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EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING 2030: VIEWS FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEER REPRESENTATIVES

Environmental Scan Report No. 4

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KEY MESSAGES

- A qualitative survey was conducted with 72 emergency response volunteer representatives to explore their views about changes in volunteering, key volunteering issues today, the preferred future for emergency response volunteering, and what needs to happen to move towards that future.
- Volunteer representatives depict a situation today in which emergency response volunteering is being squeezed by pressures on three sides (socioeconomic and demographic shifts, government and organisation expectations and requirements, and community needs and expectations), such that the personal burden of volunteering is increasing.
- As a result, a partial mismatch may be developing between organisational expectations on emergency response volunteers, and the motivations and incentives underpinning this volunteering, which increases the risk of a 'breach of psychological contract' occurring.
- Related to this, responses from some volunteer representatives indicate a widening gap between the goals, values and priorities of some organisations and their volunteers that is exacerbated by professionalisation and corporatisation. While not a dominant theme in this report, the potential for this gap to continue to grow is concerning.
- Particularly younger and female volunteer representatives considered there to be a shortage of innovation and flexibility to address complex and multi-faceted challenges in their organisations, including amongst volunteers themselves. Many identified a need for cultural change in the emergency management sector to become more open and inclusive.
- Most volunteer representatives do not expect that current policy and management approaches will effectively enable vibrant and sustainable emergency response volunteering over the next decade, and they are concerned about the implications of this for communities.
- Positively, volunteer representative responses revealed five key foundations for vibrant and sustainable volunteering over the next decade. They also suggested a wide range of priority actions to strengthen these foundations. Half also identified initiatives that are doing well addressing current issues.
- With longer and fiercer bushfire seasons ahead, the issue of alleviating the personal financial burden of emergency response volunteering into the future needs to be carefully examined. A considerable minority of volunteer representatives anticipated that further remuneration or compensation of some kind could be needed in future.
- Volunteer representatives emphasized the importance of stronger governmental leadership and support to move towards a preferred future state for emergency response volunteering.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents results from a qualitative survey completed by 72 representatives of emergency response volunteer groups and networks in Australia in 2018 and 2019. The purpose of the survey was to explore volunteer representatives' views about changes in volunteering that have occurred in the past, key volunteering issues today, what a preferred future for emergency response volunteering looks like, and what needs to happen to move towards that future.

The survey was administered by RMIT University researchers as part of a research study for the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC called [Emergency volunteering 2030: Adapting the sector](#). 'Adapting the sector' is a foresight and scenario-planning study engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to identify the most important trends and uncertainties likely to shape the future of emergency volunteering, and to consider implications of alternative future volunteering scenarios for today's decision-making.

This report is one of a series of Environmental Scan reports that capture diverse stakeholder views of the current and emerging landscape of emergency volunteering. The research was approved and overseen by the RMIT University Human Ethics Advisory Network (project number CHEAN B 21057-08/17).

CONTEXT

Formal emergency response volunteering is a crucial and central component of the volunteering that supports communities before, during and after emergency events. The 250,000 odd emergency response volunteers form the bulk of the emergency response workforce in Australia. Emergency response volunteering is especially important in rural, regional and remote communities where volunteers provide many essential community services and where emergency response services are heavily, often entirely, volunteer based.

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of Australia's formal emergency response volunteer capacity is a key issue within the emergency management sector in the face of the changes and pressures in the modern landscape of volunteering. Many emergency management organisations are responding to the changing landscape with new volunteer strategies, models, and management practices but more needs to be done. This report endeavours to reinforce volunteer voices within current research, debates, and decisions regarding strategies for the future of emergency volunteering.

KEY IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

The implications provided here are first level observations prepared by the author. They are based on views that were gathered before the 2019/2020 Australian bushfire season began and before the COVID-19 pandemic. More complete implications will also be considered in conversation with key stakeholder groups.



1. Volunteer representatives depict a situation today in which emergency response volunteering is being squeezed by pressures on three sides (socioeconomic and demographic shifts, government and organisation expectations and requirements, and community needs and expectations), such that the personal burden of volunteering is increasing.
2. A partial mismatch may be developing between organisational expectations on emergency response volunteers, and the motivations and incentives underpinning this volunteering, which increases the risk of a significant 'breach of psychological contract' occurring.
3. Related to this, responses from some volunteer representatives indicate a widening gap between the goals, values and priorities of some organisations and their volunteers exacerbated by professionalisation and corporatisation. While not a dominant theme in this report, the potential for this gap to continue to grow is concerning.
4. Particularly younger and female volunteer representatives considered there to be a shortage of innovation and flexibility to address complex and multi-faceted challenges in their organisations, including amongst volunteers themselves. Many identified a need for cultural change to become more open and inclusive.
5. Most volunteer representatives do not expect that current policy and management approaches will effectively enable vibrant and sustainable emergency response volunteering over the next decade, and they are concerned about the implications of this for communities.
6. Positively, volunteer representative responses revealed five key foundations for vibrant volunteering over the next decade. They also suggested a wide range of priority actions that could strengthen these foundations. Half also identified initiatives that are doing well addressing current issues.
7. With longer and fiercer bushfire seasons ahead, the issue of alleviating the personal financial burden of emergency response volunteering into the future needs to be carefully examined. A considerable minority of volunteer representatives anticipated that further remuneration or compensation of some kind could be needed in future.
8. Volunteer representatives emphasized the importance of stronger governmental leadership and support to move towards a preferred future for emergency response volunteering.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This research primarily used a qualitative, key informant survey with 72 representatives from emergency response volunteer groups across Australia. The survey was administered online in late 2018 and early 2019.

All participants represented volunteers from one of three general service categories: 35% represented Victorian Country Fire Authority volunteers (CFA volunteers), 31% represented fire service volunteers in other states and territories (including combined services), and 35% represented volunteers in other emergency response services, (including state emergency services or SES, ambulance, surf life saving, and marine rescue).

SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Item	Major themes
<p>1. What changes have impacted emergency response volunteering in the last 5-10 years?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Particularly younger) people are more time poor; more competition for people's time • Fewer people interested in emergency response volunteering and community service • Increased organisational expectations of volunteers and greater volunteer workload
<p>2. What issues do emergency response volunteering and volunteers face today?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer sustainability • Personal burden of volunteering • Excessive organisational requirements • Widening gap between organisations and volunteers • Shortfalls in volunteer management capacity and resources • Need for and resistance to cultural change • Inadequate youth engagement and innovation
<p>3. What is already working well to address current issues and trends?</p>	<p>Examples given fell into six main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer engagement, training and supports • Strategy, research and knowledge • Promotion of volunteering and public communication • Youth engagement, diversity and inclusion • Flexibility and diversity in volunteer roles • Operational and risk management capability
<p>4. What does a baseline future for emergency response volunteering look like (if current issues and trends continue unchanged)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced numbers of volunteers, and possible end of volunteer-based emergency services in some areas • Higher costs for governments / communities to fund services without a strong volunteer base • Inadequate protection for communities, and potential for resulting loss of lives and property • Increased burden on, predominantly older, participating volunteers
<p>5. What does a preferred future for emergency response volunteering look like?</p>	<p><i>Vibrant Volunteering</i> - Sustainable, diverse, cohesive and well-functioning volunteer teams enabled by five underpinning foundations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Enabling culture</i> - Inclusive, innovative & respectful organisational cultures 2. <i>Management capacity</i> - Capable, responsive, tech-enabled volunteer management 3. <i>Incentives</i> - Strong incentives for emergency response volunteering 4. <i>Service delivery design</i> - Integrated, collaborative & community-centred service delivery 5. <i>Valued volunteering</i> - Volunteering is highly valued, promoted & enabled in Australia
<p>6. What needs to happen to move towards this future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants recommended a wide range of priority actions to strengthen each of the five foundations underpinning vibrant emergency response volunteering in the future.
<p>7. What external uncertainties may influence the future of emergency response volunteering?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take up of volunteering by younger generations, and ability of sector to engage young people • Shifting community attitudes to volunteering and community service • Changing demographics and an ageing population, especially in rural communities • Government leadership and support



GLOSSARY

Community resilience	The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience [1] describes characteristics of disaster resilient communities, individuals and organisations as: “functioning well while under stress; successful adaptation; self-reliance; and social capacity” (p.5).
Emergency management organisations (EMOs)	Government and non-government organisations with recognised roles in state/territory, district or municipal emergency management and recovery plans. It includes state and territory emergency response agencies, local governments and NGOs involved across preparedness, response, relief and recovery.
Emergency management volunteers	Formal, accredited volunteers affiliated with emergency management organisations (EMOs) usually in ongoing, high-commitment roles (includes emergency response volunteers).
Emergency response organisations	Organisations and agencies with primary responsibility for delivering emergency response services.
Emergency response volunteers	Volunteers affiliated with primary response (emergency service) organisations, including fire services, SES, ambulance, surf life saving, marine rescue, and coast guard.
Emergent groups	New groups that form in response to a disaster event, usually informal in structure and often involve informal volunteering. [2] Increasingly digitally enabled. [3]
Emergent volunteering	Volunteering in response to a disaster event, usually informal in nature (see also ‘spontaneous volunteering’).
Formal volunteering	“Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.” [4]
Informal volunteering	“Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation.” [4]
Spontaneous volunteering	“Those who seek to contribute on impulse—people who offer assistance following a disaster and who are not previously affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience.” [5] (See also ‘emergent volunteering’)
Volunteer Involving Organisations	Any organisation that engages volunteers may be known as a Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO). [4]
Volunteering	“Any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or organization.” [6] “Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.” [4]



1. THIS RESEARCH STUDY

This report presents results from a qualitative survey completed by 72 representatives of emergency response volunteer groups and networks in Australia in 2018 and 2019. The purpose of the survey was to explore volunteer representatives' views about changes in volunteering that have occurred in the past, key volunteering issues today, what a preferred future for emergency response volunteering looks like, and what needs to happen to move towards that future.

The survey was administered by RMIT University researchers as part of a research study for the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC called *Emergency volunteering 2030: Adapting the sector*.¹ 'Adapting the sector' is a foresight and scenario-planning study [7-9]. It is engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to identify the most important trends and uncertainties likely to shape the future of emergency volunteering and to consider implications of alternative future volunteering scenarios for today's decision-making.

The focus of the *Adapting the sector* study is emergency volunteering in all its guises. Researchers have adopted Volunteering Australia's 2015 definition of volunteering [4]: "Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain." This definition encompasses formal volunteering with an organisation as well as informal volunteering that occurs outside the context of a formal organisation. It also encompasses short-term and project-based volunteering in addition to long-term volunteering, donation of employee time by businesses, as well as activism.

In line with this, the term 'emergency volunteering' is used to refer to *any and all* volunteering that supports communities before, during and after a disaster or emergency, regardless of its duration or its particular organisational affiliation, or lack thereof [10]. This includes emergency response volunteering, which is the focus of this report (e.g. fire service, SES, ambulance, surf life saving, marine rescue, and coast guard). It also includes volunteering with not-for-profit relief and recovery organisations (e.g. Australian Red Cross, Salvation Army), other community service organisations that support communities before, during and after emergency events (e.g. Country Women's Association, Rotary, church groups, BlazeAid etc), and informal, emergent and spontaneous volunteering, (e.g. Lismore Helping Hands, Brisbane Mud Army).

