

Speech By

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

Ms BOURNE (Ipswich West—ALP) (3.28 pm): Volunteers are the backbone of every community, and in Ipswich West that is something we see play out every single day through the people—the unsung heroes—who step up to support others, often without recognition or praise. Whether it is responding to disasters, running local sporting clubs, supporting community events or providing outreach to those doing it tough, volunteers are the glue that holds our communities together. I had the privilege of meeting many of these individuals and organisations in my role as the member for Ipswich West through my own work as a volunteer in the community including at Rosies.

On this side of the House we would like to thank every volunteer and organisation that contributed to this inquiry. The depth of engagement shows just how critical the sector is. However, it is important to reflect honestly on the outcome of this process, and that is why Queensland Labor has issued a statement of reservation. This inquiry presented a genuine opportunity to deliver meaningful reform and, while the report captures the challenges facing the sector, many of the recommendations stop at asking the government to investigate or consider rather than commit to taking tangible action or making the necessary investment.

This is a sector under real pressure, and that must be met with a sense of urgency. Across Queensland, and particularly in growing communities like mine, people are feeling the impact of cost-of-living increases in a very real way. Families are dealing with rising grocery prices, rent and fuel costs that make everyday activities even more expensive. As such, more and more people are finding themselves in difficult circumstances and are turning to community organisations for support. This increased demand is falling directly on the shoulders of our volunteers at the very same time as those volunteers are dealing with their own financial pressures and time constraints. We know, too, that when these organisations cannot keep up it means even more pressure on our service systems. The evidence presented to the inquiry reflects this reality, with declining volunteer participation and increasing barriers to engagement.

As our statement of reservation highlights, these are not new challenges and, importantly, they were already well understood and being addressed. The strategy recognised both the social and economic importance of volunteering, including its estimated contribution of $117 billion to the Queensland economy, and set out a clear pathway to address the challenges facing the sector.

Under Labor and the work of my good friend and colleague the member for Algester, we delivered the Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032 alongside a detailed action plan. I think about my work with Rosies and I see the growing demand for services supporting people experiencing homelessness, isolation and hardship in my area. I think about all of the amazing community events that are held in Ipswich

West that are only made possible because of our volunteers. In a couple of weeks I will attend the Rosewood Little Athletics end-of-season presentation. Rosewood Little Athletics requires around 70 devoted volunteers to operate effectively and run successful meets.

Volunteering is one of the most valuable assets in our communities, but it is not something that we can take for granted. It requires active support and strong policy leadership. Labor understood that, which is why the strategy and action plan were developed to grow and sustain the sector. This inquiry should have built on that work. Instead, it has largely confirmed what we already know without delivering the level of action required, particularly in the context of rising cost-of-living pressures and increasing demand for community support.

In communities like Ipswich West, volunteers are essential. Our amazing volunteers deserve a government that recognises not only their value but also the urgency of the challenges they face. It has to be one of the greatest privileges of this role to meet the many amazing volunteers who quietly go about supporting people in my community, whether it is the Leichhardt community centre; seniors groups; Meals on Wheels, who celebrate their 70th anniversary this year; Lions Club; Rosies; show societies and emergency services volunteers. The list is so long there are too many to mention.

I implore this government to back our volunteers with real support and investment. In finishing, I would like to thank the committee and all those who contributed to this inquiry.