Submission on Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response

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Overview

The Commonwealth Government is consulting on alternative Commonwealth capabilities for crisis response following the findings of the Defence Strategic Review that the Australian Defence Force is not structured or appropriately equipped to act as a domestic disaster recovery agency concurrently with its core function. This work includes consideration of the roles that volunteers might play in future crises. The following suggestions are made to guide future work:

- The diversity of volunteers active in crisis response needs to be fully understood and articulated. There is a myriad of ways in which people act in a voluntary capacity during crises, ranging from highly formalised roles (such as volunteers in state and territory emergency management services) through to informal volunteering activity that occurs spontaneously in the community. In this submission, we group volunteers into four categories and illustrate the breadth and variety of roles, activities, skill requirements, support needs, and training requirements.
- To determine how volunteers might provide support in future crises requires a systems approach which a) describes the roles, functions, and activities that might be needed to support crisis response in the future and b) considers which of these it is feasible and desirable to be undertaken by volunteers (i.e., people giving their time 'willingly for the common good and without financial gain'[1]).
- There is potential for an enhanced role for volunteers in crisis response in the future, but further work is needed before the interface between volunteering and Commonwealth capabilities can be codified or considered strategically. This submission outlines three potential future scenarios for volunteer involvement in Australia's crisis response arrangements, highlighting the need for further work to assess whether, and with what resources, each scenario is feasible.
- All scenarios require significant investment to support and grow volunteer capacity.

Important considerations in taking this work forward include:

- Rates of volunteering and other forms of pro-social behaviour have been declining over time. The rate of formal volunteering (through an organisation or group) as decreased from around one-third (34.4 per cent) of adults in 2002 to around one-quarter (24.8 per cent) currently. COVID-19 has resulted in a substantial decline in volunteering.[2]
- Volunteering requires deliberate and ongoing strategic consideration, underpinned by adequate resourcing. Volunteers need induction, training, screening, coordination, and management. Volunteer leadership and management is essential to effective volunteer involvement.
- The National Strategy for Volunteering illustrates that a positive future for volunteering, including during crises, requires three broad areas of focus:
    1. Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience — volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful, and not exploitative.

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[1] https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/#/
[2] https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf, 28

2. Community and Social Impact — the diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated.
3. Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive — the right conditions (strategic and operational) are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable.

- National oversight and coordination of volunteers during national crises in which Commonwealth capabilities are engaged is currently lacking. During consultations for the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, many volunteers and organisations raised the idea of a 'national volunteer passport' as a means of reducing administration, increasing portability of skills, qualifications, and screening checks between organisations, and recognising skills, training, and credentials of volunteers at a national level. Consideration of the merits of this proposal for enhancing volunteer involvement during crises should include how it would interface with existing State and Territory emergency volunteering platforms.

Introduction

About the Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper

The Australian Government is seeking public feedback on how it can best assist communities during future national crises and disasters. As part of the consultation process, the Government has released the "Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response" Discussion Paper, which calls for views on the capabilities that the Commonwealth Government needs to have to support state and territory-led crisis response and recovery efforts as an alternative to the Australian Defence Force. The Discussion Paper focuses on response and recovery efforts.

State and Territory governments have primary responsibility for crisis response in their jurisdictions. When a crisis has the potential to affect more than one jurisdiction, or exceeds State and Territory capacity, the Commonwealth can provide additional support to bolster response and recovery efforts. This process aims to explore alternative Commonwealth crisis response capabilities to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to support State and Territory-led efforts.

The discussion paper poses the following questions:

- Acknowledging the primary role of state and territories in emergency response, what longer-term capacities and capabilities does the Commonwealth need to develop to meet the challenges of the evolving strategic environment?
- At a national level, what are likely to be the key pressure points or challenges for the Commonwealth responding to competing and concurrent crises?
- How could the Commonwealth build community resilience and capability so they are better able to respond to and recover from national-level crises?
- What changes in the current system are necessary to help Australia have the right capabilities and capacity to handle concurrent crises?
- What models could the Commonwealth explore to replace or supplement support currently provided by the ADF during domestic crisis?
  - What does the right mix of Commonwealth capabilities look like?
  - How could a Commonwealth workforce surge capacity be replicated in a scalable, efficient and effective way?
  - How could we harness the critical role of volunteers and civilian groups under this model?
  - How do these models supplement, but not replicate, existing models operating at a state and territory and local level?
  - What role could industry / the private sector play? How can the Government attract increased investment in emergency management from the private sector?
- What gaps currently exist in state and territory emergency management capability?
- Are there sectors that could replicate the capabilities provided by the ADF?
- What are the critical functions the Commonwealth Government should continue to perform in disaster relief and recovery, in support of local, state and territory governments?
- What legislative, regulatory or policy changes could be undertaken to make it financially viable for other sectors to contribute to a Commonwealth crisis response capability?

About this submission

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. It follows previous submissions and position statements made by Volunteering Australia, in partnership with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies, on volunteering and crisis response, including:

- Submission to the Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
- Submission on the second National Action Plan to implement the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry: Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20
- Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements
- Volunteering Australia & State and Territory Peak Volunteering Bodies Response To Australian Government Compensation Scheme
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment (Respect for Emergency Services Volunteers) Bill 2016

This also includes the following work on volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests, Personal Protective Equipment, and Volunteers: Position Statement
- Submission to the Independent Panel Review on COVID-19
- Volunteers in Disability Support and COVID-19 Vaccinations Position Statement
- COVID-19 Vaccinations in Aged Care Position Statement
- COVID-19 POSITION PAPER 3 Volunteering vaccinations and being COVIDSafe
- Submission to the Select Committee on COVID-19
- Volunteering Australia and Justice Connect - Joint policy statement: Addressing the pandemic insurance gap for volunteers
- COVID-19 Position paper No.2: Safeguarding Volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations - Version 3
- COVID-19 Position paper No.1: Volunteering and National Policy Settings - Version 2

Volunteering and national crisis response capabilities

Volunteers are currently involved in national crisis response efforts in a variety of roles, and in different capacities with differing degrees of formality. Precise arrangements vary by state and territory, however, volunteers are generally involved in broader crisis response arrangements in four areas:[3]

1. State and Territory government emergency management organisations. These include State and Territory emergency services organisations, as well as fire service organisations and ambulance organisations that have official roles in crisis response. The role of these

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[3] https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/html-report/chapter-03

organisations varies across jurisdictions but commonly includes prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities.

2. Charities and not-for-profits that formally support crisis response. These organisations usually have "wider social welfare, community service, humanitarian, or environmental conservation missions that also have formally recognised emergency management responsibilities, particularly for the delivery of disaster welfare services."[4] These organisations are usually large charities and not-for-profits that engage volunteers, such as Australian Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Anglicare.

3. Extending community sector organisations. These are community sector organisations that do not have formal emergency management responsibilities, but which build individual and community resilience before, during and after a disaster strikes in their communities.[5] These organisations may also 'extend' their activities into emergency relief and recovery when their communities are impacted by an emergency event. Examples include churches, community associations, neighbourhood houses, health and social services organisations, and sporting clubs.[6] These organisations may not have the experience, expertise, or access to resources and information (for example, on health and safety risks, the psychological impacts of disasters, or the availability of other funded support services) to support their roles in crisis response efforts.

4. As spontaneous volunteers. Spontaneous emergency volunteers are people who seek out or are invited to contribute their assistance before, during and/or after an emergency. Some spontaneous volunteers are engaged formally by a not-for-profit organisation or through an online platform facilitated by an organisation, while others are not affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies, and may or may not have relevant training, skills, or experience. Spontaneous volunteers may therefore contribute to crisis response charities and not-for-profits or community sector organisations. They may also participate through emergent groups – new, self-organised groups or networks that form in direct response to an arising need when a disaster strikes[7] – or individually in crisis-affected areas. Spontaneous volunteering is inevitable and the inclusion of spontaneous volunteers in crisis management is complex. However, spontaneous volunteers can support crisis response efforts when effective planning and resourcing is available.