¹ See <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/resilience-hazards/3533>



2. CONTEXT

Volunteers are the foundation of Australia's emergency management capability and capacity. In terms of numbers, recent estimates refer to around 250,000 emergency response volunteers across various services in Australia. This figure swells into the vicinity of 500,000 with the addition of volunteers with non-government community service organisations that routinely provide support to communities following an emergency event [11]. This formal volunteer capacity sits alongside a significant but far less visible capacity to help people before, during and after emergencies in wider Australian society through informal, emergent, and 'unaffiliated' (with emergency management organisations) volunteering [10].


The economic and social value of this combined voluntary effort to Australian communities is immense and, to date, largely immeasurable. Given Australia's geographic size, low population density and natural hazard risk profile; it is not feasible to provide adequate emergency preparedness, response, relief and recovery services to communities across the country without volunteers [11-13]. It is also likely that the volunteer capacity needed in emergency management into the future will grow given predicted increases in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events in Australia due to climate change [14]. Nor would it be desirable to deliver emergency management services without volunteers, even if it were operationally and economically feasible. This volunteering is an important contributor to social capital and resilience in communities [15-17], and it provides significant psychosocial benefits for communities and volunteers [18, 19].

2.1. EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING

Formal emergency response volunteering is a crucial and central component of the volunteering that supports communities before, during and after emergency events. The 250,000 odd emergency response volunteers form the bulk of the emergency response workforce in Australia. According to the Productivity Commission, there were around 212,293 fire service volunteers and 23,897 state and territory emergency service volunteers [20], as well as 9,762 ambulance service volunteers (including 3,108 community first responders) in 2017-2018 [21]. In addition, Surf Life Saving Australia reported over 176,000 members in 2019 [22], while the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association and Volunteer Marine Rescue Associations and services around Australia have over 169 volunteer flotillas, squadrons, and units, which are in addition to SES volunteer marine units.

According to these figures, 91% of the fire service workforce, 97% of the state and territory emergency services workforce, and 35% of the ambulance service workforce nationally were volunteers in 2017-18 [20, p.9.4, 21, p.11.3]. Emergency response volunteering is especially important in rural, regional and remote communities where volunteers provides many essential community services [16] and emergency response services are heavily volunteer based.

Emergency response volunteering occurs in a wide range of community, geographic and jurisdictional contexts in Australia. These volunteers also undertake a wide range of roles before emergency events (e.g. community



education, engagement and preparedness, volunteer training, hazard reduction, team management); during emergency events (e.g. responding to bushfires, floods, storms, personal injury, road crash rescue, search and rescue, marine rescue as well as a wide range of operational support roles); and, after emergency events (e.g. fire 'mop up', clean up and debris removal, community engagement). Given the complex and risky nature of emergency response, considerable time is also dedicated by volunteers to training and skills maintenance.

2.1.1. Views from volunteer surveys

Numerous surveys have been conducted with Australian emergency response volunteers, predominantly from rural fire services, to understand their motivations for volunteering, expectations of and satisfaction with volunteering, and, to a lesser extent, reasons why they choose to remain or leave. There are several consistent themes evident across the results, bearing in mind the dominance of the fire services in the surveys.

First, they show clearly that the dominant motivation for emergency response volunteering across all age groups is to help others and protect the community [23-31]. They also show that satisfaction with emergency response volunteering overall is high [e.g. 25, 26, 29, 32]. However, there are recurring areas where volunteers report their expectations are not consistently met. These include access to training, quality of equipment and facilities provided, costs borne by volunteers, leadership and culture within organisations and volunteer teams, quality of volunteer engagement and consultation by organisations, the extent to which volunteers feel valued by their organisations, and recognition of volunteer service from governments, organisations, paid emergency service staff, and the general public [23, 25, 32-37].

Time commitments required of emergency response volunteers and competing demands on people's time are also key issues for volunteers. Some surveys reveal that volunteers can struggle to balance volunteering commitments with work and family commitments [35-38]. Moreover, volunteer workload is reported to be increasing, particularly due to greater training and administration requirements placed on volunteers by their organisations [26, 34, 37].

A recent, seminal study of mental health and wellbeing among emergency first responders by Beyond Blue has also shed light on this aspect of the volunteering experience [39]. It found, for example, that levels of "psychological distress and probable PTSD and mental health and wellbeing" varied among volunteers from different services. For ambulance volunteers, levels were comparable with the wider Australian population, while levels were slightly higher for fire and rescue volunteers and higher still for state and territory emergency service volunteers.

2.1.2. Views from government inquiries and reviews

Several post-event inquiries and reviews commissioned by various governments have examined aspects of emergency response volunteering and made recommendations for improvements in planning and management across Australian jurisdictions in recent years. They include recommendations regarding:

- access to and quality of equipment,



- access, quality and delivery of training,
- administrative workload and impact of regulatory requirements on volunteers,
- effective use of technology for volunteer management,
- volunteer workforce planning and reporting,
- promotion of volunteering to the public,
- recognition and reimbursement of volunteers, and
- quality, resourcing and effectiveness of volunteer support services [40-47].

2.1.3. Victorian fire service reform

At the time of this research (late 2018 to mid-2019), the Victorian fire service had been through a period of industrial conflict [48, 49] and was in the midst of protracted debate and disagreement over proposed fire service reform by the state government [50]. A key aspect of contention was the potential impact of reform on Victorian Country Fire Service (CFA) volunteers. This jurisdictional context is reflected in survey responses from Victorian CFA volunteer representatives shown in this report.

Fire service reform was passed by the state government in June 2019, after this survey had been administered. Under the new arrangements to take effect in 2020/21, career firefighters from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) will come together in a new entity called Fire Rescue Victoria. The CFA will continue to provide volunteer-based fire services across Victoria.

2.2. THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF VOLUNTEERING

Emergency response volunteering occurs within the modern landscape of volunteering in Australia, which is characterised by far-reaching change, converging challenges and emerging new opportunities [51]. The availability of people for formal, long-term, high commitment volunteering is declining due to factors such as structural economic change that has increased competition between paid and voluntary work time; and demographic change, particularly an ageing and growing population, greater participation of women in the workforce, urbanisation, and declining populations in some rural areas [12, 52-54]. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows a decline in the last few years of the number of people engaged in long-term, formal volunteering, and a decline also in the average number of hours that people dedicate to this type of volunteering [55, 56].

At the same time, the way people choose to volunteer, and how they seek to fit volunteering into their lives, are also changing. An increasing number of people eschew the traditional, formal style of volunteering choosing instead to engage in alternative forms that are more flexible, more self-directed and cause-driven [57, 58]. These alternatives include virtual, skills-based (i.e. project-based volunteers engaged for specific skill sets), informal, spontaneous and episodic volunteering. The rise of social media and mobile technology has been an important catalyst for change in volunteering. In the context of emergency management, for example, it has increased people's vicarious exposure to disasters, removed barriers to people's participation in all phases of emergency



management and increased people's capacity to self-organise outside of formal organisations [59, p.15]. As a result, there is a growing number of new, digitally-enabled, voluntary emergency support groups, networks and platforms that provide easier, more accessible and more flexible ways for people to help before, during and after emergencies and disasters compared to the more traditional emergency management organisations (EMOs).

2.3. SUSTAINABILITY OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of Australia's formal emergency response volunteer capacity is a key issue within the emergency management sector in the face of the changes and pressures outlined above. Concerns about volunteer recruitment and retention have been voiced across the sector since the late 1990s due to factors such as declines in volunteer numbers and turn outs in some areas, rising volunteer turnover, and an ageing volunteer base [43, 52, 54, 60-63]. A 2012 *National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan* called it "an issue of national importance that impacts on all levels of government and all Australian communities" [11, p.6]. However, it is also important to acknowledge that experiences with volunteer recruitment and retention vary from service to service, place to place, and over time.

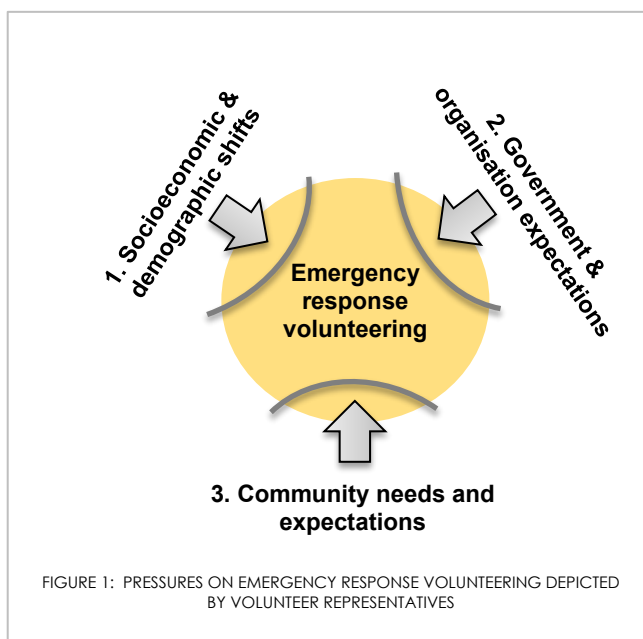
Many EMOs are responding to the changing landscape of volunteering with new volunteer strategies, models and management practices [e.g. 64, 65, p.19, 66]. The pace of change in this respect has picked up in recent years, however, overall it has been slow, considering that a need for change has been voiced for almost two decades [e.g. 54, see also 65]. The need for organisations and the sector to identify and enact further – and faster – strategies to adapt to the changing landscape and shape a vibrant and sustainable future for emergency volunteering is clear.

This report shares emergency response volunteer representative voices on the current and emerging situation for emergency response volunteering, and how shifts in the emergency volunteering landscape – including both the external and internal environments of emergency management – are felt and experienced by volunteers. In doing so, it endeavours to reinforce volunteer voices within research, debates and decisions regarding strategies for the future of emergency volunteering.

3. KEY IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

The implications listed here are first level observations by the author based on views that were gathered before the 2019/2020 Australian bushfire season began and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **The view from volunteer representatives in this report depicts a situation today in which emergency response volunteering is being squeezed by pressures on three sides, such that the personal burden of volunteering is increasing.**



On one side, it is becoming more difficult to fit volunteering into people's lives and to recruit and retain volunteers because of socioeconomic and demographic changes (e.g., rising work and family commitments, changing community attitudes to volunteering, rural depopulation and ageing).

On another side, governments and organisations are expecting more from emergency response volunteers (e.g., training, administration, community education, compliance).

Finally, community needs for, and expectations of, emergency response services are also reportedly growing (e.g., rising number of callouts and more complex callouts, increased risk exposure, greater reliance on emergency response services). Given the anticipated impacts of climate change into the future (e.g., longer and fiercer bushfire seasons), these community needs are likely to grow further.

