

Should Australian youth be conscripted into a ‘national emergency service’ to help deal with natural disasters?

What they said...

‘That bothers me. It bothers me that kids today wouldn't know a bloody sandbag, let alone a spade’

Independent senator Jacqui Lambie

‘It all sounds good, but you just can't go out and send people to do these volunteer jobs’

One Nation leader senator Pauline Hanson

On September 14, 2019, independent Tasmanian senator, Jacqui Lambie, suggested the establishment of a ‘national emergency service’ to support the ranks of volunteers attempting to tackle the ‘climate emergency’, including the increased incidence of drought, fire and floods.

The Senator has called for a Senate inquiry to find new ways to expand the numbers of volunteers dealing with emergency relief. She warned that the ‘climate emergency’ will stretch the nation's emergency services, and that Australia needed to consider a form of national service to encourage volunteers.

Ms Lambie claimed, ‘Maybe it's about time we looked at something like a national emergency service, where our kids don't go to war but we're going to need people to clean up.’ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/jacqui-lambie-calls-for-emergency-services-conscripts-to-combat-climate-change-20190914-p52rbe.html>

The idea has been condemned as impracticable by One Nation's leader Senator Pauline Hanson. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6386678/senators-split-over-community-service-idea/?cs=14231>

Lambie's suggestion has polarized social media provoking vigorous argument for and against it. There has been no response from the government either to Lambie's call for a Senate inquiry or to her suggestion of imposing ‘national emergency service’. However, it has been noted that the Government may be willing to support the establishment of a Senate inquiry in return for Ms Lambie supporting specific Government legislation brought before the Senate.

Background

The State Emergency Service (SES) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Emergency_Service
The State Emergency Service (SES) is the name used by a number of volunteer organisations in Australia that provide assistance during and after major incidents. Specifically, the service deals with floods, storms and tsunamis, but can also assist in other emergencies, such as vertical and road crash rescues, missing persons searches, and medical evacuations. In other scenarios the SES may provide a support role to other agencies, particularly police and fire. The SES is operational 24 hours a day. The SES is constituted as separate organisations operating in the various Australian states and territories. Eight of the SES organisations co-ordinate through the Australian Council of State and Territory Emergency Services (ACSES). In addition to funds provided through legislation to the SES by state and local governments, SES groups also supplement their financial resources with donations made by individuals and businesses, and through other government grants. These donations typically contribute to purchasing or maintaining group equipment, such as vehicles and tools, or to improvement of SES property and facilities.

Firefighting services https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volunteer_fire_department#Australia
Throughout Australia there are many volunteer firefighting agencies which are set up by the individual states or territories.

New South Wales is serviced by two statutory firefighting authorities. These are the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) and Fire and Rescue NSW. Fire and Rescue NSW has firefighting and rescue responsibilities for the major cities, metropolitan areas and several other towns in NSW. It also has the responsibility for all land-based HAZMAT incidents as well as inland waterway-based HAZMAT incidents. The NSWRFS is the volunteer firefighting service in NSW and consists of over 70,000 volunteers and has responsibility for over 90% of the land area in NSW. Although most of this is bush and grass land, the NSWRFS also serve smaller and regional communities that are not covered by Fire and Rescue NSW. Despite some overlapping in firefighting coverage/resources by both services, the NSWRFS does not provide rescue or HAZMAT services in the State.

In Victoria, there are three main firefighting organisations, Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB), Country Fire Authority (CFA) and The Department of Environment, Water, Land, and Planning (DEWLP). The CFA is a volunteer and community-based fire and emergency services organisation that is made up of around 61,000 members. Of these members, some 59,000 are volunteers. Their roles range from fire, rescue, HAZMAT, to non-operational support roles.

In Western Australia, firefighting is organised by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) together with Local Councils. DFES operate the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service Brigades (VFRS) and some Bush Fire Service Brigades (BFS), while the remainder of the Bush Fire Service Brigades are trained by DFES but operated and administrated by the Council of the associated area. VFRS Brigades are generally more involved in structural firefighting, Asset Protection and Road Crash Rescue depending on their location, whereas the BFS Brigades are generally more involved in Wildfire Fighting. In Western Australia there is an estimated 31,000 BFS Members among 585 Brigades, and 2,000 VFRS Members among 88 Brigades.

In South Australia, there are two legislated firefighting organisations. The South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (SAMFS) and the South Australian Country Fire Service (SACFS). The SACFS is staffed by approximately 13,500 volunteer fire fighters and around 120 paid employees.

Internet information

On September 19, 2019, The Conversation published a comment by Lucas Walsh, Professor of Education Policy and Practice, Youth Studies in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, titled 'Stop calling young people apathetic. For many, volunteering and activism go hand-in-hand'

The opinion piece suggests that among young people there are more diverse forms of community engagement than the traditional modes previously encountered.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/stop-calling-young-people-apatetic-for-many-volunteering-and-activism-go-hand-in-hand-123754>

On September 19, 2019, The Weekend Australian published a comment by Anthony Bergin and Paul Barnes of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) titled 'Here's a plan to break Volunteer drought'

The authors essentially support Senator Lambie's proposal and outline a similar scheme proposed by the ASPI for an emergency management volunteer program (EMVP).

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

On September 16, 2019, The Canberra Times published a report titled 'Senators split over community service idea'

The report details the objections of One Nation leader Senator Pauline Hanson to Senator Lambie's proposal that young people be conscripted into the emergency services.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6386678/senators-split-over-community-service-idea/?cs=14231>

On September 16, 2019, startsat60 published a report titled 'Smart idea or a burden? Jacqui Lambie calls for return to conscription'. The article considers arguments offered for and against Senator Lambie's proposal to introduce a form of conscription to address the problem of decline rates of volunteerism in Australia's emergency services.

