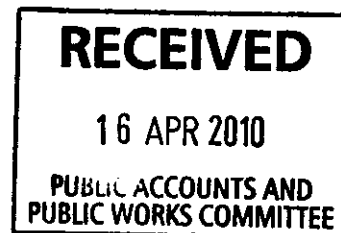


13 April 2009

The Research Director
Attn: Ms Deborah Jeffrey
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000



Dear Ms Jeffrey,

***Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland***

I am writing to you in response to the letter by Wayne Wendt MP offering Volunteering Qld an opportunity to comment on the current inquiry into the management of Rural Fire Services Queensland.

As the industry peak volunteering body in Queensland, we are certainly interested in offering a few points in respect to sustainable volunteering management, which subsequently impacts on service delivery of all agencies involving volunteers. We note that our membership roll includes three Rural Fire Service Brigade branches (or units) who, over the years, have utilised some of the services we provide such as the Linking Service which helps organisations find new volunteers.

Of particular interest to Volunteering Qld is the area of volunteer recruitment and dealing with an ageing volunteer workforce – one of the issues identified for the agency. For that reason we would like to make the point that the Rural Fire Brigade is in all probability experiencing a challenge common to many nonprofit organisations operating across the State. The trends in volunteering over the years have changed rapidly and continue to change in a direction that is not as clear cut as we would like it to be. However, as we are engaged with the nonprofit sector across the board, and with agencies that provide a diverse range of services, we are increasingly witnessing an increasing interest in the development of strategies that might attract new volunteers capable of delivering a sustainable level of service in the long term.

We would like to point out that one of the main issues affecting nonprofit sector agencies in attracting volunteers is the lack of integration of volunteers into the changing nature of the work and the brand of service individual agencies provide. Our own observation in respect to the trend, indicates strongly that people in general are interested in volunteering but increasingly look for opportunities where the voluntary work can be flexible and engaging, and can offer multiple rewards such as the opportunity to learn new skills, meet people, expand social and professional networks etc.

Overall we find that there are three vital indicators, or factors, that any agency involving volunteers needs to analyse and be able to integrate:.

1. a sense of belonging
2. the flow effect
3. infrastructure.

A sense of belonging is the key aspect that each nonprofit needs to work out for themselves as something that they can offer to a potential volunteer. This is vital in terms of ensuring that the brand of service and the organisation is in sync with the profile of volunteers the agency wishes to attract.

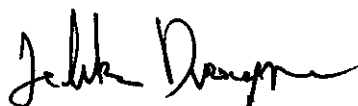
The flow effect is a critical area and it is most often the major cause for high turnover among the volunteer workforce. It refers to the idea that each individual needs to experience a flow in their daily work, which is the type of experience one feels when there is a match between skills and challenge. This effect is well documented and supported but its importance for volunteers not fully appreciated. In other words, volunteers who are not engaged at that level tend to look for better opportunities.

Finally, the importance of appropriate infrastructure for volunteers has to be carefully examined and secured. This involves proper policies and procedures as well equipment, support and training.

The above are factors that we know from experience are detrimental to resolving key issues affecting a sustainable volunteer workforce. Additionally, it is important to note that the increasing demand for volunteers is adding to the general cost of recruitment, training, support, supervision and recognition. The cost of these activities in the past were often unrealistically undepreciated or not fully accounted for because the current culture of volunteering was built on old trends. The flexibility demanded by 'new volunteers' puts extra pressure on old business models of volunteering. However, this also opens up opportunities for innovation in the way volunteers are engaged.

We hope that these comments might be of value to the committee as it considers ways of resolving the challenge of ensuring a steady flow of volunteers in years to come.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jelenko Dragisic', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jelenko Dragisic
Chief Executive Officer