2. **A partial mismatch may be developing between organisational expectations on emergency response volunteers, and the motivations and incentives underpinning this volunteering, which increases the risk of a significant 'breach of psychological contract' occurring.**

Conceptually, the tasks expected of emergency response volunteers can be divided into three categories of service: direct services to the local community (e.g. responding to local events, educating community members about risk and preparedness), other services for their organisations that enable volunteer management and volunteer skills (e.g. administration, reporting, and skills maintenance), and services to the wider public (e.g. deploying to assist with response outside of their local community).

For direct services to their local community, motivations and incentives for emergency response volunteering are already high. Indeed, serving and protecting their local community is the core reason that people choose to become emergency response volunteers. For other services for organisations,



however, motivations and incentives are likely much lower. While other organisational tasks are ultimately intended to support community service delivery, volunteers can see them as having little direct benefit for the local community, volunteer teams, or personal development. In some cases, they may also consider such tasks to hinder services to communities by absorbing a growing proportion of volunteers' available time [e.g. 67]. Hence, these services for organisations can be disconnected from, or run counter to, the reasons people choose to become and remain emergency response volunteers. This may lead to what is called a breach of the psychological contract between volunteers and their organisations [28, 68-70], in which volunteer expectations are not met, and trust and faith in the organisation are undermined. A breach of psychological contract is associated with intention to leave and may undermine volunteer sustainability. However, research also indicates a more complex relationship, with mixed reactions and impacts of psychological contract breaches involving volunteers [71].

Regarding wider public service through deployments outside of the local area, this is particularly relevant for fire service volunteers who may be involved in campaign fires. Motivations and incentives for these activities are likely to be similar to those for local community service, with the additional motivation of supporting fellow volunteers in other places. However, research has not focused on this facet of volunteer experiences. In the context of the 2019/2020 bushfire season and the likelihood of longer and fiercer bushfire seasons into the future under climate change, a better understanding of this aspect of emergency response volunteering is warranted.

3. Related to this, responses from some volunteer representatives indicate a widening gap between the goals, values and priorities of some organisations and their volunteers exacerbated by professionalisation and corporatisation. While not a dominant theme in this report, the potential for this gap to continue to grow is concerning.

Some volunteer representatives indicated that organisational goals, values, and priorities were moving away from the community-based motivations and values of volunteers. Some also described organisations seeking greater control over volunteers and potentially eroding volunteer independence to meet local community needs. This issue was noted by a higher proportion of Victorian CFA volunteer representatives, which most likely reflects, in part, disappointment and concern about the fire service reform process in that state at the time and its uncertain implications for CFA volunteers.

This issue is connected to a wider shift in the relationships between the public and voluntary sectors in modern Western democracies, in line with increased government regulations and contract requirements under shifting public administration models [72, 73]. These changes have required the voluntary sector more widely, including volunteer-based emergency services, to become more professionalised and corporatised over time. This has brought benefits for quality of service and safety, but is also recognised as having negative impacts on volunteer satisfaction, motivations and culture [74-77].

Negative impacts of this shift on emergency response volunteering are evident in this report. Exactly how this shift will play out for emergency response



volunteering, and other volunteer-based community services, in Australia over the next decade remains to be seen. Clearly, the way that emergency management organisations and the sector navigate this shifting environment will be important, and thus warrants careful attention.

4. Particularly younger and female volunteer representatives considered there to be a shortage of innovation and flexibility to address complex and multi-faceted challenges in their organisations, including amongst volunteers. Many identified a need for cultural change to become more open and inclusive.

Many of the key issues raised in this report are not new and have been noted for decades [52, 54]. These include challenges recruiting and retaining adequate numbers of volunteers in some areas, an ageing volunteer base (particularly in the rural fire services), mounting volunteer workload, and inadequate government recognition of the value of volunteering.

These issues are driven by external factors (e.g. work commitments, demographic change, policy change) as well as internal factors in the emergency management sector (e.g. implementation of training and administrative requirements, volunteer management and leadership skills and capacity). Thus, they are examples of 'wicked problems': complex and multifaceted issues that defy straightforward resolution [78, 79]. Such problems require innovative and flexible approaches. However, particularly younger, and female volunteer representatives considered there to be a shortage of innovation and flexibility in their organisations, including amongst volunteers themselves. Some described organisations as stuck in the past and failing to keep up with change.

Notably, of ten youth volunteer network representatives that participated in the survey, most described inadequate youth engagement and innovation, and almost all identified a need for cultural change in the emergency management sector to become more open and inclusive. Indeed, many volunteers from across the different service categories described the ability of staff and volunteers to actively engage young people in the emergency services as one of the aspects of the future that was most uncertain.

5. Most volunteer representatives involved in this research do not expect that current policy and management approaches will effectively enable vibrant and sustainable emergency response volunteering over the next decade, and they are concerned about the implications of this for communities.

The expected future scenario if current trends, issues and approaches continue unchanged – the 'baseline future' [8] – was predominantly negative. Volunteer representatives described emergency response services struggling to maintain capability, purpose, relevance and connection with communities. Some anticipated mounting costs to government and communities to maintain services in the absence of a strong volunteer base, and even greater burden borne by the predominantly older volunteers that remain. Some fear that increasing numbers of rural communities will be inadequately protected with potential for greater loss of life and property to occur over the next decade.



6. Positively, volunteer representative responses revealed five key foundations for vibrant volunteering over the next decade. They also provided a range of actions to strengthen these foundations. Half identified initiatives that are doing well addressing current issues.

Volunteer representatives described a preferred future in which vibrant emergency response volunteering was embodied by sustainable, diverse, cohesive and well-functioning volunteer teams. This future would be enabled by:

1. *Enabling culture* - Inclusive, innovative & respectful organisational cultures
2. *Management capacity* - Capable, responsive, tech-enabled volunteer management
3. *Incentives* - Strong incentives for emergency response volunteering
4. *Service delivery design* - Integrated, collaborative & community-centred service delivery
5. *Valued volunteering* - Volunteering is highly valued, promoted & enabled in Australia.

Volunteer representatives provided a wide range of recommendations and ideas for actions to strengthen these foundations. Some noted improvements in some of these areas over recent years, such as safety and wellbeing, quality of equipment, diversity and inclusion, and volunteer recognition.

7. With longer and fiercer bushfire seasons ahead, the issue of alleviating the personal financial burden of emergency response volunteering into the future needs to be carefully examined. A considerable minority of volunteer representatives anticipated that further remuneration or compensation of some kind could be needed in future.

Regarding the need for strong incentives for emergency response volunteering, the issue of volunteer compensation or payment has arisen in debates surrounding the 2019/2020 Australian bushfire season, with divergent views of the desirability and implications of this [80-82]. This issue was also raised in volunteer representative responses to this survey, with a diversity of views evident. A considerable minority anticipate that further remuneration or compensation of some kind may be needed in future, either to incentivize volunteering or to remove the disincentive of personal costs incurred. With longer and fiercer bushfire seasons ahead, the issue of alleviating the personal financial burden of emergency response volunteering into the future needs to be carefully examined. Issues such as the potential for extrinsic, financial incentives to 'crowd out' other, intrinsic incentives for volunteering [83], need to be considered.

8. Volunteer representatives emphasized the importance of stronger governmental leadership and support to move towards a preferred future for emergency response volunteering.

Many volunteer representatives across the various services clearly saw a stronger role for governments in supporting, enabling and promoting emergency response volunteering, and volunteering generally, compared to today. They described numerous areas where government action was needed, such as reducing compliance and regulation burdens, incentivizing volunteering, better funding volunteering and promoting volunteering more strongly in Australian society.



Responses also conveyed an underlying need for stronger leadership and direction-setting for the emergency management sector. As one representative wrote:

Leadership. Someone to have a vivid picture of the future and what needs to happen, and then draw up a plan and sell it to the membership. But at all times not telling the membership but asking them and taking them on the journey. [P-63]

Indeed, one of the key sources of uncertainty about the future of emergency response volunteering described was government and sector leadership and support.

4. RESEARCH APPROACH

This research primarily used a qualitative, key informant survey approach. Key informants are people with specific knowledge or experience relevant to a topic of research. In this case, the key informants were 72 representatives from emergency response volunteer groups across Australia (e.g. volunteer associations, state consultative committees/forums, youth networks). These representatives (hereafter 'participants') have experience and understanding of wider and shared issues for emergency response volunteering beyond their own individual volunteering experiences. It is this wider knowledge of the emergency response volunteering milieu that was sought in the survey.

The qualitative survey approach used for this research was quite different to the quantitative approaches that are more familiar to emergency response volunteers. A qualitative survey like the one used here asks open-ended questions and allows participants to provide their own answers rather than asking them to select from a range of predetermined options as occurs in quantitative surveys. Consequently, participants have the freedom to raise and describe the issues they choose in their own words.

The survey comprised seven main questions (see Appendix 1) and was conducted online using the Qualtrics survey platform (<https://www.qualtrics.com>). The main survey period was from 16th November to 21st December 2018. The survey was re-opened from 3rd July to 22nd July 2019 to target some gaps in the representativeness of the responses received. Invitations to volunteer representatives to participate in the survey were distributed via key contacts in volunteer associations and emergency response organisations.

In total, 71 people completed the survey from all Australian jurisdictions except for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). There was a particularly large response from representatives of fire service volunteers, and particularly CFA volunteers in Victoria. This is likely due to a mix of: 1) the survey being conducted at a Victorian university, 2) strong support from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria in circulating the invitation to participate to members, and 3) the timing of the survey which coincided with uncertainty surrounding fire service reform in Victoria.

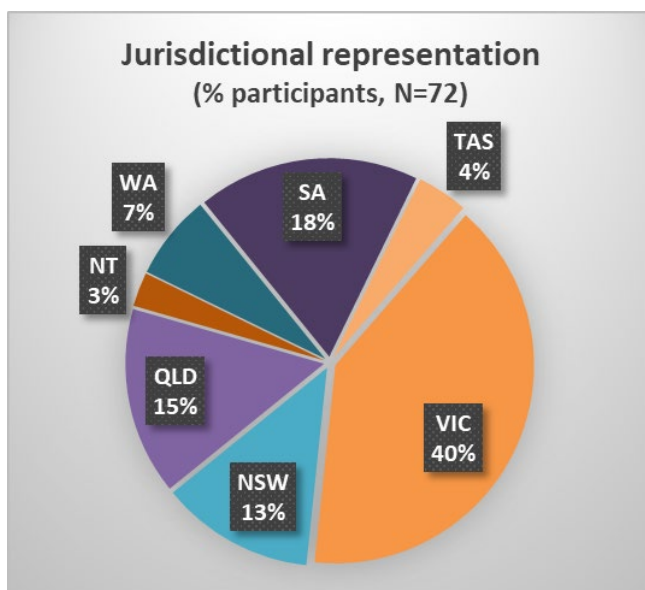


FIGURE 2: PARTICIPANT JURISDICTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Most participants were representatives of a volunteer association (64%, 46 people, see Figure 3).

