



Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2021-2022 **ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

Asked by Mr James Milligan MLA on 3 November 2022: Mr Wayne Phillips, A/g Commissioner took on notice the following question(s):

Reference: Hansard [uncorrected] proof transcript 3 November 2022 [PAGE 74]

In relation to:

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, in the 2020 and 2021 financial year, there were 381 SES volunteers and yet, in 2021-22 there were only 331 SES volunteers, so a 13 per cent decrease. So while SES volunteers are required now, more than ever, why has there been such a drop in volunteers?

Mr Gentleman: Thank you, Mr Milligan. And can I firstly thank our state emergency service and our volunteers for the incredible work they do and thank their family and friends for supporting them when they go to do that work for us, our volunteers, of course, are well resourced and well trained, that is not by chance, that is by the work of our senior officers and our trainers as well.

But I will ask Mr Phillips to give you some details on those numbers. We have had some issues trying to recruit, particularly during the COVID times, but we are trying our best to keep those numbers up.

Mr Phillips: Thanks, minister. My name is Wayne Phillips, Acting Commissioner, Emergency Services Agency and I acknowledge the privilege statement. I also want to acknowledge and thank our SES volunteers, particularly the last few months and the ongoing La Nina weather event. Coincidentally, we are coming up to a volunteer recruitment weekend for our state emergency services on the attraction of more volunteers.

I will acknowledge that we have lost a number of volunteers, the actual reasons and causes of a drop in volunteer numbers, I will take that question on notice and get some details to you and do some analysis for you. But we are always endeavouring to attract volunteers across both the SES and the RFS. I can say from a national perspective, the attraction of volunteers has been a challenge for all emergency services.

I could only hazard a guess on why that is an issue and I will—as back on my previous comment, I will take that on notice to get you better details around that, thank you

Mick Gentleman MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

As stated in response to Question on Notice Number 8 from the Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2020-2021, from 2017 to 2021 the ACT State Emergency Service (ACTSES) focused on an extensive recruiting and training program resulting in excellent outcomes for the Service. At that time there were 388 ACTSES volunteers – the largest operational numbers for over a decade. Based on the success of the campaign and to enable a balanced strategic workforce program to be fully optimised, a decision was made to pause recruiting for 2022 to manage fatigue and focus on advanced specialist technical and leadership training programs.

It was known at the time that the pause in recruitment for 2022 would see a decrease in volunteer numbers, due to expected levels of attrition and retirements, usually around 10% per year. The reduction in numbers was slightly higher than expected due to COVID-19 impacting volunteering, which has been a nationwide issue affecting all volunteer organisations. The number of ACTSES volunteers at 30 June 2022 was 331.

Having focused on enhancing the skills and knowledge of the current membership, the ACTSES is now in the middle of a recruitment cycle, concentrating on enhancing membership numbers through the 2023 Recruit College. The ACTSES has received 340 applications from community members wishing to become ACTSES volunteers, so interest in joining the Service remains high. The 2023 Recruit College will see up to an additional 92 members fully qualified and ready to support the ACT community, in time for the beginning of the 2023-24 high-risk weather season.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Signature: 

Date: 15/01/2022

By the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mick Gentleman MLA