



Volunteering Victoria Submission: Inquiry into the 2022 Flooding Event in Victoria

JUNE 2023

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Overview

The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee is currently investigating Victoria's preparedness for, and response to, Victoria's major flooding event of October 2022. The investigation encompasses emergency responses and the adequacy of resourcing to deal with increasing floods and natural disasters in the future, in addition to other planning factors. As the state peak body for volunteering, Volunteering Victoria draws attention to the need for appropriate planning and co-ordination for the role of spontaneous volunteersⁱ

Background

Spontaneous volunteers make a significant contribution in preparation for, during, and after crises, delivering essential community responses and services. This has been reflected in volunteer-led responses to bushfire recovery and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, spontaneous volunteering requires extensive planning and co-ordination to ensure the safety and support of volunteers, the general public, and the emergency management workforceⁱⁱ. The Inspector-General for Emergency Management's [Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season](#) found that there is currently "no system in place or defined lead agency to plan for and coordinate spontaneous volunteers"ⁱⁱⁱ during natural disasters.

With the discontinuation in July 2022 of [weVolunteer](#), the community recovery volunteering program funded initially through COVID-19 rapid response funding, there is no systemic alternative to support and co-ordinate spontaneous volunteering. A lack of coordination and resourcing hinders community responses to natural disasters, placing increased pressure on paid staff and reducing the capacity for the delivery of essential community recovery programs.

Volunteering during the 2022 flooding event

The flooding event experienced across areas of metropolitan and regional Victoria in 2022 highlighted the need for the resourcing and co-ordination of spontaneous volunteers. Community feedback highlighted:

- A high demand for volunteers to support community response and recovery efforts.
- Community volunteers not being aware of how or where to contribute their time; volunteer calls to emergency services hindering crisis responses.
- Volunteer Support Services being called upon to provide expert volunteer advice and co-ordination, a service for which they are not currently funded.
- Spontaneous volunteer co-ordination being disorganised and ad-hoc.
- Other essential services being withdrawn as community organisations focused their efforts on the flood response with no immediate additional funding.

It is noted that government intervention and funding was required to provide additional emergency services and first responders due to concerns over spontaneous volunteer safety, in the absence of appropriate planning and co-ordination. A recent [evaluation report on weVolunteer](#) found that:

"In times of crisis there is usually significant goodwill from people wanting to help, but often too little co-ordination. Like others, Victoria lacks a dedicated system to manage both the influx of volunteers during a crisis and the management of volunteers for ongoing community recovery."

".. the lack of a dedicated system for coordinating the influx of volunteers following a crisis remains a significant gap in Victoria's emergency management strategy."

- weVolunteer Final Evaluation Report, 25 August 2022

Recommendations

Volunteering Victoria makes the following recommendations to support spontaneous volunteering and community recovery in Victoria:

1. The development of a Spontaneous Volunteering Strategy in partnership with Volunteering Victoria and other relevant agencies providing planning and coordination for all volunteering roles involved in community recovery, with the exception of first responder volunteers.
2. Government investment in scoping and research on best practice approaches to spontaneous volunteer co-ordination.
3. Sustainable investment in the capacity building of local Volunteer Support Services to enable them to engage and activate volunteers in response to community need.
4. Funding for Volunteering Victoria to engage in the work and responsibilities associated with being a recovery support agency as part of the [State Emergency Management Plan](#).

Natural disasters and emergencies will continue to occur with increasing frequency in the coming years. Ongoing and scalable government investment is required to train, co-ordinate and manage volunteers who play a critical role in community recovery and resilience.

Yours Sincerely,



Thu-Trang Tran
Chief Executive Officer
Volunteering Victoria

ⁱ 'Spontaneous volunteers' refers to those people who are motivated to help out in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency and want to assist with relief and recovery efforts. These are distinct from emergency management volunteers who are recruited, trained, and managed by emergency management organisations.

ⁱⁱ The growing interest in spontaneous volunteering is well documented through Emergency Management literature and volunteering statistics. Organisations can also get ISO 22319 accreditation in Community resilience for planning the involvement of spontaneous volunteers

ⁱⁱⁱ Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian fire season: Phase 2. Inspector-General for Emergency Management. 2021.