

GOVERNMENT AND QFRS REFUSE TO SIGN OUR CHARTER!

Lee Johnson, Kelvin Anderson, Jack Dempsey all signed a charter and commitments to RFBAQ but refuse to sign UFUQ proposed QFRS Charter!

Full-time and auxiliary firefighters deserve a charter of respect just as much as volunteers do!

I previously advised members in Code 2 Volume 26 Number 70, that the Queensland state government and QFRS have signed a comprehensive charter with the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland (RFBAQ).

The November RFBAQ official newsletter "Smoke Signals" features the charter.

The RFBAQ charter commits to recognising RFBAQ Brigades and volunteers as "core partners" in the delivery of fire and emergency services and commits the government to "consult with representatives of the RFBAQ on matters that may impact on volunteers".

The RFBAQ charter is signed by QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson; Department of Community Safety Director General Kelvin Anderson and Minister Jack Dempsey.

I have written to the Minister, Commissioner and Director General on several occasions since mid-October, requesting them to sign a charter of similar commitments to paid staff.

Please see the below responses for all parties involved:

Minister Jack Dempsey

In typical style the Minister has ignored 3 letters from your union on this issue. It seems the Minister is keen to meet and sign commitments to volunteers, but isn't even prepared to answer the union's correspondence.

If you get a chance to read the November RFBAQ "Smoke Signals", you will see a smiling Minister Dempsey on page 2 and a message from him telling volunteers all about his discussions with them as he moves around the state talking with them. (I wondered where he's been!).

Dempsey then tells RFBAQ how they want “more autonomy” and how his Ministerial Review will look at how to achieve that. The Minister also states that “every aspect of reform will be in direct consultation with RFBAQ”.

If we ignore the inference that “more autonomy” might be code for sacking managers, we are still left with a Minister who will commit to volunteer firefighters but not fulltime or Auxiliary firefighters.

The Minister will make commitments to volunteers but not us. Do we deserve less commitments and less respect?

QFRS Commissioner, Lee Johnson

Mr Johnson has refused to support and sign the UFUQ proposed charter.

The Commissioner’s action in supporting and signing a charter with the RFBAQ but refusing to do likewise with UFUQ is significant.

Lee Johnson’s reply deliberately confused our request to sign a charter, with the enterprise bargaining negotiations. The Commissioner suggested we raise ‘consultative arrangements’ in QIRC conciliation. This is a separate issue, and contradicts the state government’s demand to abolish ‘consultation’ from our certified agreement and contradicts the QFRS demands for the QIRC to cease conciliating and refer the certified agreement to arbitration!

The bottom line is that QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson has signed a charter including commitments to the RFBAQ and has refused to sign a charter committing to paid staff.

The QFRS Commissioner will make commitments to volunteers but not us. Do we deserve less commitments and less respect?

Director General, Kelvin Anderson

The Director General refused to consider our request and simply parroted the refusal already given to us by Lee Johnson.

The Director General of the Department of Community Safety will make commitments to volunteers but not us. Do we deserve less commitments and less respect?

It is with great concern that I now inform members that the QFRS Commissioner, Lee Johnson, the Department’s Director General, Kelvin Anderson and Minister, Jack Dempsey have all refused to sign similar commitments for you as they did for rural volunteers.

I am now considering how we might let those three individuals know how we feel about that.

John Oliver
State Secretary

Rural Fire Service

Volunteer Charter



Preamble

Through over 1,400 Rural Fire Brigades, protecting communities in over 93% of Queensland (Qld), 34,000 Rural Fire Brigade volunteers provide a response and recovery service which allows for diverse community needs to be met by the dedicated men and women who comprise the Qld Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Rural Fire Brigade (RFB) volunteers are fundamental to effective fire management, mitigation and emergency response in Qld. 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 for their expertise and knowledge in their local communities by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) 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 Rescue Service Act 1990, related legislation, relevant Department of Community Safety (DCS) and QFRS policies and procedures, the Qld Public Service Code of Conduct and the Rural Fire Brigade Manual. It is an agreement between QFRS and the RFS volunteers and their representatives. The volunteers of the RFS are fundamental to effective fire management and emergency response in Qld. The safety of volunteers is, and will always be, paramount to the QFRS. Their contribution and value in this role is acknowledged.

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

The RFS Volunteer Charter

The 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 Qld 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 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.

The RFS Volunteers

The volunteers selflessly gift their time and life skills and even their own equipment to protect life and property and to prevent and suppress fire across Qld. They also actively promote fire prevention strategies and provide fire management and emergency response. They are drawn from communities throughout Qld and participate in a practical partnership based on mutual respect for each other, QFRS Rural Operations and for the community in order to promote community safety to the best of their collective abilities. They are further supported by their families, their employers and the communities they serve. They are motivated to serve by the results of their contribution, personal achievements and development, and the camaraderie of service.

The RFS Brigades and Volunteers' Commitment to its Partners

The brigades and volunteers will provide their services while maintaining a respectful and active partnership with DCS and QFRS staff and the community. They will operate safely and undertake appropriate training and planning to ensure their 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 Rescue Service Act 1990 and associated regulations in the best interests of the community.

They will engage with QFRS Rural Operations both individually and through their representatives who form the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Qld Inc. (RFBQA) as appropriate and will support the consultative mechanisms as agreed between the RFBQA and the QFRS. They are committed to working respectfully with their partners and will seek to resolve differences of opinion through internal departmental channels wherever reasonable and practicable to do so.

The QFRS Commitment to its Volunteers

The QFRS will recognise, respect, value, promote and affirm RFS brigades and volunteers as core partners in the delivery of effective fire management and emergency response to Qld. The QFRS will take into consideration in its processes the diverse people who comprise its volunteers and the widely divergent characteristics, needs and communities from which they come.

The QFRS acknowledges and affirms its:

- 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 volunteers;
- 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 the brigade and volunteers' representatives on matters which affect brigades and volunteers;
- Commitment to consider fairly the views of volunteers before adopting any new or changed policies procedures or approaches which adversely impact on its volunteers; and
- Commitment, in partnership with the community, to provide the resources necessary to enable new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on brigades and volunteers to be implemented efficiently and effectively.

Non Operational Support Services for RFS Volunteers

QFRS recognises and respects the needs of brigades and volunteers which derive 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;
- Counseling and welfare support;
- Training;
- Support and assistance for volunteers who wish to pursue employment as QFRS Rural Operations employees;
- Compensation for accidents, injuries and losses; and
- Insurance coverage for damage or loss to private equipment used in registered response and recovery activities.

The Department of Community Safety Commitment to RFS Volunteers

The Qld 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 Qld;
- Ensure that QFRS 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 RFBQA on matters that may impact upon volunteers, including proposed legislation and the adequacy of resources and support, to enable brigades and volunteers in 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 brigades and volunteers.

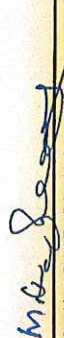
The Commitment:

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


Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service


Director-General, Department of Community Safety


The Honorable Minister for Police and Community Safety


President, Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland