

Speech By

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

Mr CHIESA (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (3.07 pm): I rise to speak in respect of committee report No. 4, *Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland*. Volunteering is the backbone of communities right across our state. It is the quiet force that keeps towns connected, services running and communities strong, and nowhere is that more evident than in regional communities like Hinchinbrook. Volunteers do not just lend a hand; they hold the communities together. Whether it is our SES crews responding to emergencies like floods, our rural fire brigades protecting lives and property, our surf lifesavers keeping our beaches safe or the many sporting clubs and community organisations bringing people together, these are the people who give their time, energy and passion, often without recognition, simply because they care.

Without volunteers, many of the services and opportunities we rely on every day simply would not exist. In Hinchinbrook, volunteering is not something extra; it is part of who we are. There are clubs, associations and community groups—they are the backbone of our community. They are centred around the three Ss—sporting, service and selflessness. In smaller communities like ours, if people do not step up things do not happen. It is as simple as that. From emergency services to sport and recreation clubs, service clubs, Lions clubs, Rotary, Scouts, RSLs and Volunteer Marine Rescue Queensland, volunteering plays a central role in community life.

I think it is important to acknowledge that, while I will not attempt to acknowledge the name of every organisation in Hinchinbrook, because there are a lot, I would like to mention a few that had a lasting impact on me growing up—the Forrest Beach Surf Lifesaving Club, the Herbert River Amateur Swimming Club, the Lightning Swim Club swim event in the northern suburbs of Townsville which I recently attended, and the Herbert River Junior Rugby League Club, the Herbert River Crushers. I was not a very good rugby league player. That is why I had to get into commentary!

These clubs were not just about sport; they were about community, learning discipline, building friendships and being part of something bigger than yourself. Behind each of those clubs are volunteers, coaches, community members, officials and parents who give their time to create opportunities for young people like me. That is the real impact of volunteering. It shapes communities but, just as importantly, it shapes people. Volunteers play a critical role in influencing our young people. They are mentors, role models and leaders. They teach values like commitment, teamwork, respect and resilience—values that stay with people for life.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to attend the Lions Youth of the Year in Ingham—an outstanding speaking competition where I got to hear six outstanding young people speak with confidence, clarity and passion about their future. It was incredibly impressive. It was also a reminder of the role that community organisations like the Lions play in developing our next generation of leaders. Interestingly, I would like to note that the winner in 1996 was a young man by the name of David

Crisafulli, who would then go on to become Premier of Queensland—so volunteers can have an impact on people. It shows that an Ingham boy can become Premier. That shows the lasting impact of these programs and the volunteers who make them possible. These are the outcomes of strong volunteering cultures in our community.

To every volunteer across the Hinchinbrook electorate, and right across Queensland, I say thank you. Thank you for the early mornings and late nights. Thank you for the weekends spent coaching, organising, fundraising and supporting others. Thank you for the countless hours of work that often go unseen. You do not do it for recognition but you deserve recognition. The committee report rightly recognises both the immense value of volunteering and the challenges that come with it, whether they be time pressures, cost of living or declining participation rates in some areas. It highlights the importance of ensuring that we continue to support and strengthen volunteering across Queensland so that future generations can continue to benefit from the same opportunities that so many of us have had.

When we support volunteers, we support communities and, in places like my community of Hinchinbrook, that matters more than ever. I would like to acknowledge the work of Volunteering North Queensland, a wonderful organisation. Volunteering builds stronger communities, it builds better people and it creates opportunities that would not otherwise exist. In Hinchinbrook we are incredibly proud of our volunteers and we will always back those who give their time to make communities better.