**Submission Number:** NND.001.01261  
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*What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation*

*What is your area of professional expertise? Volunteering*

*If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? Volunteering Queensland*

Your Submission

*In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?*

*Please see attached submission*

*In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?*

*Please see attached submission*

*In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?*

*Please see attached submission*

*Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?*

*Please see attached submission*

*Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name*

*Supporting material provided:*

Volunteering Qld Submission to Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements - 28.04.20.pdf
Volunteering Queensland
Submission to the Royal Commission into
National Natural Disaster Arrangements

28 April 2020

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Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Introduction

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements was established on 20 February 2020 in response to the extreme bushfire season of 2019-20 which resulted in loss of life, property and wildlife and environmental destruction.

The Commission is gathering evidence about coordination, preparedness for, response to and recovery from disasters as well as improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions and mitigating the impact of natural disasters.

The recent 2019-20 summer of bushfires has focused the attention of the nation on the critical roles that volunteers play during emergencies and the significant volunteer workforce that is at the forefront of the response to such a national crisis.

Volunteering Queensland welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Commission and to share recent experiences and learnings from the NSW Bushfire recovery and many previous disasters events, about the role of volunteers in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. A series of recommendations have been proposed which would strengthen building community resilience to disasters.

Summary

Evidence informs us that our citizens become more cooperative and pro-social during challenging times, such as during disasters. A vast array of research literature supports these encouraging facts which are outlined in Rebecca Solnit’s book in 2010, titled *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*.

In her book, she has a wonderful quote - ‘It’s like a reset, when you turn the machine on and off and on again, that our basic default setting is generous and communitarian and altruistic. But what’s shocking is the incredible joy people often seem to have, when they describe that sense of purpose, connection, community agency they found. It speaks to how deeply we desire something we mostly don’t have in everyday life. That’s a kind of social, public love and power, above and beyond the private life.’

We know - that at times of natural disasters within Australia - such as the Black Saturday Fires Victoria 2009, and more recently the 2019 and 2020 Australian Bushfires - there were huge financial contributions, significant offers of good will and community efforts of volunteering to assist those most affected.

There were extensive numbers of offers from wide ranging volunteering organisations, corporates, community groups and services, from across Australia and overseas, seeking to help bushfire impacted communities. The scale of volunteer mobilisation was of an order of magnitude greater than faced in this country in modern times, which collectively we were not ready to support. Leading and coordinating such level of support requires greater collaboration and comes at a cost.

These recent experiences again demonstrate the need for increased planning for the effective coordination and resourcing of these efforts – otherwise significant risks and missed opportunities exist.

The recommendations included in this submission aim to mitigate these risks and establish more agreed structures and processes to more effectively harness and utilise the human and financial resources available. This can achieve the best possible disaster recovery outcomes for communities.
Volunteering Queensland and recent experiences

The work of Volunteering Queensland (as the state peak body for volunteering) strongly focusses on putting impacted communities first, supporting local communities to lead and be the decision makers in their recovery. Our work with local government and communities, builds upon the existing strengths, assets and capabilities within communities and volunteer organisations. This not only builds capabilities in disasters but strengthens community resilience to disasters.

Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW)

EV CREW is managed by Volunteering Queensland and is utilised by the Queensland Government as the primary platform for volunteer recruitment and referral for people offering their volunteer assistance at times of disaster. This program is managed and implemented by Volunteering Queensland and was established since 2008. It is used for the: registration of people interested in volunteering at times of disasters and matching them with volunteering organisations which have the legal and management abilities to utilise these volunteers. EV CREW has the capacity to support a coordinated response to support the registration and referral of spontaneous volunteers at both a jurisdiction and national level. EV CREW supports government, communities and volunteers at times of disaster, and builds resilience across all phases of emergencies and disasters. Since its establishment in 2008 EV CREW has received registrations from over 100,000 individuals and over 100 organisations tapping into the volunteer workforce it provides.

Volunteering Queensland has over the past several years, been leading the development of sustainable new models for local community capability building in disasters. This has entailed working with the Queensland Government and 13 Local Government authorities in Queensland to achieve these outcomes.