The full text can be accessed at <https://starts60.com/discover/news/politics/smart-idea-or-a-burden-jacqui-lambie-calls-for-return-to-conscription>

On September 14, 2019. The Sydney Morning Herald published a report titled 'Jacqui Lambie calls for emergency services conscripts to combat climate change'

The report outlines Senator Lambie's call for the establishment of a Senate inquiry into Australia's emergency services and her suggestion that young people should be conscripted into these services.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/jacqui-lambie-calls-for-emergency-services-conscripts-to-combat-climate-change-20190914-p52rbe.html>

Senator Jacqui Lambie's Internet site, the Jacqui Lambie Network, has a section given over to the hazards posed by climate change and details Lambie's proposal to employ young unemployed people within Australia's emergency services.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.lambienetwork.com.au/climate>

On October 19, 2018, ABC News published a report titled 'Drought and ageing populations dwindle rural fire brigades ahead of bushfire season'

The report details the situation of many New South Wales rural communities facing difficulties attracting sufficient volunteers to combat the fires expected in the upcoming fire season.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-19/dwindling-rural-fire-brigade-numbers-spark-concern/10356652>

On May 15, 2018, The Conversation published an opinion piece and analysis by Amanda Davies, Associate Professor Curtin University; Kirsten Holmes, Professor, School of Marketing, Curtin University and Leonie Lockstone-Binney, Associate Dean (Research) William Angliss Institute titled 'Why rural Australia is facing a volunteer crisis'

The comment and analysis attempts to explain the demographic trends which have seen a decline in volunteerism in rural Australia.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/why-rural-australia-is-facing-a-volunteer-crisis-95937>

In September 2016 Pro Bono Australia published a report titled 'Volunteering On the Rise in an Ageing and More Diversified Australia - Census 2016' which details Australian Bureau of Statistic figures which indicate an increase in volunteerism in Australia.

The full text can be accessed at <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2017/06/volunteering-rise-aging-diversified-australia-census-2016/>

On September 24, 2015, The Conversation published a comment by Melanie Oppenheimer (Chair of History at Flinders University) et al titled 'Where have all the volunteers gone?' The article examines downward trends in volunteerism within Australia. The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/where-have-all-the-volunteers-gone-47192>

On October 30, 2014, ABC News published a comment from Anthony Bergin of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) titled 'Keeping Australia's emergency volunteer legacy alive' Bergin promotes an emergency management volunteer program (EMVP). The full text of the comment can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-30/bergin-keeping-australias-volunteer-legacy-alive/5847888>

On April 15, 2014, The Mercury published a report titled 'Jacqui Lambie floats return of national service to reduce youth unemployment' The news report details Senator Lambie's plan to reintroduce a military national service to help address the problem of youth unemployment. The full text can be accessed at <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/jacqui-lambie-floats-return-of-national-service-to-reduce-youth-unemployment/news-story/6851245ba294ebc539910ba9a86baf>

Arguments in favour of conscripting youth into emergency services

1. Young people and others would acquire valuable skills

Supporters of a national emergency service program have argued that it would increase the skill base of those who took part and would be of particular value to the unemployed. Anthony Bergin, a senior fellow with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) and Paul Barnes, head of the ASPI's Risk and Resilience Program, have noted that a program such as that proposed by Senator Lambie could be used to help provide skills and training to the unemployed.

Bergin and Barnes stated, 'We still have large numbers of young people not in education, employment or training and older unemployed workers who are less likely to find new employment.' They have suggested, 'a one-year program during which participants work in a volunteer organisation, gaining and practising skills applicable in emergencies, including in organisations active in the welfare and recovery side of emergency management.'

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

Bergin and Barnes have further suggested that such a scheme 'could assist in retraining long-term unemployed people of various ages. Participants might receive benefits at a higher rate than the Newstart Allowance. Some conditions of eligibility would be mandatory, such as not being in education, employment or training for six months before an application and being a recipient of Newstart support.' <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

When making her proposal, Senator Lambie stressed the lack of basic skills among many young people, skills which are of vital importance in the event of a natural disaster. Senator Lambie stated, 'That bothers me. It bothers me that kids today wouldn't know a bloody sandbag, let alone a spade.' <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/jacqui-lambie-calls-for-emergency-services-conscripts-to-combat-climate-change-20190914-p52rbe.html>

In 2014, Senator Lambie suggested a return to military-based national service which she had similarly argued would increase the skills of the unemployed. She stated, 'In six weeks we could have these guys with truck licences, we can have them with clerical experience ... it's got to be better than being on the dole.'

<https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/jacqui-lambie-floats-return-of-national-service-to-reduce-youth-unemployment/news-story/6851245ba294ebeb539910ba9a86baf>

The valuable skills training acquired within emergency services has been recognised for over a decade. In 2004, Christine Hayes of Swinburne University of Technology TAFE and Barry Golding and Jack Harvey of the University of Ballarat investigated the skills acquired through training with emergency services. They stated, 'Local fire brigades and state emergency service units are important sources and sites of adult learning in rural and remote communities. Apart from the important role of facilitating social capital - trust, reciprocity, networks - and encouraging informal learning through regular training, they offer opportunities for volunteers, particularly men, to engage informally accredited learning... The skills they learn through their public safety organisations are transferable to, and demonstrably useful in, other aspects of their community, home and work life.'

https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/file/0023/4937/nr2103.pdf

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has stressed the training and experience benefits that working with emergency services can provide. QUT states, 'Full training is provided by your local SES unit. First aid, operating communications equipment, working safely at heights, ropes, knots & holdfasts, ladders, storm response, land search, emergency lighting and generators, vertical rescue, flood boat operations, map reading and navigation, chainsaw operations and incident management are just some of the courses available to SES members. The SES-run courses are nationally accredited...' <https://blogs.qut.edu.au/student-sharehouse/2011/06/06/a-million-places-to-volunteer-in-brisbane-and-why-you-should-do-it/> Working within emergency services is similar to the Community Work Skills program offered by the Queensland Department of Employment, Small Business and Training designed to give the unemployed training and work experience that will ready them for paid employment. <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/community-orgs/funded/sqw/community-work-skills>

2. Hours devoted to volunteer activities are dropping, including in emergency services
Recent statistics indicate that the percentage of Australians taking part in volunteer activities of all kinds is declining.