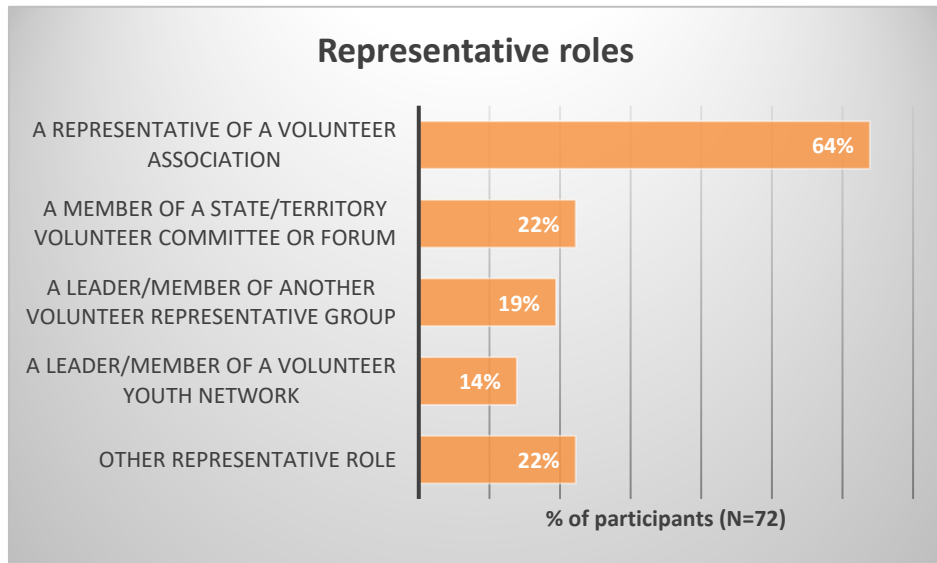


FIGURE 3: PARTICIPANT REPRESENTATIVE ROLES

All participants represented volunteers that fell into one of three general service categories: 35% represented Victorian CFA volunteers, 31% represented fire service volunteers in other states and territories (including combined services), and 35% represented volunteers in other emergency response services, (including State Emergency Services or SES, Ambulance services, Surf Life Saving, and Marine Rescue volunteers).

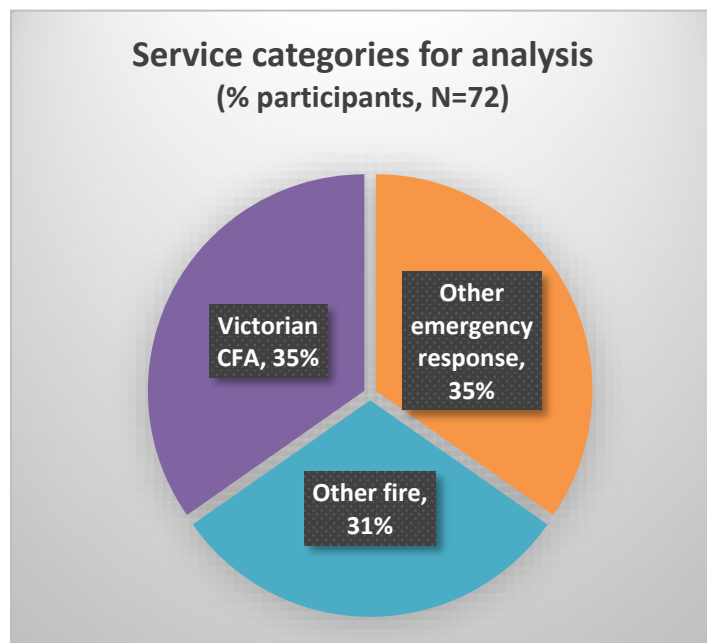


FIGURE 4: TYPE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES REPRESENTED

A further 9 surveys were only partially completed and were not included in the analysis. In addition, one interview conducted in mid-2018 as part of initial interviews for the *Adapting the sector* study involved an emergency response volunteer representative and is also included in the analysis in this report.

The research was undertaken in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research [84]. It is approved and overseen by the RMIT University Human Ethics Advisory Network (project number CHEAN B 21057-08/17).



5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following section provides a description of the main themes raised by participants, arranged by the seven main questions asked in the qualitative survey.

The findings focus on providing a combined view from volunteer representatives on broad issues and themes shared across the various emergency response services. In order to discern any major differences in the themes raised by volunteer representatives from different kinds of emergency response services, responses were compared across the three main service categories represented: the Victorian CFA, fire services in other states and territories, and other emergency response services. Significant differences identified between responses from these three service categories are described where relevant.

These findings should not be interpreted as representative of the views of all emergency response volunteers. Rather, they constitute insights from key people with experience and knowledge of broader volunteering issues due to their roles representing emergency response volunteers in some capacity.

Due to the broad, sector-level focus, the findings here also do not show differences between specific contexts across diverse communities, settings (e.g. remote, urban, etc), organisations, types of emergency response volunteering, and jurisdictions in Australia. These differences are important in shaping individual volunteering experiences and outcomes, but they are not captured in this sector-wide report. Because of this, individual volunteers may not necessarily see their own specific experiences reflected strongly in this report.

Direct quotes from participants are used anonymously in this report to illustrate the themes identified, where consent was given (two participants chose not to be quoted). Participants are identified only by a unique, random number (e.g., P-1 to P-72).

In all summary tables below, themes are listed in order of most to least commonly mentioned. Major themes (mentioned by at least half of all participants that raised a given thematic category) are **bolded**.

5.1. WHAT CHANGES HAVE IMPACTED EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING?

Participant descriptions of changes that have impacted on emergency response volunteering in the last five to ten years are divided below into two categories: external environment (changes outside of the emergency management sector), and internal environment (changes within the emergency management sector and its organisations).

5.1.1. External environment

Two-thirds of all participants described wider changes in the external environment (see **Table 1**, below). These changes are organised below using the



STEEP analysis framework (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political forces).

The changes described were primarily social in nature, with some economic and political changes also raised. Technological changes were most often described as occurring within the emergency management sector (see section 5.1.2). Only one participant described environmental change, referring to increases in environmental hazard events that require intervention. (Note, however, that climate change was mentioned by some participants as a source of uncertainty for the future of emergency volunteering, see section 5.7).

External environment
<p>Social change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Particularly younger) people are more time poor; more competition for people's time. • Fewer people interested in emergency response volunteering and community service. • Increasing demand for and expectations on emergency response volunteering • Rural depopulation and ageing.
<p>Economic change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial pressure on families has increased; more people working • Employers less willing to release employees for volunteering
<p>Political change (including legislation, regulation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicisation of, and political interference in, the fire services (predominantly Victorian fire services). • Increase in government legislation and regulation impacting emergency management. • Greater risk of litigation.

TABLE 1: EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT CHANGES THAT HAVE IMPACTED EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING, RAISED BY VOLUNTEER REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPANTS (NOTE: MAJOR THEMES ARE **BOLDED**).

Social change

Two major themes dominated participant's descriptions of social change that has impacted emergency response volunteering:

- people are increasingly time poor and have competing priorities, impacting time available for – particularly high-commitment – volunteering; and
- fewer people are interested in emergency response volunteering or community service generally.

“Time and expectations. Even if you remove family and work, there are so many other activities members could be doing rather than volunteering with our group. [P-5]

“ Volunteering in this area used to be something you either felt compelled to be a part of and in a lot of cases saw it as an honour. Now seems more a view that others will do it and why would I? [P-17]



Two other, minor themes raised were:

- increasing demand for and expectations of emergency response volunteering in communities (e.g., due to increased risk or decreased self-reliance); and
- rural depopulation and ageing.

“Increased demand for service, increased frequency of emergency incidents. [P-23]

“Rural decline is another factor impacting on rural community volunteers. There are just not the people out there now and those who are there are an aging population. [P-47]

There were no significant differences in the social changes raised across the three service categories.

Economic change

Two minor themes concerned economic changes that have impacted emergency response volunteering. The first was greater financial pressure on families. Issues raised included the need for both parents in a household to work, and for people to work longer hours and delay retirement.

“Family financial dynamics have changed to the extent that work is a priority for both partners to be able to meet mortgage costs and pay other bills, plus juggling time with children all leads to scant time available for volunteer involvement. [P-67]

As one participant explained, this has flow-on effects for grandparents as well, with more grandparents having less time available for volunteering due to caring for grandchildren.

The second theme concerned employers being less willing to release employees for volunteering due to economic reasons, as well as the economic impacts of emergency service volunteering for self-employed volunteers.

“There is an increasing reluctance by employers to release [fire service] members for callouts during working hours because it hurts the business bottom line. [P-68]

Political change

Three minor themes were raised in relation to political change (including regulatory and legislative change). The first was growing politicisation of, and political interference in, the fire services. It was raised predominantly, but not solely, by representatives of Victorian CFA volunteers.

“In the Emergency services sector, the growth of political interference in the statutory authority that is CFA. [P-13]

An increase in government legislation and regulation impacting the emergency management sector and its volunteers was a second minor theme raised by participants from across the three service categories. While some participants recognised and appreciated the improved protections offered by new regulations and laws, they also considered that it complicated volunteering.

“Regulation. There is an abundance of regulation that has to be considered when we undertake our role in emergency management. Much of this is for the good however there is so much that needs to be known that it becomes daunting to some. [P-47]

Meanwhile, a few participants also described greater risk of liability compared to the past.

5.1.2. Internal environment (within emergency management sector)

Almost three-quarters of all participants identified changes over the last five to ten years within the emergency management sector that have impacted on emergency response volunteering (see **Table 2**).

Internal environment
<p>Change in volunteering practice and volunteer management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased organisational expectations of volunteers and greater volunteer workload. - Greater difficulty maintaining an adequate volunteer base and capacity. + Improvements in volunteer management approaches and volunteer support. - Declines in volunteer support, services and resources.
<p>Change in organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +/- Professionalisation, corporatisation and modernisation. +/- Diversity and inclusion – improvements in, and lack of. +/- New technology – impacts of or lack of.
<p>Change in EM sector and its relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +/- Changes in sector governance and leadership. - Industrial relations and workforce conflict in the fire services (predominantly Victorian fire service). + Improved integration and collaboration.

TABLE 2: CHANGES WITHIN THE EM SECTOR THAT HAVE IMPACTED EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING, RAISED BY VOLUNTEER REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPANTS (NOTE: MAJOR THEMES ARE **BOLDED**, + AND – INDICATE WHETHER THE CHANGE WAS DESCRIBED IN MOSTLY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE TERMS).

Change in volunteering practice and volunteer management

Two thirds of all participants referred to changes in emergency response volunteering practice and volunteer management approaches.

Across all three service categories, **increased organisational expectations on volunteers and greater volunteer workload** was a clear dominant theme related to volunteering practice and management. It was raised by a higher proportion of representatives of non-fire emergency response services compared to fire services. It was mostly attributed to increased administration and training requirements.