Each type of volunteers is engaged in crisis response efforts with different degrees of formality. Some have specialised skills and access to formal training in crisis response and relief, and are engaged by organisations which are resourced for their role in the crisis response system. Others are

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[4] https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-5773, 12

[5] Following Barraket (2006), the term 'community sector' is used to mean: "those organisations that are not for profit, rely on high levels of volunteerism, and broadly respond to welfare needs. Community sector organisations work in related areas of health, education, employment and community services, amongst other industries. They comprise small informal community groups through to large incorporated organisations, and range in orientation from member-based consumer advocacy groups through to privately constituted but publicly-oriented service providers; https://rest.neptune-prod.its.unimelb.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/fef29c46-6cbb-5466-98be-c9e5111e2006/content, 3

[6] *ibid*

[7] *ibid*

engaged informally in the community, and as such, lack access to the formal communications, training, and resourcing offered to formal volunteers. The types of roles which may be feasibly undertaken by these volunteers, and the resourcing required to facilitate their role, varies significantly. The table below describes each type of volunteering and highlights examples of each.

Type	Description	Examples
State and Territory government emergency management organisations	State and Territory government emergency management organisations are some of the primary agencies involved in providing emergency services for fire and other events, including other natural hazards. The role of these organisations varies across jurisdictions but commonly includes prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities.	Fire and Rescue NSW Department of Fire and Emergency Services (WA) South Australia State Emergency Service Country Fire Authority (Victoria)
Crisis response charities and not-for-profits	Organisations that have wider social welfare, community service, humanitarian, or environmental conservation missions that also have formally recognised emergency management responsibilities, particularly for the delivery of disaster welfare services.	Australian Red Cross Salvation Army Anglicare
Extending community sector organisations	Community sector organisations that do not have formal emergency management responsibilities, but which build individual and community resilience before, during, and after a disaster strikes in their communities. These organisations may also 'extend' their activities into emergency relief and recovery when their communities are impacted by an emergency event.	Churches Community associations Neighbourhood houses Sports clubs
Spontaneous volunteers	People who seek out or are invited to contribute their assistance before, during and/or after an emergency. Some spontaneous volunteers are engaged formally by a not-for-profit organisation or through an online platform facilitated by an organisation, while others are not affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies, and may or may not have relevant training, skills, or experience.	EV CREW[8] Emergency Support Volunteering[9] Emergent groups

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[8] https://volunteeringqld.org.au/emergency-volunteering/
[9] https://emergency.volunteer.org.au/

Volunteering and Australia's crisis response arrangements

State and territory government emergency management organisations

Volunteering plays a significant role in formal crisis response in Australia. According to the most recent Report on Government Services from the Productivity Commission, 217,954 people volunteered in government emergency services organisations in Australia in the 2021-22 financial year.[10] This number includes:

- 193,312 volunteers in fire services organisations.
- 24,642 volunteers in State and Territory emergency services.

Volunteer emergency responders make up the majority of the emergency responder workforce in all states and territories. However, data from previous years shows that the number of volunteers in government fire services organisations has decreased gradually since 2015-16, including a 3.7 per cent decline between the 2020-21 financial year and the 2021-22 financial year.[11] Over the same period, the number of volunteers in State and Territory Emergency Service organisations has remained relatively steady. These changes have resulted in an overall decrease of 38,497 volunteers in government emergency services organisations since 2015-16.

Crisis response charities and not-for-profits

Volunteers deliver essential emergency response and relief services through dedicated charities and not-for-profits. These organisations usually focus on disaster preparedness and relief activities.

For example, the Australian Red Cross engages 17,047 volunteers, and disasters and emergencies are identified as a core focus of the organisation.[12] During the 2019/20 bushfires, the Australian Red Cross supported 49,718 people at evacuation centres and over the phone, and assisted 67,764 people with recovery through 1-1 and group support, training and workshops, information, and referrals.[13] Red Cross Recovery Teams also run community workshops and preparedness sessions to support resilience to future crises by providing information to the community on crisis response arrangements, identifying areas of risk in the community, and providing first aid training.[14]

Extending community sector organisations

Many community sector organisations also support response and recovery efforts during times of crisis. This includes local and major national organisations that provide essential services that are

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[10] https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/emergency-management/rogs-2023-partd-overview-and-sections.pdf