An article published in The Conversation on September 24, 2015 written by Melanie Oppenheimer (Chair of History at Flinders University) et al noted, 'With close to two-thirds of Australia's population not volunteering in 2014, the volunteering rate has slipped five percentage points from a high of 36% in 2010 (when equivalent data was last collected). That decrease reversed a 20-year trend of increasing participation.'

<https://theconversation.com/where-have-all-the-volunteers-gone-47192>

This appears to be part of a long-term and accelerating trend toward reduced hours given per volunteering individual. Oppenheimer et al observe, 'Viewing the statistics at an individual level...the median annual hours contributed by volunteers has fallen from 74 hours in 1995, to 72 hours in 2000, and to 56 hours in 2006.' <https://theconversation.com/where-have-all-the-volunteers-gone-47192>

The problem has become particularly acute in rural communities as Australia's non-metropolitan population has fallen under the pressure of the amalgamation of rural properties, automation, drought and a resultant lack of job opportunities and services have contributed to a rural decline. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6016548/city-congestion-and-rural-population-decline/?cs=14246>

Changing farm management models are creating a lack of succession options for some rural fire brigades. Many country towns have noticeably fewer men and women aged between 30 and 50 years old, as land management models change, requiring less labour.

Inspector Bowden, the District Manager for the Canobolas Fire Zone, headquartered in Orange, New South Wales, has stated, 'A lot of properties would have had two, three or more people running those properties. Whereas these days, they are one-man shows and those one-man shows are normally the most senior person.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-19/dwindling-rural-fire-brigade-numbers-spark-concern/10356652>

Inspector Bowden further argues that changing land use in regional areas was changing the type of neighbourly interaction, as well as the type of resident.

The Inspector has stated, 'You only have to look around the Mount Canobolas area for example. People have split [properties] up into 20 and 30-acre lifestyle blocks — 30 years ago that was all orchards.

With the land-use change, you also get a different type of resident.'

This point has been supported by Lower Portland Superintendent Karen Hodges who has observed the impact of people moving out of Sydney onto lifestyle blocks in the Hawkesbury.

Superintendent Hodges has stated, 'I'm not sure if it's a lot of people moving out from the city, out into the rural lands and think that the fire brigade is the same as Fire and Rescue and that they don't need to put things into it.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-19/dwindling-rural-fire-brigade-numbers-spark-concern/10356652>

In an article published in The Conversation on May 15, 2018, Amanda Davies, Associate Professor Curtin University; Kirsten Holmes, Professor, School of Marketing, Curtin University and Leonie Lockstone-Binney, Associate Dean (Research) William Angliss Institute stated, 'Australia's rural communities are facing a looming volunteering crisis, driven in part by a rapidly ageing population, and residents moving away from rural communities. This is combined with volunteer burnout as the government defunds essential services in these areas, leaving volunteers to pick up the slack.

Davies et al have stressed the significant impact a lack of emergency volunteers is having on some rural communities. They note, for example, 'For the town of Manjimup in Western Australia, with a population of 4,000, a volunteer shortage has resulted in some essential services being at risk. The ambulance service, for instance, is now reliant on volunteers from the nearby town of Bridgetown. This involves Bridgetown volunteers driving some 40kms to Manjimup, then transferring patients to the regional hospital in Bunbury another 130kms away before driving 100kms back to their homes.' <https://theconversation.com/why-rural-australia-is-facing-a-volunteer-crisis-95937>

3. Australia's emergency service volunteers lack diversity and are ageing

Australia's volunteer emergency management services appear to be suffering from a restricted recruitment base (Anglo-Australian males) and to have failed to attract new membership. The result is an increasing age profile. Concern has been expressed that this lack of diversity and the increasing age of the volunteer emergency services membership base will reduce their effectiveness and may ultimately endanger their survival. It has been argued that a larger, younger and more varied membership is necessary to guarantee that Australia's volunteer emergency services will be able to continue their work into the future.

In 2005 Jim McLennan and Adrian Birch of La Trobe University produced a report titled 'Recruiting and Retaining Australia's Firefighters'. They noted, 'All fire services report a common set of current difficulties associated with volunteer numbers. In many rural communities, volunteer brigade member numbers have dropped and those remaining are ageing. In some new housing developments on urban/rural fringes, brigade memberships

remain low, notwithstanding increased protection level needs. For many brigades on urban/rural fringes, it is difficult to find crews 9-5 weekdays.

Other issues identified include under-representation of volunteers from a non-Anglo Australian cultural background and under-representation of women, particularly in operational roles.'