The outcomes of this work were shared with the NSW Government in 2019 to support recovery of communities impacted by the devastating fires.

The NSW Office of Emergency Management (OEM) also seconded a Volunteering Queensland Senior Manager to a key role within the NSW bush fire recovery team to advise and provide guidance to the volunteering work in NSW. This Manager had for the past two years co-led Volunteering Queensland’s significant body of work that resulted in the publication of three widely used resources:

- Making it Happen: Good practice in building local capability to manage spontaneous volunteers.
- Making it Happen: Toolkit to support good practice in building local capability to manage spontaneous volunteers.
- Disaster Preparedness for Older People.

In addition, Volunteering Queensland has for the past three years been exploring and advocating for a network of Volunteer Organisations Active in Disasters (VOAD) to work together as a consortium to share roles, expertise, resources, knowledge, challenges, successes and personnel. This VOAD to address the current and repeated lack of coordination between these organisations and the duplication of resources and efforts that occur during disaster response and recovery.

Through the previous work of Volunteering Queensland in many disaster events, coupled with the sharing of our recent work with NSW OEM and the secondment of our Senior Manager to
lead the work in NSW, we are able to provide insights, current experiences and learnings from the NSW and Qld bushfire recovery experiences.

**Definition of formal and informal volunteering**

**Formal volunteering**

These types of programs tend to be organised around volunteer involvement in the delivery of services. They involve defined supervision structures and the organisation of work into structured roles involving long term, regular attendance. There is often a strong emphasis on policies and procedures and quality management of the services being delivered.

**Informal volunteering**

Informal volunteering occurs in a range of settings, but predominantly transpires in local communities to address specific social needs. Volunteers are generally community members who come together around a shared interest, and work largely in unfunded, less structured settings.

**Response to consultation questions**

1. **In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?**

1.1 **Volunteering Queensland is recognised in the Queensland Disaster Management arrangements**

As the organisation is recognised and has a clear role in supporting the disaster management arrangements, it can provide guidance, support and information on matters relating to volunteering at times of disasters.

Queensland Government was able to access information on the numbers of volunteers registering through the EV CREW portal to gauge the level of interest the community has in offering help.

While no organisations required Volunteers in response to the QLD fires, support was provided by Volunteering Queensland to Councils and the organisations working in their communities through the provision of guidance and information on volunteer management practices.

1.2 **Volunteering Queensland - sharing expertise and outcomes of recent work**

Volunteering Queensland was invited by the NSW OEM to share our work over several years including the recent three models previously described, as well as the work undertaken in exploring and advocating for a model of Volunteer Organisations Active in Disasters (VOAD). The VOAD was promoted as a consortium to share roles, expertise, resources, knowledge, challenges, successes and personnel to support the recovery of communities impacted by the bushfires.
NSW OEM then seconded a Senior Manager of Volunteering Queensland to a key role within the OEM bush fire recovery team to provide advice and guidance to the volunteering work in NSW described below.

1.3 Establishment of the NSW Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Volunteer Working Group

OEM with support from the Senior Manager from Volunteering Queensland, established the Volunteer Working Group - to support community recovery. The outcomes of this working group were reported to the Deputy State Emergency Recovery Controller (SERCON). Membership of this Volunteer Working Group included: Team Rubicon Australia, Samaritans Purse, Blaze Aid, SES, Lions, Rotary and the NSW Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

This Working Group enabled the collaboration between these major volunteering organisations for NSW, whilst the following outcomes were achieved.

Following the January 2020 fires and the significant impacts across Australia, this working group was extended by invitation to other jurisdictions to attend. This was well received, and most jurisdictions then had their representatives attend the meetings.

Outcomes of the Volunteer Working Group:

- **Greater understanding and partnerships between government and volunteer organisations** – regular meetings and exchange of information provided a strong understanding of the activities (as well as the challenges and opportunities) of the known and emerging volunteer organisations that provided voluntary assistance in response and recovery.

- **Sharing impact assessments, and overviews of recovery needs** – OEM provided ongoing reports and maps, on damage/destroyed data and socio-economic factors for bushfire affected localities to all volunteer organisations on a regular basis. This provided the ability to share ongoing reports in a standard and equal manner. Following other jurisdictions joining the Volunteer Working Group, they also shared similar information.