[11] Data taken from 2023 Report on Government Services for each year except 2010-2011, which was taken from the 2021 Report on Government Services; https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/emergency-management/rogs-2023-partd-overview-and-sections.pdf, 6

[12] https://www.redcross.org.au/about/what-we-do/

[13] https://www.redcross.org.au/bushfirereport/

[14] https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/corporatecms-migration/publications-research--reports/bushfire-report-2- year.pdf, 8

vital to crisis relief efforts. For example, Foodbank volunteers provide essential supplies to people affected by natural disasters and to first responders.[15] Meals on Wheels, which engages 45,000 volunteers, delivered essential food and hygiene products to vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.[16]

Organisations that provide emergency relief, food relief, and financial counselling services, alongside Volunteering Australia, are formally engaged through the National Coordination Group to provide advice to the Minister for Social Services to inform decisions on Emergency Relief, Food Relief, and Financial Counselling funding in response to crises.[17] Its membership includes both organisations that focus directly on crisis response and those that extend their activities to support crisis response. These organisations include UnitingCare Australia, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation, Launceston City Mission, Foodbank Australia, Anglicare Australia, Wesley Mission, Jacaranda Community Centre, The Salvation Army, Financial Counselling Australia, Australian Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, and Aboriginal Family Support Services.

Volunteers in these organisations are essential to crisis response arrangements. However, data on the number and roles of volunteers who contribute to crisis response efforts through these organisations is not currently available.

Spontaneous volunteers

Finally, many people contribute to crisis response efforts as spontaneous volunteers. Spontaneous emergency volunteers are people who seek out or are invited to contribute their assistance before, during and/or after an emergency. Some spontaneous volunteers are engaged formally by a not-for-profit organisation or through an online platform facilitated by an organisation, while others are not affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies, and may or may not have relevant training, skills, or experience.

Spontaneous volunteers are often recruited and coordinated through dedicated online platforms. Most of the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies operate online matching platforms that can be activated during crises. For example, the EV CREW platform run by Volunteering Queensland facilitates matching of a registered person's skills, qualifications, location, and any relevant equipment/transport they may be able to provide, with the volunteering roles that become available during an emergency. EV CREW has made over 33,000 volunteer referrals to 200 disaster preparation or recovery campaigns since it was established in 2008.[18] While these numbers demonstrate the scale of spontaneous volunteer involvement in crisis resilience, comprehensive data on spontaneous volunteering in Australia is not currently available.

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[15] https://www.foodbank.org.au/natural-disaster-relief/?state=nsw-act

[16] https://mealsonwheels.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MOWA-Annual-Report-2021-FINAL-Digital.pdf, 3

[17] https://www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people-programs-services-emergency-relief/national-coordination-group

[18] https://volunteeringqld.org.au/services/emergency-volunteering

Other spontaneous volunteers are not affiliated with an organisation, and instead provide direct, informal support in their communities. To better plan for and coordinate the involvement of spontaneous volunteers in disaster management, the Australian Government funded the *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage* in 2015.[19]

Limited data on volunteering in crisis response

Data on volunteering in Australia can be difficult to assess holistically. This is because most available data is collected in general surveys or in sector-specific data collection efforts. Available statistics count only the reported numbers of volunteers involved in formal organisations. Those involved informally in their communities, or spontaneously in response to a crisis, are not recorded nationally. Further, due to different data collection methods and the possibility that people who volunteer in multiple sectors are counted more than once, it is not possible to estimate the total number of volunteers involved in crisis response across the country using existing official data. As a consequence, clear data on the involvement of volunteers in crisis response efforts is not currently available.

As mentioned in the Discussion Paper, double counting of volunteers is a significant issue in available datasets. For example, according to the ACNC Annual Information Statement (AIS) dataset, 1,192 registered charities identify 'emergency and relief' as their main activity, and these charities report engaging 217,776 volunteers. This figure does not include any fire service or other government services organisations, or other organisation types which are heavily involved in emergency response and recovery. However, these volunteers may be engaged by more than one organisation. According to the 2020 General Social Survey, 33.4 per cent of volunteers undertake voluntary work for two or more organisations.[20] Comprehensive information on the roles, skills, and qualifications of these volunteers is also lacking.