<http://www.bushfirecrc.com/sites/default/files/managed/resource/enhancingvolunteerism.pdf>

The same issues appear to have persisted within volunteer emergency services over the next ten years. In October 2014, Anthony Bergin, noted that Australia's more than 500,000 emergency management volunteers were predominantly male and had an average age of 48 years, with very few from non-Anglo Australian backgrounds.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-30/bergin-keeping-australias-volunteer-legacy-alive/5847888>

This problem of an ageing of emergency service volunteers has been noted in Victoria. A report released in February 2014 by the Victoria Auditor General titled 'Managing Emergency Services Volunteers' stated, 'The majority of volunteers, by both proportion and number, are aged over 45 years, and rates of volunteer participation in people aged over 65 years are comparatively higher.' <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20140205-Emergency-Volunteers.pdf>

Similarly, a newsletter published three years later, in 2017, by the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades WA Inc stated that despite the 26,000 fire and emergency services volunteers across the State, demographic shifts across Western Australia continued to challenge the sustainability of the volunteer workforce. The letter claimed, 'WA faces declining numbers of regional volunteers and a steady increase in average age, which is impacting volunteers' capability and capacity to respond to incidents.'

<https://volunteerfirefighters.org.au/future-volunteering-fire-emergency-services-australia-wide>

Across Australia, volunteer emergency services have recognised the need to attract younger recruits from a more diverse background. They also recognise that these services may need to adapt in order to attract and retain these new recruits.

The Australian Journal of Emergency Management's April 2018 edition has noted, 'Diversity research has indicated that there is benefit in a mixed variety of perspectives and experiences, and the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) may gain from millennials moving around all the time. A volunteer from the Victorian Country Fire Authority may transfer into the NSW RFS bringing a range of skills and experiences the service isn't always used to.'

The Journal further noted that emergency services 'must be ready for this generation [millennials] to begin taking over the reins when older generations hang up their boots.'

<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-apr-2018-volunteers-the-ageing-and-the-millennials/>

4. Demographic changes and the effects of climate change are putting emergency services under increased pressure

It has been argued that there are increasing demands on Australia's already stretched emergency services and that these demands require an increased membership.

The traditional demands placed upon emergency service deliverers in Australia are large and varied. In 2015 the Tasmanian Fire Service detailed these as emergency response and suppression of all types of fires; marine and aviation response; urban search and rescue; vertical rescue; hazmat incidents; road crash rescue; community fire education and training; fire equipment sales and service; fire alarm monitoring; and fire investigation.

<https://tinyurl.com/y6nlmnoe>

In addition, there are several factors affecting Australia that are increasing the demands placed on the country's emergency services. One of these is the country's ageing population. All Australian states have recognised their changing demographics now and into the future. A 2004 Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance study noted, 'While the future is inherently unpredictable, it is certain that the combination of low fertility rate plus lengthening life spans will result in a gradual ageing of the Australian and Victorian populations. In 2001, 13 per cent of the Victorian population was aged 65 years and over. By 2042 it is projected that this group will have grown to 25.8 per cent of our population.'

https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/ageing/submissions/victorian_government/sub029.pdf

The same study recognised that this progressive ageing of the population would place unequal demands on resources, with a larger burden likely to fall on rural communities. It noted, 'Small rural and remote regions are ageing faster than the rest of Victoria. In some instances, this will lead to an adjustment period where age-related increases in service delivery demands are greater than the available skilled working age population to service those demands.'

https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/ageing/submissions/victorian_government/sub029.pdf

The Tasmanian Fire Service has cited a United States study to demonstrate that ageing populations are more vulnerable to natural disasters and place increased demands on emergency services. The 2013 United States report 'showed that people aged 65 years or older accounted for 35 per cent of fire deaths in the US in 2010, while only comprising 13 per cent of the population. Further, the relative risk of individuals aged 65 years or over dying in a fire was 2.7 times greater than that of the general population. The report goes on to highlight the concern of the ageing population, where it is estimated the older population will comprise 19 per cent of the total by 2030.' The Tasmanian Fire Service noted, 'Australia is on a similar trajectory, where older people will comprise a larger proportion of the total population.'

<https://tinyurl.com/y6nlmnoe>

Climate change involving increased droughts, fires and floods is also placing dramatically increased demands on Australia's emergency services. In 2018 the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council stated, 'The impacts of a changing climate are increasing in intensity, severity, frequency and duration: it is recognised that even if aggressive steps are taken to curb greenhouse gas emissions over coming years, a proportion of climate change is effectively "locked in" to the atmosphere.'

<https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/EMV-web/AFAC-Climate-Change-Discussion-3July2018FINAL.pdf>

The same Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council report also noted that not only does climate change mean that natural disasters are becoming more frequent, more severe and longer lasting, they are also tending to 'cascade'; that is, occur simultaneously. The report noted, 'In Tasmania, the January 2016 bushfires in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area occurred simultaneously with severe east coast flooding. Concurrent events stretch the capacity of the sector to respond, particularly in disrupting or destroying key infrastructure.'

<https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/EMV-web/AFAC-Climate-Change-Discussion-3July2018FINAL.pdf>

These increasing pressures have highlighted the insufficient number of emergency service volunteers to respond to these disasters. This point has been stressed by independent Senator Jacki Lambie, who has argued on her Internet site, 'We are seeing more extreme weather events - floods, cyclones, bushfires - and our emergency services are finding themselves stretched thin...

The Jacqui Lambie Network believes that part of the solution is to provide the opportunity for young people not in employment or training to contribute. We support the concept of a National Service for young Australians aged between 18 and 25 who are without job or education prospects...’ <https://www.lambienetwork.com.au/climate>

5. Conditions of eligibility would ensure appropriate participants who will then be treated fairly

Defenders of Jacqui Lambie’s scheme to conscript young people into the emergency services argue that their aptitude would be taken into account and that they would be trained and employed appropriately.