- **Created a collaborative approach across these volunteer organisations** – that self-mobilise and operate during disasters. These volunteer organisations shared knowledge, resources, insights into their barriers and opportunities, as well as volunteers during this approach and developed stronger co-operation and relationships.

- **Exposed and identified issues during activation** – the Volunteer Working Group identified several ways to improve a more coordinated approach. All concurred that one agency needs to have an ‘on the ground’ coordination role in major events. The (at times) competition between major volunteer organisations for financial, political and media support was viewed as potentially becoming divisive and could work against collaboration.

Advice is essential for volunteer organisations, emerging and community groups about what is required regarding ‘do no harm’, recovery principles, volunteer management, as well as adequate insurance and legal protection for volunteers and bushfire affected people receiving the volunteer assistance.

- **Established a strong profile of good will offers and distribution approaches** – this was achieved by close engagement with all major organisations and their offers of good
will. The mapping of good will offers, described what each organisation was providing through vouchers/goods, small grants etc for bushfire affected households. It also identified their criteria for recipients, their modalities, reach and capacities to deliver. This mapping of goodwill and ongoing engagement with these organisations, gave strong insights into the support being offered, its timeliness, and each organisation’s capacity to address identified communities’ needs - against the impacted areas and data for distribution. This provided a tool for OEM to advocate for equity of distribution of this goodwill assistance across the bushfire affected areas.

- **Increased communication between Volunteer Working Group and recovery governance arrangements** – this entailed providing regular updates from the Volunteer Working Group to Deputy SERCON, Recovery Coordinator, Recovery Committees, Council General Managers, Health and Wellbeing Subcommittees as well as Recovery Managers and the broader OEM bushfire recovery team.

- **Advice and support to Councils** – the lead role (Senior Manager of Volunteering Queensland) provided regular contact, sharing of information, and guidance to OEM Recovery Managers and through them to Councils and community groups. The guidance highlighted the opportunities and risks of working with some of the goodwill-based organisations. Guidance sheets were developed and distributed on how Councils could support goodwill organisations to access bushfire affected people, hold events, etc without Councils sharing personalised data. Guidance sheets explaining proposed ways of operation were also provided to the goodwill organisations and Councils.

1.4 **Establishment of the NSW Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Public and Private Partnerships**

Community recovery and renewal relies on collaboration and coordination between the community, governments, non-government, corporate and philanthropic sectors. It also relies on challenging the narrative of immediacy and urgency and explaining that it takes time to distribute money responsibly and well.

The Corporate and Philanthropic Working Group was set up in December 2019 to coordinate a philanthropic, corporate and government partnership approach for recovery in NSW. All members agreed to complement and not duplicate both the government activities and the public support funded through major appeals.

**NSW OEM Public and Private Partnerships Working Group** consisted of: OEM, the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, the Australian Business Roundtable represented through the Insurance Australia Group, Corporate2Community and Philanthropy Australia. The Senior Manager of Volunteering Queensland was also involved in this working group – as here was cross over in the goodwill offers of corporates and philanthropic.

This group agreed to best practice, subscribed to the National Principles for Disaster Recovery and lessons from previous events.

Following the continued broader impact of Bushfires in January 2020, other jurisdictions across Australia were invited to participate. Jurisdictions then appointed representatives to attend these working group meetings.

This working group equally had access to reposts on damage assessments, data and socio-economic mapping etc. This group demonstrated an interest and willingness to work more closely in the future with volunteer organisations to ensure response and recovery activities occur in a timely manner.
2. In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn’t work well?

Collectively for the 2019-20 bushfires, we were not ready to support or provide direction, coordination and resourcing for the level of voluntary and goodwill support offered, which created risks and missed opportunities.

The socio-economic value that volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations provide to Australia is significant, but what is not clearly recognised or planned for, is the cost to these volunteer-involving organisations to put the much-needed volunteers in place.

