




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**  
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (3.47 pm): As we all know, volunteers are the social fabric of our communities. In my electorate of Toohey we see this every single day. Lions clubs across our suburbs tirelessly fundraise and support families in need. The Sunnybank RSL volunteers safeguard the memory of service and sacrifice while supporting veterans and their families. Meals on Wheels Sunnybank and Salisbury deliver not just food but also hope and reassurance and often the only human contact some residents receive. We have the wonderful St David's Neighbourhood Centre that is a welcoming place where people can connect, belong and find support to meet their community, family and personal needs. It provides a friendly and inclusive environment where everyone is valued. The centre is dedicated to empowering individuals to reach their full potential through friendship, learning opportunities, social action and strong community connections. With a diverse range of programs and services, St David's supports people of all ages and backgrounds, helping to build a stronger, more connected community for us all. Then we have ProCare, which every month provides fresh food, including bread and food staples, to those who are in need in the electorate of Toohey. Without volunteers many essential services simply would not exist.

These organisations represent the very best of our community. Without volunteers many essential services simply would not exist. The *Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland* confirms something deeply concerning: the spirit of service is under serious strain. Volunteering rates have fallen from 76 per cent in 2020 to 64 per cent in 2023—more than 200,000 fewer Queenslanders giving their time. Hours volunteered have declined sharply. Emergency service volunteers are decreasing just as disasters become more frequent and severe. In Toohey alone the SES numbers have dropped from 160 volunteers in 2022 to just 30 today. At the same time the economic value of volunteering remains extraordinary—more than \$117 billion annually in Queensland. For every dollar invested in volunteering, \$4.70 is returned to our state. Volunteers are delivering billions of social, civil and economic benefit. What are they asking for in return? They are asking for less red tape, lower costs, streamlined background checks, insurance certainty and practical support.

The inquiry was an opportunity to deliver that. Instead, what we have is a report heavy on investigation and light on action. Almost every recommendation is qualified or subject to further review: a volunteering passport, to be explored; volunteering hubs, options to be investigated; training reform, to be investigated; blue card reform, to be reviewed; insurance issues, subject to further consideration.

The Crisafulli LNP government has accepted every recommendation in principle subject to further investigation. Volunteers do not need another advisory panel, they do not need another working group and they do not need another consultation round; they need action now. What makes this even more frustrating is that Queensland already had a whole-of-government volunteering strategy in place—the

2024-2032 strategy delivered by the former Labor government. The strategy was developed through consultation with more than 110 sector representatives in over 20 co-design sessions. It had already mapped practical reforms: administrative streamlining, volunteer management uplifts, inclusion initiatives and regulatory reform. Just eight weeks after its release the new government announced a fresh inquiry, asking many of the same organisations basically the same questions. Seven of the committee's eight key recommendation areas reaffirm or partially replicate what was already articulated under that strategy.