Senator Lambie has stated, ‘We support the concept of a National Service for young Australians aged between 18 and 25 who are without job or education prospects as a means of providing them with job-ready skills, purpose and qualifications, over a 12-month period, if they are deemed physically and psychologically able to participate.’ Senator Lambie’s supporters note the emphasis placed here on the conscripts being ‘physically and psychologically able to participate’. <https://www.lambienetwork.com.au/climate>

Senator Lambie has also stressed that these young people would be thoroughly trained so that they would be able to perform effectively within the emergency services and would also acquire personally useful skills that would make them more employment ready.

The Senator has explained, ‘Participants will be fed, clothed, housed and given medical and dental care. More importantly, National Service will teach basic survival skills, discipline, first aid training, resilience and will help instill a sense of purpose in participants’ lives. The training that will be provided will go beyond the technical skills needed to get the job done. Past National Servicemen went on to pursue successful, fulfilling careers in the civilian workplace. National Service taught teamwork, responsibility, initiative, leadership, habits of healthy living and discipline as well as skills in self-defence.’

<https://www.lambienetwork.com.au/climate>

Anthony Bergin and Paul Barnes of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) are supporters of Senator Lambie’s proposal that some young Australians be required to work within Australia’s emergency services. The ASPI promotes the establishment of an emergency management volunteer program (EMVP). The EMVP envisages a system that would match young people to the fields within which they are to be trained.

Bergin and Barnes have described the scheme in this manner – ‘An EMVP would be a one-year program during which participants work in a volunteer organisation, gaining and practising skills applicable in emergencies, including in organisations active in the welfare and recovery side of emergency management...

Similar to the Australian Defence Force’s Gap Year program...but tailored for the emergency management sector, the program would pair individuals with volunteer organisations based on their interests and suitability. It would introduce a common national approach to the training of volunteers, which would enable them to contribute service cross-jurisdictionally.’

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

While noting that participants would be matched to areas according to ‘their interests and suitability’, Bergin and Barnes have also stressed the benefits that such a scheme could offer the unemployed and perhaps those on a disability pension. They have stated, ‘An EMVP also could assist in retraining long-term unemployed people of various ages. Participants might receive benefits at a higher rate than the Newstart -Allowance. Some conditions of eligibility would be mandatory, such as not being in education, employment or training for six months before an application and being a recipient of Newstart support. It also might be viable to extend- EMVP opportunities, with appropriate streams of activity, to people on disability

pensions.’ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

Regarding suitability, Bergin and Barnes have additionally noted, ‘Further suitability criteria would be relevant, such as train-ability, fitness/health, working with children checks, and agreeing to a minimum number of years of service with volunteer groups after completion of the program.’ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

Arguments against conscripting youth into emergency services

1. The decline in Australian volunteerism has been exaggerated

Critics of attempts to force community service from sections of the Australian population point to the fact that volunteerism in this country is in a healthier state than is often claimed. 2015 Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) data indicated a decline in volunteerism. However, some commentators have noted that this figure needs to be set in context. Australia’s record of volunteerism is traditionally high. The 2015 decline was the first since records began to be taken in 1995. Further, commentators have noted that relative to most other nations, Australia has a robust volunteerism culture.

A 2015 report on ‘Volunteering in Australia’ noted ‘Australia’s giving culture as a whole is strong and vibrant.’ Australia was ranked in the top six giving nations in the World Giving Index 2014, based on an average of three measures –the percentage of people who in a typical month donate money to charity, volunteer their time, and help a stranger’. It ranked 16th out of 135 nations with respect to volunteering time. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) surveys of voluntary work, both volunteering rates (as a percentage of people over 18 who have volunteered in the last 12 months) and the total number of hours volunteered have risen since 1995 when the first national survey of voluntary work was conducted. This increase exists across all states and territories, although the rate of increase varies. Surveyed volunteer rates were higher outside of capital cities in all survey years but increased both in and outside of capital cities over time. Volunteer rates increased over time for both men and women. <https://tinyurl.com/y5kruaqf>

The 2016 Census has also revealed that Australians are still engaged and committed to volunteering activities. This census revealed that 3.6 million Australians aged 15 years and over, or 19 per cent of the population, engaged in voluntary work through an organisation or group. This is a 1.2 per cent increase from the 2011 Census results when 17.8 per cent of people responded that they were engaged in voluntary work.

<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2017/06/volunteering-rise-aging-diversified-australia-census-2016/>

It has further been argued that claims that young Australians are disinterested in volunteering are inaccurate. Mission Australia’s 2013 survey of 14,461 young Australians aged 15 to 19, reported volunteering as one of the three top activities in which young people were engaged during 2013, 2012 and 2011, following engagement in sports as a participant and as a spectator. While the survey did not specify or categorise the nature of this volunteering, it did capture a large sample of young people who identified themselves as having engaged in volunteering activities. It also showed a marked escalation in rates of youth volunteering over recent years. In 2011, 33.5 per cent of surveyed young people identified themselves as participating in volunteer work. In 2012, the figure jumped to 60.5 per cent. While the 2013 figure shows a slight decline to 55.6 per cent, it still suggests a growth overall in youth volunteering in Australia.

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/youth_volunteering_evidence_review_0.pdf

This apparent trend toward an increase in youth volunteerism has been noted in other countries. Research indicates a substantial rise in United States teenage volunteers from 13.4 percent in 1989 to 28.4 percent in 2005. Data from Canada reported in 2000 indicate 33 percent of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were engaged in volunteering. In 2005, 38 percent of students in United States high schools were participating in service-learning programs through their schools.

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/youth_volunteering_evidence_review_0.pdf

Research has further indicated that Australian youth find volunteerism appealing for a variety of reasons. The appeals of volunteering for young people include the social benefits of being with friends, strengthening social relationships and working collaboratively with others. It has been discovered that young people look for volunteering opportunities that are of interest and reflect their values and priorities, but they also look for volunteering opportunities that link them to other young people. In several studies, young people identify considerable benefits of their involvement in volunteer activities including acknowledgement, appreciation, and a sense of being socially engaged.