2.1 Registration and opportunities for volunteering – difficulties

Each jurisdiction within Australia varies in terms of providing a single point of contact for people to register to volunteer at times of disaster. The states of NSW, Victoria and Western Australia have no arrangements in place. Volunteering Queensland EV CREW service is currently utilised in Queensland, ACT and Tasmania, and South Australia and Northern Territory utilise the WeDo App.

Within NSW it was noted that there was no agreed way to refer these informal volunteers to formal volunteer organisations for deployments, This led to an uncoordinated approach, with many emerging or local mobilisations of people who wanted to help. There were many examples of people, church groups informing communities they were arriving to “clean up” things. This was without any: volunteer management practices in place, prior knowledge of contamination or risks, no understanding of what the bushfire affected community wanted, or guidance or support. At these times OEM quickly stepped in to try and mitigate these risks and provide guidance where it was known.

Council, local community members and small unincorporated groups were all put under incredible pressure to respond to these helping groups and placed themselves at risk of legal responsibilities and ramifications during these spontaneous offers to help - as were the bushfire affected people.

2.2 Coordination of volunteer organisations – not established

There were many formal groups of volunteer organisations providing volunteers on the ground. A significant gap was the lack of ability to know numbers and locations of spontaneous volunteers, to be able to refer them to these volunteer organisations.

The members of the Volunteer Working Groups were major actors, but only a small handful of those on the ground and included: Team Rubicon Australia, Samaritans Purse, Blaze Aid, SES, Lions, and Rotary.

It was particularly difficult to keep ahead of the localities where the major volunteer organisations were covering – to ensure an equity of support across the bushfire affected localities and ensure Councils were informed. Many volunteer organisations were attracted to localities through media coverage, where those localities were readily accessible, and bushfire affected households were in close proximity to each other. Those localities tended to receive strong voluntary support, but that was not the case for the more disperse, less known and spread out bushfire affected households and areas.
There was no key agency taking responsibility for the coordination of these volunteer organisations on the ground, to ensure a closer cooperation, inclusion of local volunteers, nor achieve a more equitable spread of support across bushfire affected areas.

### 2.3 Limited and unequal access to financial resources for volunteer organisations and Councils for the deployment of volunteers

Many combat, response and relief volunteer organisations are included in jurisdictional arrangements and their costs are claimed through the NDRRA. Many other volunteer organisation’s costs are not covered.

This results in Councils being restricted as to which volunteer organisations they can nominate to take on the roles that Councils considered could best serve the needs of the communities, because financial support for volunteer operations are not supported.

Some jurisdictions have entered into standalone funding agreements with volunteer organisations such as BlazeAid and GIVIT etc – which have not been done on open tender processes. This places these volunteer organisations at an advantage and disadvantages other well positioned volunteer organisations that are not funded - such as Lions (that manage and distribute many donated goods) or Team Rubicon and Samaritan’s Purse (who provide significant clean-up activities).

### 2.4 Competition between major volunteer organisations for economic, political and media support

The above described disparity of funding support – fostered a sense of competition across volunteer organisations, which led to loss of opportunities for cooperation and sharing of resources. This was difficult to overcome during the deployment. Some volunteering organisations with strong political capital, sought and gained meetings with various political leaders to seek additional resources and support.

This resulted in (for example) BlazeAid obtaining $1 million for fencing goods, GIVIT being funded to take on new responsibilities during the operation and Minderoo Foundation being able to influence decisions about types and placements of transitional shelters and use of volunteers etc.

### 2.5 Funding for base camps: insufficient allocations, timelines and explanations of this funding for NSW Councils to provide volunteer base camps

This funding was provided for a time limited duration – for Councils to offset costs associated for the establishment and running costs of Volunteer Camps (in Council facilities) There were some misunderstandings regarding this funding with a misconception that it was restricted to costs only associated with BlazeAid. BlazeAid generally utilise Council owned facilities which results in costs to Councils, and these costs to Councils are offset by this funding. The criteria that it is to only cover Council’s facilities costs limits the flexibility of how this money can be used.