A lack of clear and reliable data on volunteering in disaster relief creates significant challenges to assessing the feasibility of volunteer involvement under an alternative approach to the use of Commonwealth capabilities during crises.

Volunteering in crisis recovery and resilience

As well as supporting national crisis response efforts, volunteering is a key part of resilience and recovery efforts in communities across Australia. This work is led at the local level, with the support of State/Territory and Commonwealth governments. To enhance community resilience, there is a need for increased financial investment in local programs that help communities understand their risks, prepare, and respond effectively.

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[19] https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/2140/national-spontaneous-volunteer-strategy.pdf

[20] Australian Bureau of Statistics (July 2021) Table 10.3: Persons aged 15 years and over who have undertaken unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in last 12 months, Characteristics of voluntary work–By Sex, proportion of persons' [data set], *General Social Survey*, Australia

To support these efforts, and thus reduce the need to support from the ADF during national crises, further funding should be made available to support the role of volunteering in systemic risk reduction. This should include increased funding for preparedness and resilience activities for volunteer involving organisations through the Disaster Ready Fund and other Commonwealth grant programs. The Discussion Paper states that "in response [to the Defence Strategic Review], the Government agreed in-principle to the Review's recommendation that the Commonwealth work with the states and territories to develop national resilience and response measures for adverse climate change at the local level without the need of ADF support."[21] Support for volunteering should be a key focus of this initiative.

What we need to know

Consideration of how volunteering could contribute to a new approach to Commonwealth Government capabilities that reduces reliance on the ADF requires a systems approach. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the roles currently undertaken by the ADF, paid staff in State and Territory government emergency management organisations, and volunteers with various degrees of involvement with formal organisations. The resources required to fulfil these roles could then be assessed, and consideration could be given to which roles should be undertaken:

- By the ADF
- In a paid capacity by staff engaged by the Commonwealth government
- In a paid capacity by staff in state and territory government emergency management organisations
- In a voluntary capacity in a future Commonwealth government voluntary organisation
- In a voluntary capacity in State and Territory government emergency management organisations
- In a voluntary capacity in charities and not-for-profits that formally support crisis response
- In a voluntary capacity in community services organisations
- By spontaneous volunteers
  - o Noting that spontaneous volunteers can be engaged in a formal organisation or directly in the community, and have different levels of training.

Further work therefore needs to be undertaken before different options regarding the role of volunteering in alternative Commonwealth capabilities can be considered for their efficacy or feasibility. This includes:

- Collection of detailed and reliable data on volunteer involvement in crisis response arrangements, including:
  - o Numbers and locations of volunteers in crisis response roles, including those who volunteer through State and Territory emergency management organisations, through crisis response charities and not-for-profits, through extending community

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[21] https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/alternative-clth-capabilities-crisis-response.pdf, 9

   sector organisations, and through online spontaneous volunteering platforms such as EV CREW.

    o Information on completion of relevant training and worker screening requirements (where applicable).

    o Information on available training and resourcing of volunteer involvement.

- A mapping of existing national policy on volunteering in crisis response arrangements. This should include mapping responsibilities for the resourcing and regulation of volunteering across Commonwealth, state/territory, and local government levels.
- Scoping work and initiatives to improve national coordination and oversight of volunteers during national crises in which Commonwealth capabilities are engaged.
  o During consultations for the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, many volunteers and organisations raised the idea of a 'national volunteer passport' as a means of reducing administration, increasing portability of skills, qualifications, and screening checks between organisations, and recognising skills, training, and credentials of volunteers at a national level. Consideration of the merits of this proposal for enhancing volunteer involvement during crises should include how it would interface with existing State and Territory emergency volunteering platforms.
- A review of existing crisis response volunteering initiatives conducted by volunteer involving organisations, including not-for-profit organisations and governments. This includes existing training programs and arrangements for recruiting and managing spontaneous volunteers. This should also draw upon international examples of policy and practice on engaging volunteers in crises, such as the US Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster model.[22]

Information collected through this work would then inform the consideration of the roles currently undertaken in a voluntary capacity, those that could feasibly be undertaken by in a voluntary capacity in the future, and what resources would be necessary to facilitate the role of volunteers under a new model for Commonwealth involvement in crisis response.