“Increasing administration effort forced on us by [Government Department] which has paperwork requirements far greater than ever. 5 years ago, maybe 3 hours per week. Now 5-6, and that is just me. There are others in the team doing more paperwork too. [P-65].

Additionally, participants also described an expansion in the skills and services expected from volunteers by their organisations, which further increased expectations and workload.

“The job of responding to emergencies has become more complicated, with a higher level of expectations of the crews to issue community alerts, manage aircraft, plus do the operational communications and manage on site crews, plus much more. [P-50]

“Demands put upon volunteers to commit more time to community education and resilience in addition to fire suppression and hazard reduction (include associated training). [P-41]



Three minor themes were also raised relating to changes in volunteering practice and volunteer management. The first was **greater difficulty maintaining an adequate volunteer base and capacity**. Participants described declining volunteer numbers, ageing volunteer bases, and growing difficulty in both recruiting and retaining (particularly younger) volunteers:

“There is an increased reliance on an aging number of volunteers undertaking tasks demanding long hours of physical activity. Older retired members have the discretionary time to respond to fire incidents that require instant response and are of uncertain lengthy duration in contrast to younger employed potential volunteers. [P-46]

A second minor theme was **improvements in volunteer management approaches and volunteer support**. A range of different areas of improvement were identified by a few participants each from across the three service categories. These included:

- volunteer recognition,
- volunteer equipment and resourcing,
- volunteer safety and wellbeing,
- new technology,
- new volunteering models and roles, and
- incentives for younger volunteers.

However, by contrast the fourth and final minor theme in this category was **decreases in volunteer support, services and resources** provided by organisations, which was again raised by a few participants across all three service categories. This contrast suggests mixed experiences with volunteer management and support services, even within the same organisations. Participants referred to both staff and budget reductions, as well as a decrease in the amount or accessibility of training and the rate of updating of equipment and buildings.

Another issue related to experiences of volunteering, raised by only a few participants, was an observed rise in mental health issues and trauma experienced by volunteers.

“Wellbeing seems to have become more of an issue in recent years with more vollies seemingly affected by trauma. [P-40]

Change in emergency response organisations

Almost half of all participants described wider changes that have occurred in their organisations. Organisational change was reported by a higher proportion of Victorian CFA volunteer representatives compared to the other two service categories. There was no major, dominant theme in this category. Rather, a range of minor themes were evident. Moreover, organisational changes were described in mixed terms, with differences in views of whether the changes were occurring, and if they were having positive or negative effects.

The first minor theme was **professionalisation, corporatisation and bureaucratisation**, which was related to the increasing government legislation and regulation (minor theme), and to the increased organisational expectations on volunteers and greater volunteer workload already described (major theme).

“The organisation started as a community-based organisation evolving from need and drive within communities or geographic areas - it is the key to its success, its longevity and its relevance. Despite this the last few years has seen increased corporatisation, substantially more direction and orders from career bureaucrats [...] It's key strength as a community based and driven organisation is being replaced by the notion that it's a professional emergency response service. It is both but the pendulum and momentum are all focused on the latter and not the former. [P-30]

“Professionalism. Volunteer brigades are mostly moving into the future in inclusiveness and attitudes towards training and safety. Some are not yet moving very far!” [P-1]

The second minor theme was issues of **diversity and inclusion**, which were more likely to be raised by younger and female participants across all service categories. Some described greater importance being given to improving diversity and inclusion in recent years, with positive outcomes already being seen. Others, sometimes volunteering with the same organisation, lamented a lack of action or change to become more inclusive and diverse.

The third minor theme was the **impact of new technology**. Again, comments suggested mixed experiences, with some acknowledging positive impacts of new technology, while others described difficulties associated with limitations of new technology in rural areas, or slow/no uptake of new technology.

“Technology that might work in the city, but not so good in the country.” [P-72]

Change in emergency management sector context and relationships

A smaller number of participants described changes in the wider emergency management sector context and relationships in their jurisdiction that have impacted on emergency response volunteering. Three minor themes were:

- Changes in sector leadership and governance.

“ Government or bureaucracy constantly doing reviews and making unsettling changes, which has changed our focus and amount of time available to be spent on the grass roots volunteer issues and welfare to that of protecting our culture and what volunteers want to do and how they do their volunteer work. [P-63]

- Industrial relations and workforce conflict involving unions, raised by representatives of fire services.

“ Industrial bodies now impacting on volunteers and influencing Government. Not prepared to work with volunteers! [P-42]

- Improved integration and collaboration across agencies.

“ The organisation has embraced interaction with other emergency groups in the past 5 years rather than operating in its own bubble, as it did 5-10 years ago. [P-44]

For Victorian CFA volunteer representatives, industrial relations and workforce conflict was exacerbated by the recent conflict over fire service reform in that state, leaving some feeling a loss of respect and appreciation for CFA volunteers among paid staff, organisational leadership and/or state government in recent years.

“ At the highest level it means that almost daily we face politicians and union leaders fighting and belittling us, and whilst they say they 'value us' the words ring hollow and untrue. They are not genuine, insincere and spin. [P-30]

5.2. WHAT ISSUES OR CHALLENGES DO VOLUNTEERING & VOLUNTEERS FACE TODAY?

Sixty-nine of the seventy-two participants described issues and challenges facing emergency response volunteering and volunteers today. Table 3 summarises the seven major themes in their descriptions. Many of the issues raised either stem from or are exacerbated by the changes in the external and internal emergency management environments already described. There are also strong interactions between these issues.

Issue	Key aspects
1. Volunteer sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retaining volunteers Recruiting (particularly younger) volunteers Ageing volunteer base (in fire services) Difficulty engaging and motivating volunteers High volunteer workload and burnout due to low numbers
2. Personal burden of volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing work, family and volunteering commitments Financial costs and lack of employer support (in fire services) Mental health, wellbeing and safety issues
3. Excessive organisational requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and skills maintenance requirements Excessive administration and red tape, due to professionalisation and corporatisation Expanding range of volunteer activities
4. Widening gap between volunteers and organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflicting goals, values and priorities between organisations and their volunteers, exacerbated by professionalisation, corporatisation and bureaucratism Less time for community service due to other organisational requirements Greater control sought over volunteers by organisations/management
5. Shortfalls in volunteer management capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer leadership capacity and skills Management and paid staff capacity and skills to support and work with volunteers Equipment, resourcing and support services for volunteers Organisational leadership and strategy
6. Need for and resistance to cultural change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusive culture and bullying Resistance to cultural change among volunteers
7. Inadequate youth engagement and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By volunteer leadership By organisations

TABLE 3: KEY EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING ISSUES RAISED BY VOLUNTEER REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPANTS

The relative proportion of participants – overall and from each of the three service categories – that described each of the seven themes above are shown in Figure 2. Percentages are not included to reflect the qualitative nature of the responses; hence the figure shows relative differences between categories only. Over half of participants raised only one or two of these issues, while one-third raised three or four issues. Five participants raised five or more different issues, and three participants did not raise any current issues.

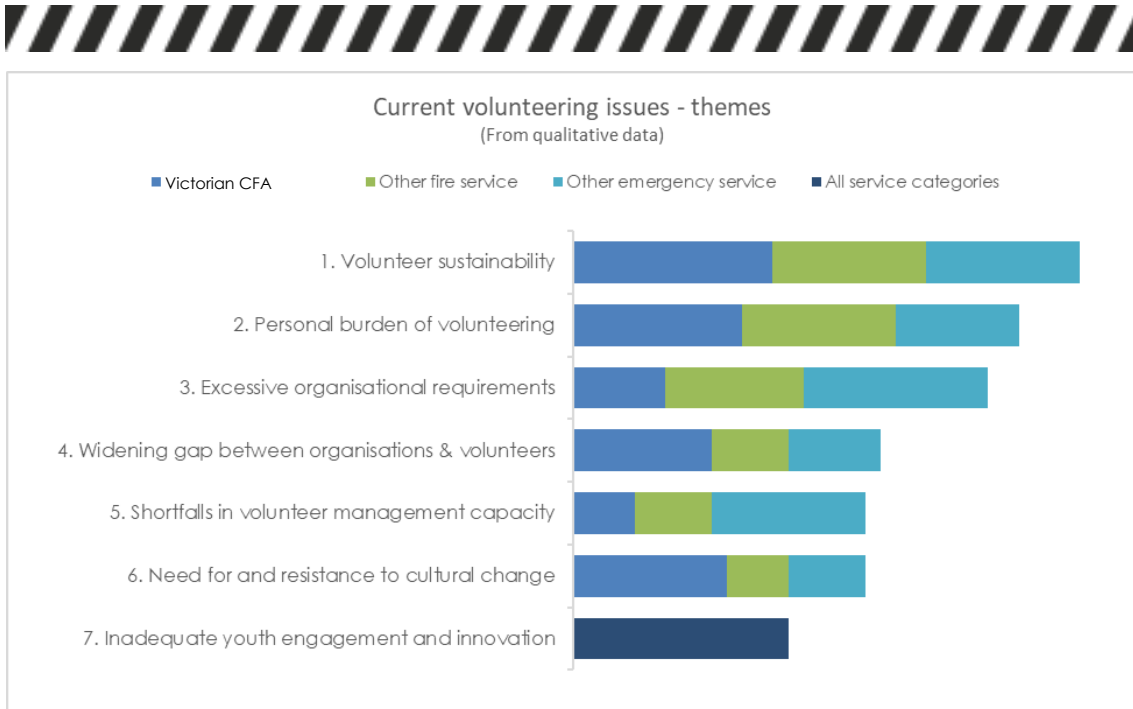


FIGURE 5: PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS THAT RAISED CURRENT VOLUNTEERING ISSUES (PERCENTAGES ARE EXCLUDED TO REFLECT QUALITATIVE NATURE OF THE RESPONSES.)

Of the seven issues raised, **volunteer sustainability challenges** were raised by the highest proportion of participants. This was followed by managing the **personal burden of volunteering**. Both were raised by a relatively similar proportion of participants across all three service categories.

The third most common issue was **excessive organisational requirements** on volunteers, which was raised by a higher proportion of representatives from other emergency services compared to fire services. This was followed by descriptions of a **widening gap between organisations and volunteers**, raised by a higher proportion of representatives of Victorian CFA volunteers.

The fifth issue, **shortfalls in volunteer management capacity**, including resourcing, was raised by a higher proportion of representatives from other emergency services compared to the two fire service categories. A **need for, and resistance to, cultural change** in the emergency management sector, was another issue raised by a higher proportion of Victorian CFA volunteer representatives relative to the other two service categories.

The number of participants that raised the final issue, **inadequate youth engagement and innovation**, was too low to show differences across the three service categories with any confidence. However, it was raised by most volunteer youth network representatives.

It is likely that the different emphasis across these issues among representatives of Victorian CFA volunteers compared to other fire services is at least partly due to the dominance of fire service reform as an issue in that state at the time of the survey.



5.2.1. Volunteer sustainability

Among participant descriptions of volunteer sustainability issues, difficulty retaining volunteers was raised most often. This was followed by difficulty recruiting new, particularly younger, members.

