older that had volunteered in 2023, only 11.7% are involved in Emergency Support. The report also highlighted volunteers on average were undertaking 2.3 different forms of volunteering each and the number of formal volunteers has reduced from 69.6% in 2020 to 49% in 2023. The report also sought to understand the barriers to volunteering with current volunteers citing the top four barriers as: no time, costs, health reasons, and burnout from over-volunteering.

The ongoing recruitment and retention of volunteers is a critical issue as the overall pool of volunteers willing to engage and remain in disaster response or recovery related activities is finite, with a significant number of organisations offering opportunities to volunteer. A search of the Australia Charities and Not for Profits Commission Register indicates there are 608 charities recorded as operating in Queensland that support 'victims of disaster'. Whilst not all of these will be competing directly as first responder organisations, the market to attract and retain volunteers is extremely competitive.

The NSW Review of Emergency Volunteering Reports indicate that volunteers are also at risk of burning out as the number of requests for assistance for volunteers increase against the decreasing number of suitable volunteers currently available especially in more rural and remote areas. The Review also suggests that current cost of living pressures is having an impact on volunteers with differing leave entitlements between employers, out of pocket expenses and delays in reimbursement, particularly when volunteering during protracted disaster events.

Harnessing the goodwill of spontaneous volunteers during disaster operations can be hindered by complex or unclear regulations around insurance, safety and liability. This presents a challenge for organisations when managing spontaneous volunteers who present during disaster operations. For many organisations it can be difficult to understand nuances in insurance policies and how they apply during disaster activation.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

Now entering its fiftieth year, the SES, along with many other volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) faces continued difficulty retaining the number of volunteers required to provide the services required by the community.

Other organisations are facing similar difficulties, noting that the number of Queenslanders involved in formal volunteering has decreased by 20 percent since 2021, with factors such as COVID-19 impacts, cost of living pressures and an aging population cited as the primary drivers.

The SES not only competes with other volunteer organisations for members, but increased cost of living pressures also increase competition with paying employers.

The turnover of volunteers between 2022 and 2023 was just over one quarter (25.5 percent; using data from 1 January each year) and 24.7 percent of existing volunteers between the years of 2023 and 2024, which is a substantial loss of recruitment, induction and training investment.

Feedback from current, former, and prospective volunteers indicates excessive administration as a barrier to effective participation. The application process to join the SES can include initial inquiry, information sessions, application, parent or guardian approvals, blue card and criminal history checks, medical assessments, and interviews. While these steps are designed to protect prospective volunteers and ensure their safety and suitability, inefficiencies in the application process can result in a negative experience for prospective volunteers and dissuade them from progressing to active membership.

Additional feedback from SES volunteers indicated the following barriers to volunteering:

- Restrictions on time/availability (e.g. FIFO workers, students and shift workers who cannot attend trainings at certain times).
- An ageing workforce – many people are staying in the workforce for longer, reducing the time they have to participate in volunteering.
- Impacts associated with cost of living – the high cost of living (and associated housing crisis) is impacting some volunteers' ability to engage in unpaid work. Volunteers who previously worked part time are having to return to full-time work, while others may be working two or more jobs or taking additional shifts to make ends meet.
- Some volunteers spoke of finding it difficult to afford the fuel costs associated with attending meetings and training activities. This is especially relevant for regional and remote communities where there are greater distances between SES facilities.
- Language or cultural barriers (particularly when acquiring information).
- Accessibility of volunteering information – general research shows that people cite that they're unaware of how to volunteer/ have never been asked to volunteer, which is why they haven't.

With the SES now formally established under the QPS with its own legislation, operating budget, staff and volunteers, along with its first dedicated Chief Officer; these changes enable the SES to focus on building a service that empowers volunteers, reduces barriers to volunteering, and drives real and meaningful change for our volunteers and the communities they support.

The Chief Officer's 18-Month Strategy for SES outlines six key objectives and associated activities that are aimed at embedding the SES within QPS, addressing key organisational challenges and improving the overall experience for volunteers and the communities they support.

The six objectives of this strategy are:

1. **Stabilise the SES** – refine and embed organisational arrangements and building SES teams.
2. **Align capability and grow capacity** – modernise our processes to attract and retain our valued and highly skilled volunteers, enhancing our ability to keep communities safe.

3. **Foster resource stewardship** – demonstrating responsible use of public resources, providing suitable equipment, and further exploring opportunities to streamline resourcing.
4. **Develop productive partnerships** – collaboration among volunteers, local governments and key stakeholders to enhance community safety and improve service delivery.
5. **Invest in leadership** – commit to and invest in leadership development and scope alternative pathways to enhance participation.
6. **Build our profile** – strengthen awareness of the SES through active promotion, community partnerships, and championing volunteerism.

3.3 THE CURRENT EXPERIENCES, MOTIVATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND IMPROVING THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

VOLUNTEERS IN POLICING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH QUEENSLAND

Volunteers within ViP and NHWQ consistently express their motivation to volunteer comes from wanting to serve the community, engage with community members and help their local community to prevent crime.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

Feedback from SES volunteers indicates that most speak highly about the culture within their SES group, and the high degree of support, camaraderie and friendship they have enjoyed since joining the SES. The sense of belonging to the 'orange family' is what keeps volunteers staying with the SES for many years. Further to this, it is clear that the motivations and challenges for volunteers vary depending on the different stages of life.

The 2023 Volunteering for Queensland survey identifies only 17% of volunteers intended to leave the SES within the next 12 months, while 67% were intending to volunteer for at least the next few years. Of those members looking to leave the SES, they cite the following experiences as their primary reasons:

- too much red tape (44%);
- lack of leadership / direction (38%);
- don't like the culture (35%);
- lack of communication (31%); and
- lack of training (25%).

Members of the public are often motivated to join the SES as a pathway to paid employment in emergency services – for example SES, QPS, QAS or QFD. Other motivations can be broadly summarised into the following categories:

- desire to help others;
 - sense of purpose;
 - skill development and learning opportunities;
-

- adventure and challenge;
- belonging and camaraderie;
- recognition and contribution;
- resilience and growth;
- community connection and responsibility;
- career advancement; and
- personal fulfillment.

Challenges for current and prospective SES volunteers include:

- Financial and time constraints of the volunteer workforce.
- Volunteer and resource management systems that are reaching end-of-life, which increase administrative burden on volunteers and volunteer managers.
- Provision of a consistent and positive volunteer experience across a wide range of communities and climates.
- Providing consistent guidance and professional development for volunteer leaders across SES.
- Volunteer attrition rates and the subsequent pressure it puts on existing volunteers in times of crisis.

Activities underway within the SES to address challenges include:

- reviewing and updating organisational policies and procedures;
- scoping of an action plan to reduce 'red tape' and administrative burden on volunteers and staff;
- developing a 10-year strategy to provide long-term, evidence-based strategic guidance and direction for the SES;
- development of a volunteer attraction and retention plan; and
- implementation of an SES Leadership Capability Framework.

3.4 THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS, GENDERS, AGE GROUPS, ABILITIES AND LOCATIONS, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE VOLUNTEERING PARTICIPATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND EXPERIENCE FOR THESE GROUPS

VOLUNTEERS IN POLICING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH QUEENSLAND

Volunteers from diverse backgrounds experience unique challenges around navigating government systems as well as language barriers. A lack of understanding and/or awareness around opportunities, roles and responsibilities for volunteering also exist for members of diverse backgrounds.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

The SES prides itself on being a safe, inclusive and equitable organisation for members of the community from all backgrounds. In December 2024 the SES

implemented changes to the volunteer information management system, enabling capture of a broader range of diversity information to help better understand the composition and associated needs of its volunteer workforce.

The recently established People, Culture and Sustainability directorate within SES will also contribute to ongoing opportunities for the SES to focus on improving participation, accessibility and experience of volunteers from all backgrounds.

To reinforce organisational expectations regarding inclusive and equitable behaviour, all SES members complete induction training as part of their journey towards active membership, including acceptable conduct and behaviours, and human rights obligations. This training helps to reinforce the SES as a safe, inclusive and equitable organisation, and the expectations of its members to uphold these values.

Gender

Women make up 39% of all SES volunteers, with slightly higher participation rates among women between 18 – 65 years of age. In the 2023 Volunteering for Queensland Survey, 1% of respondents indicated they had experienced sexual harassment in the SES, and there were no respondents that indicated that they were currently experiencing sexual harassment. In addition, 3% of respondents reported experiencing gender-based discrimination, an improvement from 6% in 2022.