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/youth_volunteering_evidence_review_0.pdf

2. Australian emergency services are developing new ways of attracting members

In response to the increased demands being placed on Australia's emergency services, these agencies are developing new recruitment and staff management strategies designed to increase volunteerism and to retain volunteers within their different services. Critics of Senator Lambie's proposal argue that increasing and retaining volunteers is a better strategy than co-opting young people into emergency services.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) is building its new strategy around three guiding principles. The first is that volunteers are respected, recognised and rewarded for their local knowledge. A culture of respect will be reflected in the way QFES collaborates and communicates with its volunteers during their everyday work. QFES recognises the need for people to feel capable to execute their tasks properly in their local area based on their local knowledge. As such, it will engage more with its volunteers to develop volunteer-owned solutions to challenges and opportunities rather than imposing departmental-directed ideas onto the local volunteer groups.

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/about/Documents/Volunteerism-Strategy.PDF>

The second guiding principle is that the life experience and knowledge of volunteers is utilised. QFES is committed to recognising the unique attributes that each of its members brings to the workforce and utilising these attributes to find solutions that best suit each individual community's needs. <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/about/Documents/Volunteerism-Strategy.PDF>

The third guiding principle is that the volunteering experience is enhanced, valued and mutually beneficial. Future QFES mechanisms and structures are designed to support flexible individual volunteer needs, life-stages, cultures and practices ensuring a more inclusive workforce. QFES plans to focus on improving the working environment of volunteers by actively seeking alternative strategies and solutions that may better assist volunteers to do their job in the community. This may include producing clearer role descriptions, managing staff and volunteers' expectations, requiring future QFES staff to be experienced in engaging with volunteers, and providing uniform inductions across all local community volunteering

groups ensuring consistent information is provided to all.

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/about/Documents/Volunteerism-Strategy.PDF>

The New South Wales State Emergency Service has a 'volunteering reimagined' scheme that has lifted its volunteer base by 21 percent, with the total number of volunteer members standing at 9110 in June of 2018. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/jacqui-lambie-calls-for-emergency-services-conscripts-to-combat-climate-change-20190914-p52rbe.html> 'Volunteering Reimagined' was launched in September 2017 with new policies and procedures to increase flexibility. Three new categories of membership were introduced to enable community members to get involved in new ways. Each pathway has a varying level of commitment and training required to enable a diverse range of community members to engage with the Service. Current research into volunteering in emergency services suggests a fundamental shift is required for agencies to recruit and retain volunteer members in the future. <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2964/volunteering-reimagined-overview-paper.pdf> As a result of these new initiatives, not only has the New South Wales State Emergency Service volunteer workforce grown by more than 21 percent but another 1000 people have expressed an interest in volunteering in the future and have registered their details with New South Wales State Emergency Service.

<https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2964/volunteering-reimagined-overview-paper.pdf>

One of the pathways New South Wales State Emergency Service. Has made available is open to 'spontaneous volunteers', that is, people who are called on to perform short-term, low-risk activities in the wake of a natural disaster. For example, during December 2018 the community of Berowra was impacted by a significant hailstorm with jagged hail stones of up to 8 cm impacting almost every property in the community. A call was put out to the local community via the Berowra Community Facebook page and locals came in large numbers to fill sandbags, door knock, act as radio operators and assist with community liaison and catering. <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2964/volunteering-reimagined-overview-paper.pdf>

3. Conscripting people to emergency services would be ineffective

Critics of the proposed scheme to have conscripts take part in combatting natural disasters have argued that it would be ineffective. They claim that work such as firefighting requires aptitude, skill and commitment, none of which qualities or attributes are likely to be possessed by a group of unemployed young people forced to take on such tasks.

Leader of One Nation. Senator Pauline Hanson, commenting on Senator Lambie's suggestion, noted that unwilling young people would be unproductive and difficult to manage, in part because they would be likely to see their forced attendance as emergency service personnel as an infringement of their civil liberties. Hanson stated, 'A lot of these kids can't even turn up for a job application or turn up to get a job. It's going to be very hard to get them to do it because they know their rights.'

<https://starts60.com/discover/news/politics/smart-idea-or-a-burden-jacqui-lambie-calls-for-return-to-conscription>

Others have raised related concerns. One Facebook commenter posted, 'To be honest this is a horrendous idea. It takes a special sort of person to be a member of an emergency service, be it paid or volunteer. You're not going to get the quality of service out of a lot of vulnerable people if you force them to pick up a fire hose and do things they're not willing to do like CPR on a child or do property protection on your house at a bushfire.'

<https://starts60.com/discover/news/politics/smart-idea-or-a-burden-jacqui-lambie-calls-for-return-to-conscription>

Another Facebook poster observed, 'I think it's best to not have people who don't want to be there in these kinds of positions. Do we really want people who don't know what a spade or

sandbag is in range of raging fires?’ A further Facebook commenter posted even more vigorous objections, arguing, ‘Oh great...people who don’t want to be there put into dangerous positions where not only their lives but the lives of other volunteers are depending on them [are at risk]...it’s already very obvious that not everyone is capable of doing this (shown by the small percentage of people in a community that are volunteers and the number that join and then leave because they can’t do it or handle it).’

https://www.facebook.com/iwakeupwithtoday/posts/2813416828692964?comment_id=2813421308692516

Similarly, one of the reader comments published in The Australian on the issue observed the risk posed by those undertaking dangerous assignments without a serious commitment to do so. The poster states, ‘Part of the ethos of volunteering is having enough get-up-and-go to look into it, do your own research and, if you think you’re right for it, putting your hand up. If you don’t have enough drive to do that your value in an emergency is going to be questionable.’ Another stated, ‘Why would you want to force unwilling people into a voluntary organisation that at times [is]... life-threatening for responders and civilians? You want a green army to clean your beaches, rivers, roadside verges, etc., fine, just don’t push them into areas where they or others could die because they really do not want to be [there].’ A related observation read, ‘Bushfires are not an area for learning. You need to know that the person standing beside you knows exactly what to do next, and has your back, at all times,’ while another reader ironically noted, ‘Take people who don’t want to be there and place them in life-threatening situations where discipline is essential but where command and control is difficult. What could possibly go wrong?’

