



Speech By
Margaret Nightingale

MEMBER FOR INALA

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
COMMITTEE**

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mrs NIGHTINGALE** (Inala—ALP) (3.47 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the committee report on the inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. I am somewhat flabbergasted by the member for Townsville's contribution. He could have been speaking about all of the wonderful things that could have been addressed by this government in the volunteering sector. Instead, he chose to play politics and make ridiculous comments that are completely out of line.

I acknowledge the extraordinary contribution of Queenslanders who give their time to strengthen our communities. Across our state, an estimated 2.8 million people volunteer each year, contributing more than 719 million hours of service—generating over \$117 billion in economic value. They deserve better than that. Behind those figures are real people giving up evenings, weekends and family time to serve others. That is why this inquiry mattered and that is why volunteers deserve real progress, not duplication.

I thank my fellow committee members, the committee secretariat and the inquiry secretary, Kylie, for their hard work and dedication during what was quite an extensive inquiry. I thank the volunteers and peak bodies who participated in this inquiry in good faith. They prepared submissions, attended hearings and shared candid and at times emotional evidence about the pressures they face. Only eight weeks before this inquiry was established the Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032 and its action plan were released. That was built on extensive consultation with more than 110 sector representatives and over 20 co-designed meetings. That is how Labor listens to the people who volunteer across this state. The member for Townsville would do well to read that report himself. Instead of building on that evidence, though, this government sent the sector back through consultation, stretching already stretched organisations to repeat the work they had just completed when they already are feeling the pressures, particularly felt by those in regional, rural and remote Queensland.

We heard from Queensland regional, rural and remote women and other stakeholders about the unique challenges facing small communities. When one key volunteer steps away, there is often not a soul there to replace them. Rural and remote volunteers carry a disproportionate share of unpaid and volunteer labour, and they do this facing extreme burnout with limited support. An aging population is compounding these challenges, particularly outside metropolitan areas. Older volunteers bring extraordinary commitment, but organisations are increasingly worried about succession planning and the lack of younger volunteers coming through. Again, it was fairly crickets on that issue from the minister. Nearly half of volunteer-involving organisations report having no volunteers under 25—zero under 25. Despite this evidence, there is no strong recommendation targeting youth engagement or addressing this demographic shift. That is a failure.

The committee's recommendations were framed in cautious language—'investigate', 'consider', 'review'. Well, that has been done. The government accepted every recommendation only 'in principle subject to further investigation'. Further investigation? That is ludicrous! We know what needs to be done. What we do not know is what the government is actually going to do. According to the chair and the member for Southern Downs, the government is going to do something, but let's wait and see what that is, because there have been no recommendations that actually demonstrate action or meaningful improvement in outcomes—not a single one. What they have said is they will investigate, a volunteer passport will be explored, training reforms will be reviewed, blue card processes reconsidered, and insurance settings examined. That has been done. The government needs to do more. We need to see real actions because it is our volunteers who are paying the cost. They are paying it out of their pocket and emotionally, and their families are paying the cost as well. In some communities, insurance complexity and regulatory duplication can mean the difference between an event proceeding or being cancelled. These are significant issues.

On Brisbane 2032, the response is quite disappointing. We might have a brand new broken-promise stadium coming, but there will not be any volunteers to fill it, or if there are, they will be taken from community organisations in Inala or other places like Townsville. Where are you going to get your volunteer organisations? The games present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get volunteers, and this government has failed Queensland. It has failed our volunteer sector and it continues to do so.