“There is a high turnover of people these days as training opportunities are so infrequent. The focus seems to be more on attracting new members than it does on retaining existing ones.” [P-8]

“Less members, difficult to attract younger members and keep them involved. [P-22]

Regarding volunteer numbers, one participant explained that, due to high rates of people volunteering with more than one emergency response service, actual volunteer numbers are lower than they appear.

“Another aspect is that the total number of volunteers is listed as much higher through multiple registrations. If we look at the number who volunteer within a single agency context, the real situation of volunteering becomes a highly critical strategic planning concern. There are just not enough volunteers to support government expectations. [P-62]

An ageing volunteer base (predominantly in fire services) was also highlighted by numerous participants, as well as difficulty engaging and motivating volunteers, and high volunteer workload and burnout due to low numbers.

A few participants had concerns about the ability of volunteer teams to protect communities due to volunteer shortages.

“A lot of fire brigades, especially in rural and regional Victoria are suffering a severe shortage of volunteers. This shortage of volunteers has an adverse effect on response times and service delivery standards. As a result, the community are not getting the fast emergency support they desperately require in a time of need [...] Not being able to help the community when they need it the most can weigh quite heavily on the minds of CFA volunteers. [P-16]

5.2.2. High personal burden of emergency service volunteering

Numerous participants described challenges with managing the personal burden of being an emergency response volunteer. Many indicated that it was becoming more difficult. Three areas of challenge highlighted were:

- balancing work, family and volunteering commitments,
- financial costs and lack of employer support (in fire services) and
- mental health, wellbeing and safety issues.

“Volunteers struggle balancing work, family and volunteering. Often family and friends are impacted by the pager alerting and the volunteer responding. [P-14]

“Cost of volunteering and out of pocket expenses for members. [P-42]

“The volunteer is also impacted over time as the types of environments and exposures can impact mental health. [P-4]

Reasons given for why the personal burden of volunteering is increasing included:

- people having greater demands on their time outside of volunteering,
- rising numbers of call outs and more complex call outs (e.g., with drugs on scene for ambulance services),



- insufficient organisational supports (e.g., for mental health and safety), and
- the increase in administrative and other organisational demands on volunteer time.

5.2.3. Excessive organisational requirements expected of volunteers

Numerous participants described how the increasing expectations on volunteers and greater volunteer workload in recent years has created a situation of excessive organisational demands being made on volunteers today. This was described by participants as a key issue impacting volunteer recruitment and retention, as well as being one of the factors increasing the personal burden of volunteering, above.

Participants reiterated that higher training and skills maintenance requirements, ever more administration and red tape, as well as an expanding range of volunteer activities was creating volunteer dissatisfaction and affecting retention, as well as deterring new volunteers.

“The increasing demands on volunteers to not only attend the emergency but do a huge amount of administration work for the organisation and the government is taking a toll and making it harder to retain volunteers. The organisation under the direction of government is becoming more risk averse but lacks the staff to properly audit all their property for compliance and “fit for purpose”. This has the effect of further reducing the likelihood of retaining volunteers.” [P-68]

With regard to training, however, some participants felt that volunteers received insufficient training, and called for additional training that is more accessible to volunteers.

“Need a lot more training and competencies. Cost to volunteers of travel. Training held further away from where it is needed. [P-50]

5.2.4. Other issues

Widening gap between volunteers and organisations

Related to the issue of excessive organisational demands on volunteers, some participants described a widening gap or disconnect developing between volunteers and their organisations. They explained that the increasing time volunteers were required to dedicate to administration, skills maintenance, and other activities viewed as not contributing directly to their community's safety, limited the time volunteers could spend on delivering community services, which is the core reason that most chose to volunteer. They also described frustration over organisations seeking to exert greater management control of volunteers through the imposition of corporate policies and procedures, resulting in a loss of volunteer independence.



As a result, some felt that organisational goals, values, motivations and priorities were moving away from the community-based motivations and values of volunteers.

“The organisation started as a community-based organisation evolving from need and drive within communities or geographic areas - it is the key to its success, its longevity and its relevance. Despite this, the last few years has seen increased corporatisation, substantially more direction and orders from career bureaucrats, increased interference from political leaders, and as a result it is no longer as relevant or connected to community. It's key strength as a community-based and driven organisation is being replaced by the notion that it's a professional emergency response service. It is both, but the pendulum and momentum is all focused on the latter and not the former. [P-30]

“ We are losing that community ownership and along with that losing Brigade ownership which in turn just turns us into a cheap workforce. [P-63]

“Lack of understanding by many in the management levels that our volunteers are here for our community not for the organisation. This gets worse as fewer managers are appointed who come from an operational ambulance background, especially a volunteer background. [P-65]

For Victorian CFA volunteer representatives this issue was exacerbated by the politics that have surrounded the fire services in that state recently. Some described volunteers no longer feeling respected and valued by paid staff, organisational leadership, and/or state government as a result.

“ In the Emergency services sector, the growth of political interference in the statutory authority that is CFA has diminished the credibility and internal cohesion of the organisation. The damage to the morale and motivation of existing members is profound. The lack of leadership at the highest levels that demonstrates true appreciation and empathy for volunteers means the sense of respect vital in engaging these people is relatively absent. Respect is the key to retaining the support of volunteers and that is certainly not felt at a grass roots level currently. [P-13]

Shortfalls in volunteer management capacity

Regarding shortfalls in capacity within organisations to effectively manage, lead and support volunteers, participants described shortfalls that fell evenly across four areas:

- leadership capacity and skills among volunteer leaders, and adequate training for volunteers to build their leadership skills,
- capacities and skills of paid support staff in their organisations to adequately support and work with volunteers,
- insufficient equipment, resourcing, and other supports for volunteers, such as training, and
- Inadequate leadership, governance and/or strategic direction at the organisational level.

“ I believe the biggest challenge is the development of an inclusive and sustainable Volunteer Management Strategy that will chart a future for fire volunteers within the [organisation] clearly identifying their responsibilities in a respectful, inclusive, transparent and empowering organisation. [P-19]

Exclusive culture and resistance to cultural change

Some participants described an overly exclusive culture in the emergency services, as well as resistance to cultural change. They described a need for a



more inclusive, innovative, and open culture to support sustainable emergency response volunteering into the future.

While recognising that large cultural differences and behaviours exist between organisations, locations and among specific volunteer brigades, units and teams; some younger and female participants in particular described current culture in terms of “old boy-ism”, “an old guard”, and “white Anglo male”. A few participants also described bullying in some teams and organisations. Some emphasised a lack of diversity among volunteers as contributor to this.

“The culture of agencies is still a hangover from old white Anglo male traditions. It does not attract new and innovative thinkers and there are barriers to women and diverse groups. [P-23].

“It depends very much on the brigade. In some there is bullying and entrenched old-boyism. [P-1]

Resistance to cultural change among volunteers, or inability to change, was also described.

“I think change is the biggest problem for urban / semi urban areas and having a sense of loss about what used to be back in the ‘good old days’. [P-24]

Inadequate youth engagement and innovation

The issue of inadequate youth engagement and innovation was related by participants to the wider issue of a need for, and resistance to cultural change. However, it was raised by a sufficient number of participants to be considered a key theme in its own right. It was more commonly raised by younger volunteer representatives. They described a lack of youth engagement and innovation by both volunteers and by organisations and management. Youth engagement and innovation issues were often connected to discussion of technology use.

“The youth are stepping away because volunteer brigades are unable to move with the times. What 17,18,19-year-old kid wants to be walking around with a pager! Innovation and connectivity through young volunteers are vital and currently those aspects are just lacking within CFA. [P-9]



5.3. WHAT INITIATIVES ARE DOING WELL AT ADDRESSING CURRENT ISSUES AND TRENDS?

Participants were asked to provide examples of projects and initiatives they considered to be doing well to address current volunteering challenges and emerging trends.

Twenty-three people spread evenly across the three service categories were unable to identify any examples:

“No! There seems to be an absence of any real progress in the right direction. There have been attempts made, but there has been no real progress. [P-68]”

Thirty-six people gave a range of examples that fell into six broad areas. Of the initiatives identified, approximately one-quarter were volunteer-led while three-quarters were organisation-driven programs:

1. **Volunteer engagement, training and supports** - e.g., NSW RFS Volunteer Consultative Committee, SAAS volunteer support, CFA safety training for volunteers.
2. **Strategy, research and knowledge** – e.g., QFES Volunteer Strategy, BNHCRC research, Surf Life Saving NSW State Sustainability project, cultural burning and partnerships with aboriginal communities to understand aboriginal use of fire in the landscape, Review into Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations in Queensland.
3. **Promotion of volunteering and public communication** – e.g., CFA Community Engagement Programs, community warning systems, brigade use of social media for local messaging, NSW RFS Community Awareness Programs.
4. **Youth engagement, diversity and inclusion** – e.g., District multi agency youth network program (Victoria), Chidlow VBFB brigade 'ladies only' information night and 'have-a-go-day' (WA), CFA state-wide diversity campaign.
5. **Flexibility and diversity in volunteer roles** – e.g., New membership categories in Surf Life Saving Qld, stepped education program and volunteer roles in SA Ambulance Service, SA Ambulance Service community paramedics.
6. **Operational and risk management capability** – e.g., use of computer-based tools for fire risk assessment and to assist suppression (CFA), NSW RFS use of BART system for crew notification, and increase in airborne suppression tactics (NSW RFS).

5.4. WHAT DOES A BASELINE FUTURE FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING LOOK LIKE?

The most likely, or expected future if currently observed trends, and responses to them, continue unchanged, is known as a 'baseline' future [8, p.37]. 60 people described a predominantly negative baseline future, while eight people provided positive or mixed views with outcomes conditional on support from organisations and governments into the future (see Table 4).

Themes in participant descriptions of a baseline future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced numbers of volunteers, and possible end of volunteer-based emergency services in some areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher costs for governments / communities to fund services without a strong volunteer base
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate protection for communities, and potential for resulting loss of lives and property
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased burden on, predominantly older, participating volunteers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of age and gender diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminished community connection and ownership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communities self-organising to create their own response capacity

TABLE 4: THEMES IN PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS OF A BASELINE FUTURE (NOTE: MAJOR THEMES ARE **BOLDED**).

Participants from all three service categories described volunteer-based emergency service organisations struggling to maintain capability, purpose and relevance due to a loss of volunteers. Some foresaw, or feared, the end of volunteer-based emergency response services altogether in some areas.

“Volunteer fire, ambulance and marine rescue will cease to exist in a lot of (smaller) towns and we are seeing this starting to happen now. No state has the funds to employ paid / retained personnel.” [P-72]

Participants described several potential negative outcomes from the expected decline in emergency response volunteering. They included higher costs for governments and communities to fund paid emergency services, a decline in the capacity of emergency response organisations to protect life and property, and/or increased burden on the, predominantly older, volunteers that remained.

