

I commend the Productivity Commissions Draft Research Report into the Contribution of the Not-for-profit Sector.

I am a project worker, funded by Government to provide Volunteer Management support to volunteering organisations, groups and individuals in the Wimmera region in North Western Victoria. I work across four Local government Areas covering a total area of some 28,000 sq kms with a population of just under 40,000 people.

Many of the NFP's in the region include those that are considered "Self-interest" groups such as bookclubs, cards clubs, ball-room dancing, and sporting clubs. There are also many NFP's who provide the range of services to the community as identified on page xxvii of the report. In my region, there is significant cross-over between what would normally be considered a "Self-interest" group and a NFP providing direct community benefit outside of the groups main purpose. Small rural groups provide valued services in remote, rural communities, such as care-taking community halls, providing catering services at local functions where such businesses do not exist, land management and environmental projects such as "Adopt-a-Highway". There are many other examples of this type of work.

For many of the individuals who live in these areas, they volunteer across a large number of self-interest/community participation and Not-for-profit organisations. An example is a woman in a small country town commenting recently that she volunteers (multi-tasks) on 17 boards, committees, town-planning networking groups, clubs and events. Many of these volunteers are over 55 years of age.

If the NFP sector is to be more "stream-lined", consideration will need to be given to the fact that for rural and regionally based NFP's and particularly its volunteers, a balance has to be struck between the needs of the local community and the expectations of government for NFP's to be at a "certain level" of expertise and qualification. Flexibility and balance will be critical in this. Older volunteers don't have the time or the resources to attend "Training" and yet they DO want information.

The ideal way for this information to be distributed to these groups is through locally based Volunteer Resource Centres, such as the centre where I current work, Wimmera Volunteers. However, VRC's are not funded by government, only specific projects are. VRC's have a strong community focus and arrange themselves to flexibly meet the needs of the local communities they serve. Our VRC has a unique identity unlike other VRC's, but what we do through our programs, such as the Volunteer Management Program is provide access for

volunteers and small NFP groups in remote, regional Australia, to the information, resources, and appropriate training suited directly to their needs.

Individuals will never have more time! However, volunteering will continue to be a vital component in making communities sustainable. Overloading volunteers in NFP community participation groups with legislative requirements, required qualifications, reporting acquittals, and so on impacts on this sustainability. Once small groups and NFP's in rural Australia are not sustainable anymore, the quality and life and the liveability of regional Australia is significantly reduced.

NFP's in the country require paid staff to ASSIST, SUPPORT, GUIDE, INFORM and MENTOR volunteers across a broad spectrum of NFP groups and organisations. This can most effectively be done through Volunteer Resource Centres like Wimmera Volunteers, provided that each centre is able to remain flexible, unique and connected to the community they serve.

Kind regards

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