SES volunteers and staff work closely with the QPS Ethical Standards Command and QPS People Hubs to review and manage unacceptable behaviour and provide advice and training to volunteers and staff on how to manage unacceptable behaviour and interpersonal conflict.

Age

15% of SES volunteers are under 25 years of age, and 13% are over 65 years of age, with the remaining 72% between 25 – 65 years. In 2023 7% of SES members surveyed reported experiencing age-related discrimination, and 9% felt that age was a barrier to success within the SES.

Disability

People with disability may face additional barriers and challenges when volunteering with the SES, which limits both their participation and contribution. These challenges will vary considerably, depending on the nature, but in broad terms, challenges may include:

- Many SES facilities do not meet contemporary building access standards for people with a disability, resulting in inadvertent exclusion of people with accessibility requirements. In addition, access to vehicles, use of equipment and / or fitting of uniforms may not be designed to accommodate individuals with mobility issues and/or other physical limitations.
- Communication challenges, especially for people with hearing and/or vision impairments, which may make it difficult to engage effectively during training or real-time operations (without reasonable adjustment).
- Inadequate accommodations or support systems, such as adaptive tools or flexible training methods, can further hinder involvement.
- Lack of clear guidance around volunteer roles that people with disability can safely participate in.

Location

The SES generally faces no challenges with recruitment in urban areas, however recruitment can be more challenging in regional, rural and remote communities. Some challenges relate access to training opportunities in rural and remote communities, as it is more difficult for volunteers who live in these locations to gain training qualifications. Further, the cost of delivering training in these areas can be significantly higher due to additional travel, accommodation and staff costs.

The SES has sought to address some of these challenges by establishing recruit courses, which have proven to be an effective and transportable way of delivering training to rural and remote areas, particularly in locations without qualified volunteer trainers. These courses can also provide a shared experience for bonding and connection, improving cohesion and retention of volunteers over time.

The introduction of Regional Community Engagement and Recruitment Officers within the SES also provides dedicated regional staff to deliver sustainable recruitment and retention programs, and more targeted community engagement activities.

3.5 THE EXTENT, EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AT ALL LEVELS FOR THE VOLUNTEERING SECTOR IN QUEENSLAND AND SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Queensland Government, through the QPS, supports sustainable funding models, including multi-year funding agreements in support of the volunteering sector. The QPS currently administers Queensland Government funding and support to volunteer-involving organisations including a ten-year service level agreement with Surf Life Saving Queensland, a four-year service level agreement with Royal Life Saving Society Queensland and a four-year service level agreement with the Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC) Emergency Services Cadet Program.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

As part of the Disaster and Emergency Services Reform, the previous government committed to a reform package for SES, boosting the SES annual baseline budget to approximately \$60 million from 2023 onwards. A total of 105 additional FTE were also approved for the SES, further boosting the level of support provided to SES volunteers. 75 of these positions have been finalised, with the last 30 FTE still to be recruited.

Each year, the SES allocates State Government funding to councils across Queensland (known as the Local Government Subsidy), with the intent that this funding is used to directly support the SES unit within that local government area.

External grants are used to supplement current funding arrangements for the purchase of desired equipment that is not provided for by SES and cannot be funded by local government.

3.6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT TO LEVERAGE ALL PORTFOLIOS TO SUPPORT GROWTH IN VOLUNTEERING ACROSS QUEENSLAND, INCLUDING THROUGH HOSTING THE BRISBANE 2032 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

The Queensland Government currently funds the PCYC Emergency Services Cadets Program through a four-year service level agreement, administered by the QPS. The

Emergency Services Cadets Program is offered to youth aged 12 to 17 with Cadet units managed under the leadership and guidance of volunteer Adult Leaders. The Program is designed to support community resilience and encourage the Cadets to explore voluntary or paid careers in emergency services.

QPS, SES and MRQ recognise and support their volunteers through the Queensland Volunteering Awards, Community Awards, National Volunteers Week, National Student Volunteers Week and the SES's 'Wear it Orange' Day. This community-wide recognition is vital to grow interest in volunteer activities, whilst celebrating volunteer involvement and dedication.

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (NSVI) were developed by Volunteering Australia as a best practice guide for volunteering involvement. The standards represent opportunities for volunteer-involved organisations to ensure their volunteers are not only supported to conduct their work, but also recognised and protected whilst undertaking volunteer work. The QPS Volunteerism Strategy and the QPS Guiding Principles for Volunteer Involvement are both guided by the NSVI, which establishes a benchmark for quality volunteer engagement.

MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND

MRQ has identified several opportunities to support its volunteers such as joint exercises that include the public, volunteer hubs to support major events, and attendance at events such as the Volunteering Queensland conference.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

The State of Volunteering Report 2024 states that volunteers in Queensland reported spending an average of \$336 per month, or \$15.57 per hour they volunteered. In 2023, this was a gross amount of \$4,000 per volunteer, compared to a gross amount of \$1,600 per volunteer in 2020.

As per the Queensland Volunteering Strategy, supported and sustainable volunteering means looking for opportunities to build core and common infrastructure, shared systems and resources, and innovative approaches that will support volunteers and volunteer involving organisations to make the most of the resources they have.

3.7 OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND, INCLUDING HOW TO OPTIMISE THE ENGAGEMENT, SUPPORT AND INTEGRATION OF VOLUNTEERS ASSISTING WITH NATURAL DISASTERS AND COMMUNITY RECOVERY

MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND

MRQ is a new capability, within QPS, that operates within the QDMA. The MRQ capabilities and resources can be focused on frontline service delivery during disasters and emergencies. More specifically, post-transition MRQ sets to cover a footprint of one hundred and thirty-eight (138) vessel assets and forty-seven (47) frontline marine rescue facilities, with approximately two thousand and seven hundred (2700) volunteers. The inclusion of MRQ as a Queensland Government capability presents opportunities for greater collaboration, for example cross-decking i.e., ability for SES, QPS, MRQ staff and volunteers to work across each other's vessels as boat/deck crews. There are further opportunities for using MRQ primary vessels as forward

command posts for incidents and the inclusion of MRQ volunteers in Local Disaster Management Groups to inform Disaster District Management Groups.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Volunteers provide a vital contribution to disaster management with Queensland plans, policy and guidelines outlining arrangements to facilitate their engagement, support and integration within the disaster management system.

The Interim Queensland Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery Disaster Management Guideline 2024-25 considers volunteers and identifies two primary types; trained volunteers (associated with established organisations such as the SES and Australian Red Cross) and spontaneous volunteers (often untrained but motivated local community members).

The Queensland Managing Offers of Assistance Manual covers volunteers who offer to assist disaster affected communities. An identified pathway for the management of spontaneous volunteers has been established through Emergency Volunteering for Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) as part of Volunteering Queensland.

Through EV CREW, Volunteering Queensland connects local government and community organisations with people who want to help with disaster recovery efforts. EV CREW facilitates the placement of volunteers with the required skills, availability and locality into disaster impacted communities.

Volunteering Queensland also provide resources for local government and organisations to support their management of spontaneous volunteers.

State-based volunteer organisations with roles and responsibilities in the disaster management arrangements, are well established and integrated into the QDMA with membership on local, district and State disaster management groups. All stakeholders with a role in the QDMA are provided with disaster management training and involved in disaster management exercises.

The integration of state-based emergency response volunteer organisations within the QDMA supports unified coordination and engagement of volunteers during disaster operations. This integrated and aligned approach enhances efficiency and ensures volunteer resources are utilised to best effect to support disaster impacted communities.

The importance of integrating and coordinating volunteer resources within the QDMA is highlighted in the Inspector-General of Emergency Management (IGEM) 2023-34 Severe Weather Season Review Report which outlines challenges presented by some Australian Government deployments, citing the lack of coordination, integration of communication and reporting adding a further burden on already stretched local governments. Further, uncoordinated volunteers involved in clean-up efforts resulted in destruction of property, personal belongings and cultural artefacts, which increased trauma to disaster impacted communities.

The QPS, as one of the Queensland members on the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC), is actively engaged and advocates for the development of principles for national action to support emergency volunteering and volunteer wellbeing. Current ANZEMC considerations include initiatives and incentives to support volunteer wellbeing, and both attract and retain volunteers.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

The 2020 SES Review Report “Sustaining the SES – Partnering for Change” highlighted a range of observations regarding engagement and support of SES volunteers regarding emergency response and recovery. The review identified:

- wide variability in the level of support provided to the SES by local governments;
- confusing and risky responsibilities for asset ownership and management, and dual management of volunteers between SES and local governments;
- ambiguity regarding legislative guidance for local government support to the SES; and
- inefficient funding models and an inability to conduct effective long-term planning due to a heavy reliance on grants, subsidies, and complex funding responsibilities.