Future scenarios for volunteering in national crisis response

The Discussion Paper highlights the following roles which have historically been performed by the ADF when they are engaged in national crisis response:[23]

- planning support (including in relation to recovery and response)
- logistics (including use of defence assets and infrastructure)
- communications (including emergency communications and aerial surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities)
- transport of people and goods by inland waterways, sea, land and air (including rescue and evacuation, resupply of essential goods and heavy lift capability)

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[22] https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US; https://www.nvoad.org/

[23] https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/alternative-clth-capabilities-crisis-response.pdf, 5

- additional personnel (including general duties support, such as search, road clearance, debris removal, emergency repairs and access control, and specialist support, such as medical and engineering personnel).

This section outlines three possible future scenarios in which volunteers could be engaged in future national crisis response arrangements. In doing so, it responds to the questions outlined in the Discussion Paper on how volunteering could support and interface with alternative Commonwealth capabilities for crisis response in Australia.

1. In some States and Territories, volunteers could undertake some tasks currently undertaken by the ADF.
   o This would require an assessment of the requirements of relevant roles to determine which could appropriately be performed in a voluntary capacity, and with what resourcing and supports.
2. In some States and Territories, volunteers could undertake some tasks currently undertaken by the ADF, alongside a new Commonwealth capability delivered by paid staff.
   o The lead agency would require in-depth knowledge of the volunteering ecosystem, crisis response volunteering, and the relevant policies that support volunteers. Volunteers would need relevant support and training etc to undertake designated roles.
3. Volunteers could continue their current role in crisis response, with further investment from the Commonwealth government to attract, train, and retain a greater number of volunteers.
   o The sustainability of volunteer involvement is being adversely impacted by recruitment challenges and the increasing burden created by more frequent and severe disasters. Further, decreases in volunteer numbers over the past several years would place significant financial pressure on volunteer involving organisations and would strain existing capacity. Volunteer involvement would not be scalable without further investment.

In any of the above scenarios, there is an important question around which level of government is engaging volunteers and in what capacity. There is no current volunteer capability engaged by the Commonwealth government. The idea for a new national community service model needs to be considered within the context of the highly complex emergency management landscape, in which there are significant challenges to the capacity and sustainability of current volunteer efforts.

It is important to emphasise that whether, and with what necessary supports, the array of functions previously undertaken by the ADF could be undertaken by civilians in a voluntary capacity, requires a systems approach which considers the roles currently undertaken and the resources and skills they demand. As noted above, this should follow further work on the capacity of the volunteering ecosystem and the roles required in future crises. This is necessary to determine which, if any, of the above scenarios is feasible.

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

The new National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) is a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It is the first National Strategy for Volunteering in a decade, providing a strategic framework for enabling safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering. The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed through a 12-month co-design process with

members of the volunteering ecosystem.[24] The National Strategy for Volunteering is now in the Establishment Phase, which will involve four key activities:

- Co-design of the first three-year action plan
- Establishment of a governance model
- Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework
- Development of a model for shared accountability for information.

National oversight and coordination of volunteers during crises is currently lacking. During consultations for the development of the National Strategy, many volunteers and organisations raised the idea of a 'national volunteer passport' as a means of reducing administration, increasing portability of skills, qualifications, and screening checks between organisations, and recognising skills, training, credentials of volunteers at a national level. Consideration of the merits of this proposal for enhancing volunteer involvement during crises should include how it would interface with existing State and Territory emergency volunteering platforms.

Future work

Volunteering Australia and the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies emphasise that further work is necessary to assess the feasibility of any proposed model for volunteer involvement in national crisis response arrangements. We recommend a systems approach to determine which roles, if any, that have historically been undertaken by the ADF could be feasibly undertaken in a voluntary capacity to support alternative Commonwealth capabilities for crisis response. This should follow further consultation with the volunteering ecosystem on the role of volunteering in future Commonwealth crisis response arrangements.

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[24] https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.

Mr Mark Pearce

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote a strong, connected, and resilient Australian community through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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