Other volunteer organisation such as Lions, Team Rubicon could equally draw upon these resources for base camps, but there was very limited understanding of this. Also, it may not be feasible for all volunteer groups to share the same base camp.
There were a range of other volunteer organisations which provide a more diverse range of recovery assistance (including but not limited to physical labour) that could not be supported regardless of whether they were occupying a Council-owned facility or not. Many of these volunteer organisations could operate into the longer-term recovery, but the base camp funding is only short term for early relief phase. The time period did not suit the operation of these volunteer organisations.

2.6 Advice to volunteer organisations, emerging and community groups – inadequate

There exists a need for more mature guidance and community education about volunteer management, issues of informal and spontaneous volunteering, what is required regarding insurance, legal and ethical responsibilities during disaster recovery - for volunteers and recipients of volunteer assistance to fully protect both.

Trying to do this ‘on the run’ during an event had some results but is inadequate and a broader campaign is required to mitigate risks.

Council, local community members and small unincorporated groups were all put under incredible pressure to respond to these helping groups and placed themselves at risk of legal responsibilities and ramifications during these spontaneous offers to help - as were the bushfire affected people.

A number of Community Groups and organisations emerged in their communities as taking a strong lead in accepting donations and goods for those impacted by the Bushfires. While well-meaning and believing they are responding to community need, many of these actions can create more of a challenge in recovery particularly in terms of equitable distribution of goods, storage and management of facilities. Organisations need support in the form of information, guidance and advice as they start to mobilise and respond to the community – they don’t know what they don’t know!

2.7 Lack of recognition of the role that the State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies can play in supporting governments at all levels in the planning and coordination of volunteers in times of disaster

Volunteering Queensland has a clearly defined role within Queensland however within other States or Territories, it is noted that not all State and Territory volunteering peak bodies are created equal.

There was a noted gap in how Governments at a State and Territory level interact with the volunteering peak bodies in their respective jurisdictions. Within NSW, there was little to no recognition of the work of the volunteering state peak and how it could complement and enhance the work of NSW Government.
3. In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

Having a stronger partnership with our citizens who continue to demonstrate their strengths and commitment to voluntarily help others, is the foundation for how we collectively plan, respond and recover to disasters.

During disasters there are known opportunities and identified risks which communities face. These recommendations address these issues by:

- Fully supporting local community driven solutions
- Reinforcing that volunteering is an attribute of a resilient community
- Greater acknowledgment and investment into volunteer organisations and the role they play at times of disasters
- Further establishing collaboration and coordination between key volunteer organisations and partners
- Harnessing goodwill and driving the establishment of Public and Private partnerships to resource the implementation of voluntary support.

The following recommendations are designed to have ready – a range of agreements, practised approaches, guidelines, resources and support for the utilisation of human and financial resources required for effectively deploying volunteers in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

Recommendations to improve arrangements

3.1 National registration and referral platform for the registration and matching of spontaneous volunteers

To establish a national registration, referral and management platform for volunteers (to be used by all State and Territory volunteering peak bodies across each jurisdiction) to enable ease of operations, sharing of information and knowledge, sharing of volunteers and equipment as required, consistent messaging and communications, sharing of training and good practice, shared digital presence and technology capabilities, cost saving, reduction of duplication, and interjurisdictional support during major disaster events.

EV Crew has the capacity and capability to become this centralised portal for registrations and follow up matching and referral of spontaneous volunteers to volunteering organisations, which would then manage these volunteers on the ground.

EV CREW has been shared with and is being utilised by other States and Territories. The system and accompanying program have the potential to be an accessible, coordinated, cost-effective national resource at any time of enormous need to support immediate and longer-term recovery.

EV CREW is a proven and valuable online system with more than 12 years’ service and experience that can help governments with the challenges of registering, managing and
referring offers from spontaneous individual and groups of volunteers to local and broader organisations working to support disaster recovery.

State and Territory volunteering peak bodies that utilise EV CREW as part of formal disaster management arrangements with their governments are Volunteering Queensland, Volunteering ACT and Volunteering Tasmania. Volunteering Victoria also utilises EV CREW to register, match and manage expressions of interest to volunteer for disaster recovery efforts and to support volunteer-involving organisations active in disasters. Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering WA use a different system however both have a link on EV CREW’s emergencyvolunteering.com.au website. This link forwards potential volunteers from those jurisdictions to their individual emergency volunteering webpages.