The previously mentioned SES 18-Month Strategy outlines a range of objectives and activities to increase participation, engagement and support for volunteers. This includes:

- additional investment in and commitment to leadership development;
- service-wide alignment and modernisation of capabilities and processes; and
- development of productive partnerships within QPS, as well as with local governments, other partners and stakeholders.

Further, by fostering greater resource stewardship, the SES aims to enhance governance and quality assurance of training, fleet, equipment and systems, to ensure that volunteers are safe, supported and ready to respond in support of Queensland communities.

3.8 FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES VOLUNTEERING, INCLUDING IN REMOTE AND DISCRETE COMMUNITIES, AND THE ROLE OF FIRST NATIONS VOLUNTEERING IN CLOSING THE GAP

MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND

MRQ is in the process of transitioning and gathering workforce data. MRQ demonstrates a commitment to First Nations people through the support and investment in Far North Queensland. During 2025, MRQ will develop its inaugural Diversity and Inclusion Plan with a focus on the experiences of First Nations peoples.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

As with all communities, established volunteer-involving organisations within First Nations, remote and discrete communities with a role in local disaster management arrangements are integrated into local arrangements including training and exercising

to enhance their understanding of the QDMA and their role within disaster management.

When conducting disaster management training and exercising in First Nations, remote and discrete communities, programs are tailored to ensure cultural alignment and local community relevance. This approach fosters trust, encourages participation and enables a shared understanding of local needs and values.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

As part of recent research undertaken, the need to find people who share similar traits or shared lived experiences was a sentiment strongly expressed by women of all ages, young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and First Nations members. These volunteers spoke of needing 'safety in numbers' and of feeling more inclined to engage with SES activities if they knew there would be others 'like them' involved.

This finding suggests that SES leaders seeking to grow the diversity within their group should make every effort to ensure broad representation by different demographic groups, wherever possible, when engaging in any form of recruitment and/or community engagement activity. Leaders might also encourage diverse volunteers to tap their own networks when undertaking recruitment activities, and/or undertake social media engagement to encourage other diverse volunteers to consider joining.

3.9 ANY OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS, INCLUDING ACADEMIC AND OTHER DIVERSE SOURCES, AND ANY RELEVANT REPORTS AND REVIEWS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND ACROSS OTHER STATES AND TERRITORIES.

Noting the terms of reference require the Committee to consider relevant sources, reports and reviews as part of the Inquiry, the QPS has noted below a number of key national and state-based inquiries, reviews, reports and documents, which may be relevant for the Committee's consideration:

The Australian Government's reviews and reports

- Department of Defence
 - Defence Strategic Review 2023.
 - 2024 National Defence Strategy.
- Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience: *Boots on the Ground: Raising Resilience*; Final Report.
- Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) (pending).
- Australian Government Report on Government Services.

State governments' reviews and reports

- The Inspector General of Emergency Management's Review of Queensland's Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA).
- Queensland Fire and Emergency Services² (QFES)'s Emergency Management Sector Adaptation Plan for Climate Change.
- The Inspector General of Emergency Management's 2023-34 Severe Weather Season Review Report.

² Now known as the Queensland Fire Department.

Third sector reviews and reports

- Volunteering Queensland
 - State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report.
 - State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 – Older People 65+ Report.
 - State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 – Youth Report.

Independent reviews and reports

- KPMG's Independent Review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.
- Campbell Darby DSC AM's Review into Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations in Queensland (Blue Water Review)
- Campbell Darby DSC AM's SES Review Report - Sustaining the SES Partnering for Change.

Strategies, Plans, Guidelines and Manuals:

- Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts³ Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032.
- Volunteering Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033.
- Queensland Fire and Emergency Services' The Queensland Disaster Management Committee's Queensland Interim State Disaster Management Plan 2024-25.
- Queensland Police Service's Emergency Management and Coordination Command's Interim Queensland Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery Disaster Management Guideline 2024-25.
- Queensland Police Service's Emergency Management and Coordination Command's Managing Offers of Assistance Manual.
- Queensland Police Service Volunteerism Strategy.
- Queensland Police Service Guiding Principles for Volunteer Involvement.
- Volunteering Australia's (funded by the Australian Government's Department of Social Services) Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers Handbook.

³ Now known as the Department of Women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Multiculturalism.