



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 1 May 2001

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE VOLUNTEER

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (7.08 p.m.): This year is the International Year of the Volunteer. It is very fitting that we recognise in an appropriate way the efforts made by a wide range of people in every community who work in a voluntary capacity in the almost endless range of activities that make life better for everyone. There can be no doubt that life in the community I represent, in the electorate of Callide, would be much poorer but for the efforts of the people who work in a voluntary capacity. Without reward to themselves they come together to work in a range of fields, including sport, community development, community service, church groups and care groups such as Meals on Wheels, Anglicare and Blue Care—all of which provide services that would otherwise have to be provided by the government.

There are many other volunteers, such as those in the State Emergency Service, rural fire brigades and Landcare groups. The list goes on and on. All of these groups and many more are made up of volunteers, and their efforts are critical to the maintenance of the lifestyle and the social structure of the communities in which they work all over the state. Almost without exception these volunteers are regrettably being frustrated and annoyed by the volume of red tape and the volume of seemingly endless, pointless paperwork and the pedantic regulations that they are being required to endure in the duties they carry out.

In contrast to the sentiments behind the International Year of the Volunteer, it seems inescapable that life is being made more difficult for volunteers in this year dedicated to recognising their efforts. Long-serving volunteers are being driven from the services that they have long provided by this overload of form filling and pedantic regulation which adds nothing to the service that they provide but curtails and hampers the efforts of those working for no reward. It serves as a discouragement to those who would otherwise give their own time in the service of others.

There needs to be a careful analysis of the costs and benefits of all this red tape and regulation. There needs to be a careful analysis by the bureaucrats and the regulators, who need to think carefully about the costs and the benefits to the people and the communities who rely on the services of the voluntary organisations, because they will be the ones who suffer in the end. If the burden becomes too great and the volunteers opt out, then either the government will have to pay someone to provide the services or dependent people will have to go without and our community life will be lessened. The first option is unlikely. The second option is simply unacceptable.

We need to look after our volunteers. We need to protect them from unnecessary burdens, and we need to protect them from unnecessary litigation—from the increasing trend towards no-win, no-pay lawyers. We need to value the services that our volunteers contribute to every community throughout the state—big and small. We need to be aware of the burden that unnecessary litigation, unnecessary regulation and unnecessary red tape place upon those people. Every member of this House should support those volunteers in the work they do and support this call to make their life easier.