“More and more reliance on existing volunteer and the risk of burn out. More reliance on ageing volunteers.” [P-19]

All of these problems were generally expected to be more severe in rural communities, leading some to foresee significant disparities in service provision between rural and peri-urban or urban communities.

“A continued drop off in numbers and an ever-increasing demand on professional support in the sector. Volunteers in and around regional centres will be either able to keep pace or become disenchanted and the gap in skill level between the professionals and regional centre-based volunteers versus those in rural remote areas will continue to grow. [P-17]



Another important theme in responses was the potential for emergency services to become disconnected from communities, undermining the contribution that emergency services make to community cohesion and preparedness. Some participants saw this arising from organisations failing to adapt to their changing environments and hence becoming out-of-date, lacking age and gender diversity and being unattractive as a volunteering option for future volunteers. Others, especially from ambulance and fires services, saw community disconnection and a loss of community preparedness arising from an increase in the need for paid staff to meet rising expectations and skills required of emergency response workers, and to fill in a gap left by declining volunteerism:

“Significant reduction in numbers of volunteers with governments forced to increase the numbers of paid workforce in fire services. Increasing cost of such services with reduction in effectiveness due to lack of local knowledge and experience being passed on through local involvement and networks. Reduction in local fire awareness and education preparedness due to dis-engagement from direct community involvement.” [P-48]

Finally, a few participants (3) described greater activity by communities occurring that is not directed by emergency management organisations to fill gaps in services left by declining numbers of trained emergency response volunteers. They expected more communities to self-organise to create their own response capacity, drawing on the self-organising capability of social media.

“I believe it is highly likely that communities may start to self-organise and once again create their own response capacity outside of the corporate brand. This is difficult under current legislation and with ownership of assets, but it is likely to happen. Self-organised through social media, it is likely that communities will say “enough of your crap!! We want a local brigade that can respond when we need, and for the reasons we need it.” [P-30]

5.5. WHAT DOES A PREFERRED FUTURE FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING LOOK LIKE?

A key question for the *Emergency Volunteering 2030* study is what a preferred future for emergency volunteering would look like by 2030. 65 volunteer representatives provided a wide range of answers to this question. Their responses have been synthesised into a combined picture, shown in Figure 6.

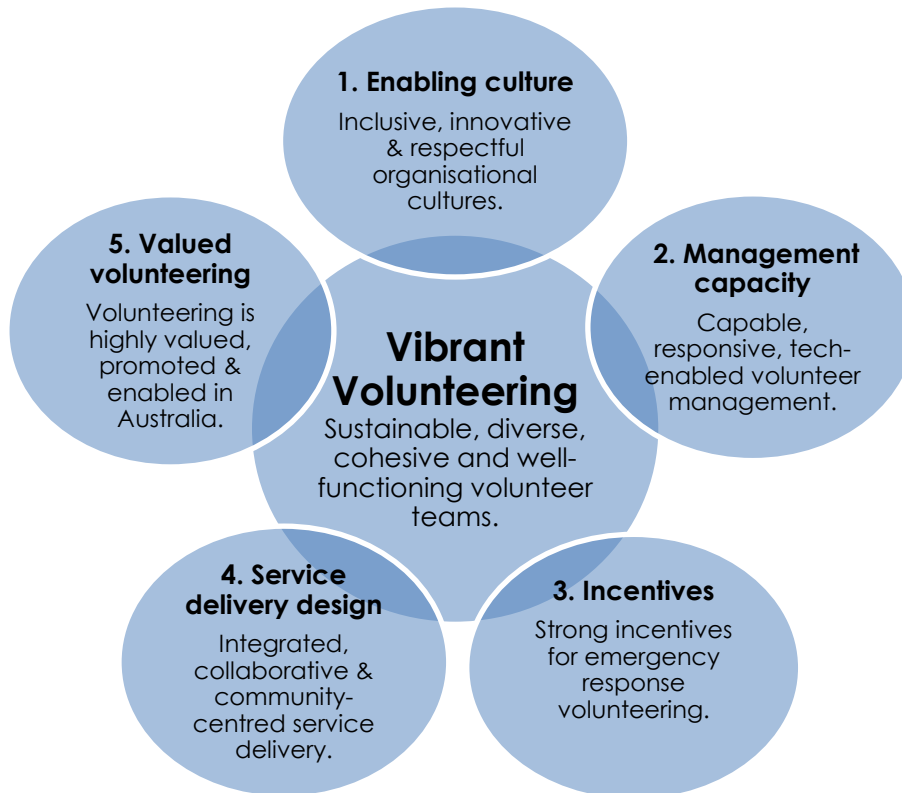


FIGURE 6: UNDERPINNING FOUNDATIONS FOR A PREFERRED FUTURE FOR EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING, ACCORDING TO VOLUNTEER GROUP PARTICIPANTS

5.5.1. Vibrant volunteering

At the centre of this preferred future was vibrant emergency response volunteering, embodied by sustainable, diverse, cohesive and well-functioning volunteer teams. There would be ample motivated volunteers across urban and rural communities with a diversity of age and gender. Volunteer teams would be cohesive and high functioning, providing an effective service to communities.

“Women and men with a diverse range of ages. [P-37]

“A group of active volunteers who are intrinsically motivated and thoroughly committed to the cause. [P-27]

“...an experienced crew of young and fit people being mentored by older volunteers that no longer need to put themselves out there. [P-12]

“An efficient brigade that works well for its community and has plenty of members due to its being known as a great place to be. [P-1]

“In an ideal situation, fire brigades will have more than enough members to serve Victoria and continue to protect life and property. When the pager goes off, 12-15 people will respond to the station, rather than just 5 or 6. [P-16]

5.5.2. Foundations underpinning vibrant volunteering

In this combined picture, vibrant volunteering is underpinned by five foundations. This view was generally consistent across the three service categories, with no significant major differences in the proportion of representatives from each category that raised issues across the five elements. Two minor differences were: slightly fewer Victorian CFA volunteer representatives raised issues of incentives; slightly more representatives of other emergency service volunteers raised issues related to valued volunteering compared to the two fire service categories (see Figure 7).



FIGURE 7: RELATIVE PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS THAT REFERRED TO EACH FOUNDATION UNDERPINNING VIBRANT VOLUNTEERING IN A PREFERRED FUTURE. (NOTE THAT % ARE EXCLUDED TO REFLECT THE QUALITATIVE NATURE OF THE DATA).

1. An enabling culture

Organisational culture in emergency management was described as a key enabler for vibrant volunteering into the future. An enabling culture would be welcoming and inclusive. It would be open and innovative, and it would have leadership that builds cohesion and respect and strongly values volunteers. This would create a positive and enabling environment in which people would be motivated to volunteer.

“Mutual respect and acknowledgement of others including the staff that create the frameworks for volunteers to thrive. A healthy, inclusive and fair environment that creates roles that others aspire to. [P-13]”

2. Management capacity

Capable volunteer management in organisations that is responsive to volunteer needs and the changing landscape of volunteering, and that effectively harnesses technology was also emphasised. Management approaches would strongly prioritise reducing volunteer burden and making volunteering as easy and accessible as possible. Examples given of what this would look like included:



having enough paid staff to undertake the growing number of administrative tasks; streamlined training, recruitment and other processes; and delivery of training in situ to reduce travel required. One survey participant particularly outlined the importance of strong psychological support for volunteers to deal with the range of traumatic operations.

“ More resources are put into psychologically preparing our members for the traumatising aspects of the job, e.g., fatalities at motor vehicle accidents, large scale bushfires, house fires, suicides etc. [P-50]

Some participants also described more flexible, adaptive and diverse volunteering models and pathways, including shorter-term, project-based and specialized volunteering. This would encourage a wider range of people to engage in emergency service volunteering, as well as assist long-term volunteers to better fit volunteering around their family, work and other time commitments.

“ A new committee structure which allows flexibility and encourages people to be involved with things they want to be, e.g. people who only want to deal with grass roots issues ... Others who are willing and understand governance such as finance, policy, strategy, HR, lobbying etc. ...people have the ownership of their destiny and can direct it. [P-63]

Effective use of technology would be a key enabler of capable and responsive volunteer management approaches. Technology would be used to provide online training that complemented face-to-face training, to communicate well with volunteers, and to improve the experience and safety of frontline volunteers, particularly fire fighters.

3. Incentives

Several participants saw incentives for emergency service volunteering, both tangible and intangible, having a stronger place in a preferred future compared to today. Various approaches to financial reimbursement and remuneration of volunteering were put forward.

“ I do not support volunteers being paid but some small token to cover personnel costs would help. [P-15]

“ Maybe some level of financial remuneration other than just reimbursements for expenses would help matters? Maybe a nominal wage of \$5 per hour to give incentive to people to give up their time? [P-51]

Regarding intangible incentives for volunteering, participants described clear access to opportunities for professional and personal development.

4. Service delivery design

Integrated, collaborative and community-centred delivery of emergency services was also described as a key element of a preferred future. This included, for example, more co-delivery of training, integrated and sector-wide support of volunteering, networking among volunteers.

“ EM agencies join up and provide sector-wide support for all volunteers, so the value of volunteering is sustained (maintaining community benefits, social 'glue', sense of neighbourhood, belonging, self-esteem, achievement, identity etc.). [P-23]



Some participants described a future with more localised, volunteer-led approaches targeted to local community needs.

“The essence and core remain the same, i.e. a community-based response to local emergency, however, the associated support bureaucracy remains as an organisation that exists to support volunteers but is devolved from a Head Office to a variety of regional head offices. The regional offices are funded based on risk profile, asset load, resource availability and geography.

This would allow greater flexibility in local response, increased freedom for local / regional cooperation and increased freedom around local decisions, community safety activities and emergency response. Specifically, in relation to volunteering it would allow volunteer roles to be created based on local need, resourced based on local capacity and safety messages to respond to local conditions. [P-30]

5. Valued volunteering

The fifth element was volunteering generally, and emergency response volunteering specifically, being highly valued and enabled in Australia by both governments and society.

State and federal governments would clearly value volunteering highly, and have strong legislation and policies in place, and strategies and programs funded, to enable it.

“State Governments would take on an attitude where the long-term view of volunteer retainment is paramount, rather than seeking to implement quick fixes. [P-14]

“Greater support for younger volunteers by government and employers to allow for participation in emergency service activities. [P-46]

A small number of participants also described stronger community support for, and involvement with, volunteer-based emergency services.

“Ambulance will be seen as a part of community; Community members will be the main labour and the community will recognise and support these people. This means that members of the community will have a higher level of knowledge of ambulance medicine and when to call an ambulance, how to treat on site in preparation for ambulance and importantly who to contact for information about first aid and ambulance medicine. A community which is involved in Ambulance feels safe and supportive of that body. A community which does not feel involved with ambulance does not support the organisation so well or easily. [P-65]



5.6. WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO MOVE TOWARDS THIS FUTURE?

5.6.1. Strengthen the foundations of vibrant volunteering

Participants recommended a wide range of priority actions needed to strengthen each of the five foundations underpinning vibrant emergency response volunteering in the future.