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

Other reader comments from The Australian featured concerns regarding the physical preparedness of conscripts to undertake this work. One noted, ‘Volunteering for emergency services organisations sees the lowest participation rate across the board. And for entirely understandable reasons, fitness being foremost amongst those.’

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

Readers of The Australian also argued that training these conscripts would be likely to prove an unreasonable burden for existing emergency service personnel. One reader noted, ‘Those press ganged into Jacqui’s service would simply be a “bridge too far” for the already heavily burdened [emergency] services to manage.’

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/heres-a-plan-to-break-volunteer-drought/news-story/19e8c472756b16ab4034c365189a8989>

4. Conscription is not a means of promoting volunteerism and discounts the value of social contributions already being made by young people

Critics of the suggestion that young people should be conscripted into an ‘emergency national service’ argue that such a measure will discourage youth from subsequently volunteering.

James Law, a journalist for Channel 9’s The Today Show has stated, ‘You don’t foster a spirit of volunteerism by forcing people to do stuff like this.’ Law argued that coercion would actually turn people away from volunteering, suggesting that rigid processes were part of the reason why current volunteers were not prepared to remain. Law claimed, ‘Volunteering numbers are actually falling off and it’s because people aren’t having positive experiences when they’re doing it and there is not enough flexibility...’

We need to give people the opportunity to volunteer once in a little while rather than having to sign up every week...I don’t think forcing people to do things is a way to empower them. It becomes an obligation. They will do the bare minimum and move on.’

<https://starts60.com/discover/news/politics/smart-idea-or-a-burden-jacqui-lambie-calls-for-return-to-conscription>

Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) directions for prospective volunteers stresses the flexibility that the Authority recognises as intrinsic to the role. The CFA states, '[Our Authority] encourages flexibility for volunteers, and your level of involvement will depend on your personal availability together with brigade and community needs. Commitment to the brigade simply requires the time and skills that you can afford to give...

Our volunteers are offered a range of development opportunities such as formal training, scholarships, self-paced learning via online portals, mentoring and attendance at forums and conferences... There is no obligation to volunteer with CFA for a minimum period of time... Some brigades allow seasonal volunteering to assist during their fire season.'

<https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteer-careers/volunteer-faqs#whocanjoin> Critics note that this is in direct opposition to any form of conscription.

Additionally, it has been argued that young people do not need conscription in order to perform some form of community service. A national youth survey in 2018 found volunteering to be one of the top three activities for young people—ahead of arts, culture and music activities. Australian Bureau of Statistics (BS) figures from 2014 also showed that while overall rates of volunteering were on the decline, young people aged 15-17 had the highest rate in the nation at 42%. <https://theconversation.com/stop-calling-young-people-apatetic-for-many-volunteering-and-activism-go-hand-in-hand-123754>

It has further been noted that Senator Lambie has a narrow view of what community service might involve and so discounts much of what young people currently contribute. Lucas Walsh, Professor of Education Policy and Practice, Youth Studies in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, has noted, 'For young people, many types of volunteering take place invisibly through online activities like constructing news groups on Facebook that contribute to a wider cause. Such online activities may not be for a particular organisation or group and may be conducted internationally.' <https://theconversation.com/stop-calling-young-people-apatetic-for-many-volunteering-and-activism-go-hand-in-hand-123754> Professor Walsh further noted, 'Young people are also increasingly motivated to take part in another form of civic participation: peaceful protest. For many, protesting for important causes is considered an equally valid way to give back to society.

The most prominent example of this are the student climate strikes around the world that have been galvanised by youth activist Greta Thunberg.' <https://theconversation.com/stop-calling-young-people-apatetic-for-many-volunteering-and-activism-go-hand-in-hand-123754>

Supporters of this form of action note that although it is not a traditional form of emergency service, protest regarding climate change has the capacity to sway public opinion and prompt governments to take action which may help to reduce the hazards attributable to climate change.

5. Developing community-wide resilience is needed to reduce the pressure on emergency services

Opponents of schemes such as Senator Lambie's which would conscript young people into Australia's emergency services argue that such proposals merely encourage an excessive reliance on these services. Instead, these commentators maintain, what is required are communities which can share the responsibility of disaster prevention and response with emergency services. These critics maintain that the increased incidence of natural disasters cannot be met by services alone and must be faced by all who live within at-risk communities.

On 7 December 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to adopt ‘a whole-of-nation resilience-based approach to disaster management, which recognises that a national, coordinated and cooperative effort is needed to enhance Australia’s capacity to withstand and recover from emergencies and disasters...’

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-strategy-disaster-resilience.pdf>

This resilience-based approach stresses that responsibility for disaster management must be widely shared, including within communities. The Council of Australian Governments’ National Strategy for Disaster Resilience states, ‘A resilience-based approach is not solely the domain of emergency management agencies; rather, it is a shared responsibility between governments, communities, businesses and individuals.’