EV CREW also provides consistent national messaging and individual State and Territory updates on disaster volunteering needs and opportunities via its emergencyvolunteering.com.au site.

EV CREW data is ‘real-time’, utilising texts and emails, and can be shared with and accessed by appropriate parties, including local government authorities. An example of information on volunteers (including number of volunteers in each local government area) can be accessed by relevant parties.

EV CREW can provide a coordinated response, minimise duplication and save costs by providing one central point of registration. This helps governments at all levels deliver best outcomes that ensures that volunteers are protected and that Australia’s diverse communities are effectively supported at times of as well as in preparedness for disaster, and in post disaster recovery and regrowth.

3.2 Coordination of volunteer organisations and groups during operations

It is recognised that due to the scale of these recent bushfires, and the impact upon communities, that additional coordination is required (in the field) for the larger groups that offer their support across each jurisdiction.

Jurisdictions to be supported to openly seek and enlist a coordinator for their State/ Territory.

Improved coordination can also ensure the equitable distribution of support from volunteer organisations.

This coordination approach to ensure close engagement with Councils and local voluntary organisations, to ensure they don’t feel overpowered by external support – but their capacities and approaches are complemented to ensure local capacity building.

3.3 Establish a funding model for the deployment and utilisation of volunteers in disaster preparedness, response and recovery

A grants program to be established for volunteer organisations and Councils to access, that funds required voluntary support that is not recognised with the NDRRA and/ or by separate jurisdictional arrangements.

This funding model to be developed with the Public and Private Partnership Working Group, the respective jurisdictional governments and the Commonwealth Government as partners.

The Commonwealth Government to then develop the grants program with a partner agency that can accept charitable funds and provide grants to volunteer-involving organisations and Councils - to support their local voluntary groups. This funding to support volunteer
organisations when working in preparedness, response and recovery. The support of a partner agency will be required - for example, the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal – to develop and manage a grants program.

Funding model and grants programs will need to have criteria established, to enable Councils to financially support local and/ or larger organisations to establish and provide a broader range of services across the disaster-affected communities.

This will enable volunteer organisations to be supported to participate and provide a more diverse range of response and recovery assistance (including but not limited to physical labour). This will also give Councils the ability to nominate volunteer organisations to take on roles that they consider will best serve the needs of the communities.

This funding could support the volunteer organisations in meeting costs for the provision of services including transport, cover out of pocket expenses of volunteers, communications, insurance, food, volunteer camp facilities, and materials.

3.4 Establish a Volunteer Organisations Active in Disasters (VOAD) nationally and in each jurisdiction

When disasters occur many existing volunteering organisations (formally recognised as well as informal emerging volunteer groups) often arrive unannounced in impacted communities ready and willing to help. At times of major to catastrophic events, even well-resourced communities may rely on the services provided by these informal, non-recognised, or larger unknown volunteer organisations. However, this well-meaning assistance while structured within the individual groups delivering services, is uncoordinated overall.

There is currently no structure in place to identify all the volunteer organisations that demonstrate the expertise, interest, capability and capacity to support the delivery of recovery services in affected communities. This results in significant duplication of effort, costs and resources. It creates confusion, lack of coordination, inconsistent messaging and information, stresses for impacted communities facing accommodation and supply challenges, and a lack of recognition of the importance of involving and building local impacted community assets and capability. Timing is often not suitable for affected communities and while immediate assistance is offered, there is a lack of longer-term recovery support.

Many volunteer organisations traditionally work in isolation regarding how they source, train, deploy, manage, protect and direct their volunteers working in disasters.

Following extensive investigation based on learnings and experience gained from many previous disaster events and the NSW OEM Volunteer Working Group, Volunteering Queensland recommends that a national VOAD and one within each jurisdiction would be an effective and efficient mechanism to assist with disaster preparedness, response and recovery and community resilience and capability building. This would be an impactful solution to how these organisations can work together to best provide positive outcomes, and significant time and cost savings for communities and governments at all levels.