1. Changing culture

Activities described to change culture to be more inclusive, innovative, and respectful of volunteers included:

- better engagement with youth, including mentoring,
- organisation leadership reconnecting with volunteers and demonstrating greater support for volunteers,
- greater focus on improving workforce relations and increasing awareness among paid staff of value and capacities of volunteers,
- developing stronger governance, strategy and vision for volunteering,
- increased volunteer involvement in organisational decision-making,
- stronger focus and leadership around diversity and equal opportunity,
- changes in leadership at organisational and brigade/group/unit levels.

“There needs to be above-brigade support in the growing phases, to make sure the old ways are not still entrenched, to put down any infighting while new blood moves brigades forward. Once modern captains are in brigades, the rest will look after itself from the captain down. [P-1]

“I also believe that there is a tremendous amount of brain power amongst volunteers to enhance the thinking and implementation of desired fire management strategies. Use this to make them part of the change. [P-41]

2. Building management capacity

Activities described to build capable, responsive, and technology-enabled volunteer management included:

- developing more flexibility and diversity in volunteer roles,
- simplifying and streamlining processes, and increasing paid staff capacity to provide administrative support to volunteers,
- tailoring and localising supports and services for volunteers, including opening more space for volunteer-led initiatives,
- more innovative and up-to-date use of technology,
- improve quality, design, and accessibility of training,
- improving access to leadership training for volunteers.

“Agency needs to recognise skills from outside of a volunteer's fire skill set [...] Also need to recognise the benefit of volunteer surge capacity where traditional volunteering is no longer sustainable. [P-29]

“All agencies need to look at ALL existing processes with one thought: 'How can we make this easier for volunteers?' All agencies need to look at their volunteers with one thought: 'How can we make the volunteering experience more rewarding?' [P-8]

“the associated support bureaucracy [...] is devolved from a Head Office to a variety of regional head offices. The regional offices are funded based on risk profile, asset load, resource availability and geography. [P-30]



3. Strengthening incentives

Those volunteers who saw a greater role for incentives for volunteering in the future described a range of forms this might take or referred to incentives in general terms only. Direct volunteer remuneration, tax incentives, and volunteering leave arrangements were the most cited options:

“State/ National government negotiates with employers to allow workers to spend one day a week volunteering, e.g., with tax breaks, subsidies. [P-23]

“Where there is a large campaign fire volunteers could be remunerated to release the burden from their employer for the time away at the fire. [P-39]

4. Redesigning service delivery

Recommendations made for enabling more integrated and collaborative delivery of emergency management services emphasised:

- centralisation of service delivery (e.g., combined training) and amalgamation of separate services into single organisations,
- localisation and devolution of authority and decision-making, enabling more community-tailored and volunteer-led service delivery,

“I think we have got to get away and focus more on EMV's (Emergency Management Victoria) model, where you have a single Emergency Management agency coordinating Emergency Management with a single Commissioner. [P-62]

“The essence and core remain the same, i.e. a community-based response to local emergency, however, the associated support bureaucracy remains as an organisation that exists to support volunteers but is devolved from a Head Office to a variety of regional head offices. The regional offices are funded based on risk profile, asset load, resource availability and geography.

This would allow greater flexibility in local response, increased freedom for local / regional cooperation and increased freedom around local decisions, community safety activities and emergency response. Specifically, in relation to volunteering it would allow volunteer roles to be created based on local need, resourced based on local capacity and safety messages to respond to local conditions. [P-30]

In contrast, however, a few participants saw potential future amalgamation of services having negative outcomes for volunteers.

“Amalgamation, if it occurs, will likely result in my and many others departure from the service. [P-67]

A small number of participants also described greater collaboration and engagement of emergency response agencies with other organisations, such as local councils and Volunteering Australia, and a whole-of-community approach to emergency management.

5. Valuing volunteering

Across the service categories, participants saw much that governments could do to ensure that emergency response volunteering is highly valued, promoted and enabled in Australia:

- reducing compliance and regulation burdens on volunteers,
- better promoting the benefits of emergency response volunteering for communities and individuals,



- implementing tax incentives for volunteering,
- Legislating to protect rights and status of volunteers,
- allocating greater funding and improving distribution of funding, and
- providing stronger leadership and direction-setting (see more below).

“Positive promotion of benefits of involvement. A sell of these benefits and positive acknowledgement of the contribution made. State government, CFA, local leaders and the education sector. Primary schools through secondary. [P-17]

“State Government needs to consolidate financing across the sector and re-deploy funds to a centralised system of admin/training for all vols in all agencies. [P-23]

Among Victorian CFA volunteer representatives, another priority was depoliticisation of the fire services and a reduction of the influence of the paid staff representative union on volunteers and the CFA.

“Political changes need to stop having an influence as it is just widening the gap between volunteers and staff. [P-9]

“Change within the organisation with less influence over staff and volunteer roles by the paid staff representative union. [P-36]

5.6.2. Leadership and direction-setting

A cross-cutting theme underpinning all the action areas described by participants was that of stronger, multi-level leadership and direction-setting across governments, the emergency management sector, and organisations.

“Leadership. Someone to have a vivid picture of the future and what needs to happen and then draw up a plan and sell it to the membership, but at all times not telling the membership but asking them and taking them with on the journey. [P-63]

“I believe the biggest challenge is the development of an inclusive and sustainable Volunteer Management Strategy that will chart a future for fire volunteers within the [organisation] clearly identifying their responsibilities in a respectful, inclusive, transparent and empowering organisation. [P-19]

“I think this needs to start from the top and filter down. Federal Government, State, Local etc. it can't just be said though it needs to be acted. Leaders need to lead by example. [P-28]

“Some decision makers prepared to have a go and tackle long standing issues. [P-42]

5.7. WHAT IS MOST UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE FUTURE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING?

The final question posed to volunteer representatives asked about sources of uncertainty for the future of emergency response volunteering. Identifying uncertainties about the future is difficult, and most responses to this question reiterated the impacts of current trends already described (see Table 5).


Category	Key areas of uncertainty
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take up of volunteering by younger generations • Shifting community attitudes to volunteering and community service • Changing demographics and an ageing population, especially in rural communities
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unreliability of new communications technology and services in rural areas and overreliance on this technology • Potential impact of new technology developed in the future
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in people's paid work commitments • Willingness among employers to release staff for callouts • Cost of living increases • More expensive fire protection
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change, particularly more frequent and severe fire events
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government support and funding • Government leadership changes • Victorian fire service reform (Victorian CFA volunteer representatives only)

TABLE 5: FORCES OF UNCERTAINTY FOR THE FUTURE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE VOLUNTEERING.

A third of all participants described sources of uncertainty in the social environment, including youth engagement in volunteering, community attitudes to volunteering, and demographic changes.

“ Uncertain of how future generations will embrace volunteering. If future generations have never seen their parents/carers volunteering, what reference is there for them? No role models of volunteering. How would they know of the positives it brings both individually and to the community? [P-27]

A considerable minority of participants described technological, economic or environmental uncertainties. Technological uncertainties included unreliability of new communications technology in rural areas combined with overreliance on this technology, and the potential impact of new technology developments impacting emergency response operations and communication. Four areas of economic uncertainty described were paid work commitments, employer willingness to release employees for call outs, costs of living impacts, and rising costs of fire protection. Uncertainties associated with climate change, particularly the impacts of more frequent and severe fire events were also raised.



“ Technology - yes, this will help, but relying on too much technology will mean total failure if the technology fails to work. A really good example is the National Broadband Network. For most of Australia, when mains power disappears, most homes will not have a working landline phone. ‘That’s o.k.’ say the NBN – ‘use your mobile’ [...] The mobile will work until the batteries go flat in your local base station after about 3 or 4 hours. How does the community call for help or find out what is happening then?” [P-68]

“Longer working hours and work commitments, shift work, both home partners working, etc. leading to lack of time to participate in volunteering particularly where demands can vary. Also lack of support from most employers who do not appreciate or see a commitment towards community benefit.” [P-48]

“ The climate change that we are experiencing is bringing bigger and more fires, so is also going to be a challenge. Hotter temperatures mean more fireground stress and health risks, as well as more dangerous fires. [P-1]

Over half of all participants identified politics and government as a key source of uncertainty about the future. Key issues raised included uncertainty of government support and funding for volunteering, government leadership changes, and – for representatives of Victorian CFA volunteers – uncertainty about the future of fire services in that state due to fire service reform.

“ Change of Government which will influence the support that the government gives to volunteers.” [P-3]



6. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Emergency Volunteering 2030: Adapting the Sector study resources

<https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/resilience-hazards/3533>

Publications

- McLennan, B. J. and T. Kruger (2019). *Emergency volunteering 2030: Views from managers in volunteerism*. Melbourne, RMIT University and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC. Environmental Scan Report No. 1, <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-5415>
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Other resources

- McLennan, B. J., et al. (2016). "The changing landscape of disaster volunteering: opportunities, responses and gaps in Australia." *Natural Hazards* 84(3): 2031–2048, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11069-016-2532-5> or
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7. FURTHER RESEARCH

This report is one of a series of Environmental Scan reports being prepared through the *Adapting the sector* study to capture diverse stakeholder views of the current and emerging landscape of emergency volunteering.

The Environmental scan reports will be synthesised and summarized, and the results presented to an expert panel, called a Delphi panel, that will assist researchers to develop future volunteering scenarios.

The Environmental Scan summary and the outcomes of the Emergency Volunteering 2030 Delphi will be made publicly available via the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC website, <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/resilience-hazards/3533>.

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APPENDIX 1 SURVEY QUESTIONS

Introductory questions

- Please select which of the following options most apply to you. I am answering this survey as:
 - a. A representative of a volunteer association
 - b. A member of a state/territory volunteer committee or forum
 - c. A leader/member of a volunteer youth network
 - d. A leader/member of another volunteer representative group
 - e. Other
- Can you tell us a bit more about this role/s?
- In which state or territory of Australia are you most involved in volunteering or volunteer representation/leadership?
 - a. Victoria
 - b. New South Wales
 - c. Australian Capital Territory
 - d. Queensland
 - e. Northern Territory
 - f. Western Australia
 - g. South Australia
 - h. Tasmania
 - i. Nationally
- What type of volunteering will you be referring to in the survey?

Main questions

1. Thinking about the type of volunteering you specified, what – if anything - do you think has most changed for this volunteering in the last 5-10 years?
2. In your opinion, what issues or challenges does this type of volunteering, and these volunteers face today?
3. If the issues that you have described above remain unchanged, what do you think the situation is most likely to look like for this volunteering by 2030?
4. Imagine an alternative, preferred future situation for this volunteering by 2030. Can you describe what it looks like?
5. What most needs to happen to move towards this preferred future, and who needs to do it?
6. Can you describe any projects or initiatives that you think are doing a particularly good job of grappling with any of the issues, challenges or needs you have described?
7. Is there anything that you consider to be particularly uncertain or unpredictable when thinking about the future of this volunteering?

Wrap-up question

- Do you have any other comments about the current or future situation for this volunteering?