

Submission to the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)

Subject: Enhancing Support and Alignment for Emergency Services Volunteers

The following submissions address critical challenges faced by emergency services volunteers. These proposals aim to improve volunteer retention, align volunteer capabilities with paid services, and ensure access to consistent training and support.

Submission One: Tax Relief for Emergency Services Volunteers

Proposal:

Introduce a tax relief program for emergency services volunteers who meet a defined annual minimum commitment of service hours.

Rationale:

Emergency services volunteers dedicate considerable time to training, activations, and emergency responses, often at their own expense. A tax relief incentive would:

- Recognise and reward the essential contribution of volunteers to community safety.
- Encourage active participation in training and operational activities.
- Offset out-of-pocket expenses such as travel, equipment, and income lost due to volunteering commitments.

Providing financial recognition through tax relief will reinforce the value of volunteering and support retention in this vital sector.

Submission Two: Legislative Alignment Between Paid and Volunteer Emergency Services

Proposal:

Amend legislation to permit emergency services volunteers to operate under the same conditions as paid emergency service workers, particularly regarding the use of emergency lights and sirens while responding to incidents.

Rationale:

Paid emergency service personnel are authorised to utilise emergency lights and sirens to expedite responses to critical incidents, such as road traffic crashes. In contrast, volunteers in many jurisdictions are restricted from doing so, which can delay their response and reduce effectiveness.

Aligning these operational capabilities would:

- Enhance community safety by ensuring faster response times.
- Equip volunteers with the necessary tools to fulfil their roles effectively.
- Foster consistency between paid and volunteer emergency service operations.

This adjustment is essential to improving service delivery in regions heavily reliant on volunteer resources.

Submission Three: Work Experience Opportunities with Paid Emergency Services

Proposal:

Establish structured opportunities for emergency services volunteers to undertake supervised “work experience” or shadowing programs with paid emergency services.

Rationale:

Currently, the ability for volunteers to work alongside paid emergency services is highly restricted, often due to union agreements. Allowing volunteers to shadow paid personnel would:

- Provide invaluable real-world experience, bridging the gap between theory and practice.
- Enhance the skillset of volunteers through mentorship and practical exposure.
- Benefit the broader community by ensuring volunteers maintain high standards of training and preparedness.

This initiative would create a more cohesive and integrated emergency services framework, enabling volunteers to respond more effectively to emergencies.

Submission Four: National Standardisation of Training and Qualifications

Proposal:

Implement a nationally recognised and transferable training framework for emergency services volunteers to ensure consistency across states and territories.

Rationale:

Currently, volunteers moving between jurisdictions often face delays and administrative burdens due to inconsistencies in training standards. A uniform approach would:

- Streamline the process for recognising prior learning and qualifications.
- Enable volunteers to maintain operational readiness regardless of their location.
- Improve interoperability during large-scale, multi-jurisdictional emergency responses.

This measure would build a more agile and capable volunteer workforce to meet the challenges of increasing climate-related emergencies.

Conclusion

The National Volunteer Incentive Scheme has a critical role to play in supporting and enhancing the contributions of emergency services volunteers. By adopting these proposals, the scheme would address key challenges, ensure volunteers are adequately recognised and equipped, and strengthen Australia's resilience to climate-related disasters.

We urge the government to prioritise these initiatives, acknowledging the vital role volunteers play in safeguarding our communities. I would be pleased to be contacted to discuss the above proposals and provide further details about the above.

Yours sincerely,

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