The VOAD can assist these partners at local, jurisdictional and Commonwealth levels, to function within a collaborative framework from the ‘ground up’ and could provide:

- Knowledge about the nature, role, abilities and reach of volunteer organisations working in disasters, and ensure this is understood at all levels.
Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

- Share knowledge, training and resources, capture lessons learned, develop best practices, rationalise costs, reduce duplication, and use a collaborative approach to their work.
- Develop broader collaboration and coordination of preparedness, response and recovery as well as capability and resilience building services provided by the VOAD organisations.
- VOAD members would map their organisations’ capacities to assist in disasters and their ability to accept spontaneous and/or cross-agency volunteers to support their organisation’s respective operations.
- All members to be able to utilise EV CREW as a centralised mechanism to enable the referral of volunteers to their agencies.

3.5 Improving Councils’ and local volunteer organisations’ capabilities to manage spontaneous volunteers and strengthen community resilience to disasters

At times of disaster, individuals, groups and large external volunteer organisations from far and wide, step forward to offer their assistance. Although well-intended, managing these offers and this type of volunteering can be challenging. In the past, whilst these volunteering activities have produced outstanding results for disaster affected communities, they have at times unfortunately caused additional stress and hurt to the people and communities they are trying to assist. Managing the expectations of large external volunteer organisation spontaneous volunteers can also be problematic, particularly in this era of widely used social media and high political interest.

Both at the time of disasters and after all other groups have departed, local government authorities have ‘end point’ and ultimate ongoing responsibility for their communities. They know their communities best and appreciate the critical need for their communities to be strong, connected, inclusive and resilient. An outcome of Volunteering Queensland’s previous body of work and learnings is that numerous local government authorities echoed the challenges they face in planning for the management of spontaneous volunteers and coordination of the many volunteer organisations active in disasters that step forward to help at times of need.

To address these challenges and support the key role of local government authorities and the empowerment of local communities impacted by disaster, Volunteering Queensland is building on learnings from its previous Improving Local Capability to Manage Spontaneous Disaster Volunteers Project.

Through an extensive consultative, mapping and collaborative process, the Improving Local Capability to Manage Spontaneous Disaster Volunteers Project has resulted in the development of:

- Three (evolving) models for local governments to engage volunteer organisations active in disasters to manage spontaneous volunteers.
- A training program for local community groups in the management of spontaneous volunteers.
- A Community Champions initiative that sees community members trained and supported on an ongoing basis to become coordinators of small teams of spontaneous volunteers.
Volunteering Queensland is further developing this work in partnership with a number of Queensland local government authorities of varying sizes and demographics. The project aims to develop local government authority capability to establish plans and Standard Operating Procedures to support local arrangements for the management of spontaneous disaster volunteers and the coordination of volunteer organisations (local and external) active in disasters.

This work can be utilised nationally and with Councils across all jurisdictions with their local partner volunteer organisations, to take on this work and form arrangements at the local level.

3.6 Develop Guidelines and a tool kit for volunteer organisations and volunteers

The guidance sheets and tool kit to highlight the opportunities and risks of working with emerging groups including newly formed goodwill-based organisations. Guidance sheets are required to explain the requirements for volunteer organisations to cover management, legal and insurance requirements for volunteers. These are also provided to Councils and others being asked to support self-activating unincorporated groups and spontaneous volunteers arriving to ‘help’.

Guidance sheets to provide advice on the legal and professional issues, as well as the risks in directing or utilising these informal groups. Both for those in organisational roles, and for the disaster affected community members who may be recipients of this type of voluntary support.

Guidance sheets to also be developed for how Councils can support goodwill organisations to access disaster affected people, hold events, etc. without Councils needing to share personalised data.

In response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, Volunteering Queensland has built on its learnings, knowledge and experiences from past disasters and the recent devastating bushfires and collaborated with other State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to produce a suite of interactive, online (downloadable) guides for volunteer organisations and volunteers that provide additional user friendly resources that have applicability across disasters. These are, Responding to a Pandemic: A Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations; Volunteering in Response to a Pandemic: A Practical Guide for Volunteers; Re-engaging, Retaining and Managing Volunteers Post a Pandemic: A Practical Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations; and, Priorities for Recovery Post a Pandemic: A Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations.

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14 | P a g e