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-strategy-disaster-resilience.pdf>

In New South Wales the development of community resilience is organised through the Community Resilience Innovation Program (CRIP). CRIP’s aims are to foster ways to effectively engage the local community in creative, community focused activities that build local capacity and capability for disaster resilience; to develop effective partnerships and build networks between local community organisations, councils, businesses and emergency services agencies; to share knowledge and lessons learnt about approaches and models through project evaluation and to support initiatives that can be integrated into current business and maintained in the longer term.

Projects supported through the CRIP are designed to respond to the specific needs and characteristics of the local community. Projects may involve the entire community or be tailored to the needs of particular groups, such as people identified as more vulnerable to disaster events. <https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Pages/emergency-management/funding-programs/community-resilience/Community-Resilience-Innovation-Program.aspx>

One example of a CRIP supported initiative in New South Wales is a program designed to increase the disaster-preparedness of the state’s deaf community.

The Deaf Society Get Ready program began as a one-year project under the Natural Disaster Resilience Program. Get Ready is the implementation of recommended interventions arising from university research into disaster resilience in the deaf community.

Get Ready Deaf Community New South Wales is a highly successful emergency preparedness program undertaken by The Deaf Society. It is a partnership between The Deaf Society and New South Wales State Emergency Services, New South Wales Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue New South Wales, Australian Red Cross and the University of Sydney.

The Get Ready program helps deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing people to increase their readiness for, and recovery from, disasters. It helps emergency services personnel increase their deaf awareness and ability to communicate with deaf people. Consistent with the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, the deaf community and emergency services organisations share responsibility for helping the deaf community prepare and recover from emergency events. <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-jul-2018-get-ready-a-model-for-deaf-community-leadership-and-preparedness/>

In Victoria, an example of building community resilience is the way in which the Victorian State Emergency Service (VICSES) is attempting to increase flood preparedness within local communities. The VICSES Kerang Unit, Kerang and District Community Centre, Kerang CFA, Kerang Woolworths, and MIXX FM held a relaunch of the Local Flood Guides for Kerang, Quambatook, Murrabit and Benjeroop which had been updated following the flood of 2016.

VICSES continues to provide up to date, localised information to targeted communities on flood risk, including a guide for planning, preparing and responding to flooding, as part of the Local Flood Guide program.

https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/documents/112015/137179/VICSES+-Community+Resilience+Strategy+2016-2019+2nd+Year+Report_WEB.pdf/6a24948b-8230-d9f1-3ac1-44bf7c854938

Further implications

Environmental and demographic changes are placing increased pressure on Australia's emergency services. Climate change is resulting in prolonged droughts, more intense bushfires over a longer period of the year and more instances of severe storms and flooding. Coupled with these environmental developments, Australia's ageing population has increased the country's vulnerability to such disasters. Older Australians are less able to cope with extreme weather events and natural disasters, while the nation's changing demographic has seen the age of emergency service personnel rise, creating fears that current volunteers will lose capability and may be difficult to replace.

It would be inaccurate to claim that the country is taking no action to address these issues. The increased emphasis on broadening responsibility for responding to natural disasters via community resilience information and training is intended to make the nation as a whole more disaster ready. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-strategy-disaster-resilience.pdf>

Changing recruitment strategies and patterns of volunteerism being employed and encouraged by Australia's emergency services are intended to make allowance for the changing lifestyles, preferences and abilities of prospective volunteers, allowing these services to draw on individuals whom more traditional forms of volunteer service would not suit. <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2964/volunteering-reimagined-overview-paper.pdf>

Despite these accommodations to Australia's changing circumstances, Senator Lambie and others appear to be correct when they draw attention to the nation's growing vulnerability to a range of natural disasters outside our former experience. However, the national emergency service that Senator Lambie and others have proposed may not be the most appropriate solution. What is clear is that the country has an increasingly more complex and demanding set of emergency issues to address, issues which include a potential lack of on the ground personnel to combat natural disasters, especially fires, as they occur.

The media has largely focused on Senator Lambie suggestion that some form of conscription of the unemployed might be used to increase the size of the workforce that Australia's emergency services are able to draw on. This focus appears to be largely a result of the contentiousness of the senator's proposal. It was, for example, immediately challenged by One Nation leader, Senator Hanson, herself a frequent focus of media attention, and has provoked a wide range of extreme responses in the social media.

<https://www.standard.net.au/story/6386678/senators-split-over-community-service-idea/?cs=10264> Senator Lambie has called for conventional, that is military, national service for the unemployed in the past, with similar divisive results.

<https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/jacqui-lambie-floats-return-of-national-service-to-reduce-youth-unemployment/news-story/6851245ba294ebeb539910ba9a86baf> However, the media has paid very little attention to Senator Lambie's original suggestion that there should be a Senate inquiry into Australia's disaster preparedness.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/jacqui-lambie-calls-for-emergency-services-conscripts-to-combat-climate-change-20190914-p52rbe.html>

The country appears to have become somewhat inquiry weary, perhaps because numerous significant inquiries have been held whose recommendations have not been promptly acted upon. One obvious example is the string of inquiries which have been held into the operation of the Australian family law system. In 2017, the House of Representatives inquiry into a "better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence" made 33

recommendations, while in 2019 the Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry made 60 recommendations to the government on measures to improve the operation of the Family Law Court. The government has not responded to either of these reports yet is about to institute a third inquiry co-headed by Senator Pauline Hanson.

Inquiries have come to be seen as stalling devices rather than as springboards for informed action. This may explain the lack of media attention given Senator Lambie's call for an inquiry into Australia's emergency services. Despite this, the suggestion has merit as there are significant problems to be investigated and hopefully addressed.