

RURAL FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTEER BRIGADES' CHARTER

Preamble

Through over 1,400 Rural Fire Brigades, protecting communities of Queensland, approximately 31,000 Rural Fire Brigade volunteers provide a mitigation, response and recovery service which allows for diverse community needs to be met by the dedicated men and women who comprise the Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Rural Fire Brigade (RFB) volunteers are fundamental to effective fire management, mitigation, and emergency response in Queensland. This response and recovery covers the diverse range of community needs encompassing flood, cyclone, storm, structural fire, road accident rescue and support, search, and swift water awareness. RFBs and volunteers are recognised and valued for their expertise and knowledge in their local communities by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) and as equal partners in response and recovery activities alongside full time and auxiliary firefighters.

This volunteer charter is to be read in conjunction with the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990*, related legislation, relevant QFES policies and procedures, the Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct, the *Public Service Act 2008* and the Rural Fire Brigade Manual (RFBM). It is an agreement between QFES and RFB volunteer brigades and their representatives.

The volunteers of the RFS are fundamental to effective fire management and emergency response in Queensland. Their contribution and value in this role is acknowledged. The safety and well-being of volunteers is, and will always be, paramount to QFES.

The volunteers' commitment to working with the Queensland community remains the core strength of the RFS. Meeting the individual and collective interests and needs of volunteer brigades supports the safe and effective delivery of their services with the Queensland community. Consultation and engagement with them on issues that affect them as volunteers is an integral element of the relationship between QFES and volunteer brigades.

The RFS Volunteer Charter

The RFS Volunteer Brigades' Charter provides the framework for the relationship between the parties. The relationship is informed by the following principles:

- Decision making is to be in the best interest of the safety of Queensland communities

- Procedures are to be both practical and sustainable with a focus on reducing red tape
- Decision making is to be founded on a fair, just and reasonable process and will include consultation and engagement from brigades and volunteers, and
- Decision making will not inappropriately discriminate against brigades and volunteers.

This is an enduring agreement to which all parties are committed. The Charter shall be reviewed by agreement of the parties or at the end of four years from its date of commencement.

RFS Volunteer Brigades

Volunteer brigades selflessly gift their time and considerable life skills to protect life and property and to prevent and suppress fire across Queensland. They also actively promote fire prevention strategies and provide fire management and emergency response. They are established in communities throughout Queensland and participate in a practical partnership based on mutual respect. The RFS and QFES provide support and resources to volunteer brigades in order to promote community safety to the best of their collective abilities. They are further supported by their families, their employers, and their communities. They are highly motivated to contribute, and by the results of their contribution, many members gain personal achievements and development. The camaraderie and esprit de corps within volunteer brigades is highly valued.

QFES' Commitment to its RFS Volunteer Brigades

QFES will recognise, respect, value, promote, and affirm RFS volunteer brigades as core partners in the delivery of effective fire management and emergency response to Queensland. QFES will ensure respect and consideration is paramount in its processes to the diversity of cultures and individuals that comprise its volunteer brigades and the divergent communities', characteristics and needs from which they come.

QFES acknowledges and affirms its:

- Commitment to a contemporary RFS that is fully engaged with the Rural Fire Brigade Association Queensland (RFBAQ) and volunteer brigades, partner organisations, associations, and other stakeholders whilst providing services with community at its core
- Commitment to provide administrative, operational, and

infrastructure support to enable volunteers to perform their roles safely and effectively within available resources

- Commitment, in partnership with the community, to provide the necessary resources to enable brigades and volunteers in the RFS to deliver agreed services
- Commitment to nurture and encourage volunteers while developing their skills and competencies
- Commitment to securing optimal advantage from the valued time gifted to the RFS by its volunteer brigades.
- Commitment to the development of policy and implementation of change that supports and facilitates the volunteers' contribution, within the context of the character of the local brigade
- Commitment to work in a timely way and in a collaborative manner with volunteer brigades and representatives on matters which affect them
- Commitment to consider fairly the views of volunteers before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which adversely impact on volunteer brigades, and
- Commitment, in partnership with the community, to provide the resources necessary to enable new or changed policies, procedures or approaches, which impact on volunteer brigades, to be implemented efficiently and effectively.

Support Services of RFS Volunteers

QFES recognises and respects the personal needs and health and safety of volunteer brigade members, which can be derived from their service. Support services include but are not limited to:

- Legal assistance including protection against the financial consequences of extended litigation and legal representation following the delivery of volunteer services in good faith on behalf of the department
- Procedures to address issues of discrimination in a fair, just, and timely manner
- Counselling and welfare support
- Training
- Support and assistance for volunteers who wish to pursue employment as RFS employees
- Compensation for incidents, injuries and illnesses, and
- Insurance coverage for damage or loss to private equipment used in registered response and recovery activities.

Queensland's Commitment to RFS Volunteers

The Queensland Government will:

- Recognise, respect, value, promote and affirm RFS brigades and volunteers, their families and their employers as core partners in the delivery of effective fire and emergency services to Queensland
- Ensure that legislation recognises the needs and interests of brigades and volunteers in the delivery of services and protects volunteers, who provide their services in good faith, and their dependants from consequential financial losses and other liabilities
- Consult with representatives of the RFBAQ on matters that may impact upon volunteers, including proposed legislation and the adequacy of resources and support, to enable volunteer brigades of the RFS to deliver the agreed services, and
- Reduce red tape and unnecessary administration wherever possible whilst maintaining legislative requirements and without diminishing the health, wellbeing and safety of volunteer brigades.

RFS Volunteer Brigades' Commitment to its Partners

Volunteer brigades will provide their services while maintaining a respectful and active partnership with the community. They will endeavour to operate safely and undertake appropriate training and planning to ensure their members personal safety and enhance the delivery of services in creating a safer community. They will exercise the powers vested in them by the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990* and associated regulations in the best interests of the community. They will commit to observing lawful QFES policies and procedures, the Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct and the RFBM.

They will support and participate in consultative mechanisms including those involving RFBAQ. They are committed to working respectfully with their partners and will seek to resolve differences of opinion and grievances through internal departmental channels wherever reasonable and practicable to do so.

The Commitment:

The parties commit themselves to use and apply the Charter in a spirit of mutual respect and goodwill and to work together to resolve any disputes that may arise in accordance with those key principles set out herein.

President, Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland

Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services

The Honourable Minister for Police and Corrective Services
and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services

This Charter takes effect on and from the 12th day of June, 2021.

