



volunteering
queensland

Submission to the Anti-Discrimination Act Review

22 March 2024

Who We Are

Volunteering Queensland is the state's peak body for advancing and promoting volunteering. A core part of our work is assisting volunteer involving organisations to engage, manage and retain a strong, effective volunteer workforce that is necessary to advance their mission and cause.

We directly represent over 300 member organisations and support thousands more through our wider network, encompassing hundreds of thousands of volunteers who contribute their time, money and skills for the benefit of all Queenslanders. Beyond our direct networks, we advocate for the rights and wellbeing of all volunteers in Queensland, numbering over three million. Our activities involve us in collaborating with all levels of government, volunteer involving organisations, individual volunteers, and diverse networks of organisations across the state and country. Our work spans disaster response and resilience building, training (including accredited courses), advice and consulting, research, advocacy, management resources, recruitment support, and capacity-building projects for volunteer involving organisations.

Comments on the draft legislation

Volunteering Queensland welcomes the draft Bill and its goal of ensuring Queensland's anti-discrimination laws are adequate and comprehensive. We have a few brief comments to make on a couple of provisions which will apply specifically to volunteers.

Volunteering Queensland strongly supports the inclusion of work done "on a voluntary or unpaid basis" under the definition of work contained in the Dictionary in Schedule 1 of the draft Bill. We use the definition of volunteering as time willingly given for the common good without financial gain.

Our latest estimate is that over 64 percent of Queenslanders aged 15 years and over engage in volunteer work. This includes formal volunteering through an organisation, and informal volunteering such as helping a neighbour, cleaning a local park, or more coordinated activities with larger groups of people that happen outside of any formally recognised organisational structure. It is important to ensure that people's rights against discrimination are protected when they are contributing their time and skills on a voluntary basis, the same as any other worker.

We note the exceptions for discrimination that are included for certain types of voluntary bodies in Clause 39 of the draft Bill. We recognise that this is a narrower exception than occurs under the existing legislation, and we support this narrowing. We also recognise that this Clause is based on the exception in the Sex Discrimination Act, and understand the desirability of consistency in this area. We none the less would encourage that the application of this exception, should it pass into law, occur within the overall spirit and intent of the entire legislation to protect the rights of volunteers against inappropriate or unfair discrimination, rather than be used in effect as a loophole.

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