



Background

The NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association is a not-for-profit, registered charity that was established in 1998 to represent and support the volunteer members of the NSW State Emergency Service.

The NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association became an incorporated association in 2000 and a registered charity in 2005. In recognition of the need for the NSW State Emergency Service volunteers to have a member body and a voice to Government the NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association was included as a consultative body in 2010 into the NSW State Emergency Service Act 1989.

The NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association is an organisation set up for the benefit of the thousands of volunteer members of the NSW State Emergency Service.

These are the men and women wearing orange that you see on the news and in the media. They are all volunteers that freely give their time in training and responding to emergencies and advising communities how to prepare for floods and storms.

They are highly trained professional volunteers with skills in general rescue, storm damage, flood rescue, car accident rescue, alpine rescue, vertical rescue, urban search and rescue. You will see them tarping roofs, rescuing people from floodwaters, sandbagging, removing fallen trees, rescuing people from car accidents, from heights and depths or alpine areas as well as searching for lost loved ones.

They go to great lengths at personal cost to help the community at times of crisis. They save the economy financially and the community emotionally.

The NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association provides representation and support services for these volunteers. It works closely with the NSW State Emergency Service to achieve common goals and represent the interests of its volunteer members, advocating for them when appropriate.

Benefits provided by the NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association include the provision of a NSW SES Volunteers Association Welfare Fund, Unit grants and personal scholarships, plus other support funding schemes. Various fundraising activities are required to fund these support activities including raffles, donation appeals, sponsorships, merchandise sales and advertising commission from the publication of 'The Volunteer', the NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association magazine.

Funds raised through these activities are used to directly support the welfare of members of the Association through the welfare fund, the provision of scholarships, grants programs, training activities and conferences.

Objectives

The NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association complies with all legislative requirements but also operates in accordance with its Constitutional objectives being:

Provide a means for the consolidation and representation of the views and concerns of NSW State Emergency Service volunteers via such mechanisms as may be appropriate.

Provide tangible benefits to NSW State Emergency Service volunteers, plus other beneficiaries as directed by the Board, from time to time.

Provide Public Education (Letting people know what we do and what they can do – how they can help!).

Strategic Plan

Our Strategic Plan “Building a Sustainable Future” is set on a platform of four pillars:

Volunteer Recognition

Building recognition and respect through:

Establish and maintaining a member benefit programs to recognise volunteers for their contribution to the community.

Leading the establishment of a National Volunteers Association.

Advocacy and Representation

Members are aware that we are here to support them:

Communicating effectively with stakeholders in ways which suit them.

Providing assistance and advice to NSW SES volunteers in times of need.

Reviewing training, with a view to making it user friendly, adequate, up-to date and available.

Contributing to the improvement of training with consideration of becoming a Registered Training Organisation.

Enhanced Reputation

We obtain positive acknowledgement and respect of who we are and what we do:

Acknowledged, understood and respected by the community.

Aligning ourselves and partnering with organisations that share our vision and values.

Build our profile with organisations seeking our input on contemporary volunteer management issues.

Strong Member Base

We maximise and grow our membership base through:

Transparency of how we operate.

Encourage comment and continuous improvement.

Benefits of NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association membership are publicised.

Actively recruit to maximise membership.
Research the viability of providing a volunteer recruitment service.
Adherence to our Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The NSW State Emergency Service volunteers will always be the prime reason for the NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association's existence. These goals have been developed using the fundamental basis of strong values based leadership supported by solid and sustainable financial viability and growth.

Mission

To provide the necessary resources, including the impetus, opportunity and tangible benefits needed to enhance the role of NSW State Emergency Service volunteers for the betterment of the NSW State Emergency Service that will result in better prepared State Emergency Service volunteers and safer Communities across NSW.

“Supporting volunteers supporting our communities”

Vision

To enhance the role of the NSW State Emergency Service volunteers in a way that provides for the betterment of the NSW State Emergency Service and the individual.

“Volunteers supporting volunteers to improve our Service”

Values

Our values describe what we believe, how we act and our commitment to serve our members and the community.

Independent - We determine our own destiny through planning

Team Focused - We work as a team to lead our organisation making decisions based on merit

Advocacy - We are a voice for the volunteers, speaking up for and supporting their interests

Stewardship - We maintain and grow a sustainable organisation that diligently maintains its resources and invests in its people

Professionalism - We act, lead and support our people, inspiring them to achieve successful outcomes

“We are an independent organisation made up of a diverse group of professional people that work together to care for our members and to speak up on their behalf”

Context

According to Our Community

“The Australian community sector - sometimes referred to as the not-for-profit sector, nonprofit sector, third sector, or social sector - encompasses a broad range of organisations that are neither commercial nor governmental, all pursuing a range of charitable purposes through service delivery, grantmaking and other activities which advance health, education, social welfare and religion. It includes entities of all sizes - hospitals, community services, universities, sports clubs, religious groups, day care centres, recreation clubs, environmental groups, job-training centres, family counseling agencies, and many more.”

The Australian Charities Report 2014 states that the sector contributed 3.8% of Gross Value Added to the Australian economy and employed more than 1 million people in FY2014, representing 9.7% of the workforce.

Around 20,000 of the 600,000 not-for-profits in Australia have Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status or 3.3%. A quarter of these rely on donations for more than half of their income. The overwhelming majority of these are registered charities, granted tax exemption by the Australian Taxation Office on the basis that their work is to the public or community benefit.

Public Confidence

It is therefore extremely important that organisations that have DGR status do not damage the confidence of the philanthropic community that supports their activity by donating. Transparency and accountability are key.

The Australian Charities and Not for profit Commission (ACNC) has been set up and is now confirmed as the national body to oversight the compliance of the sector. It is the ACNC that should be charged with the sole responsibility to regularly review compliance with its operational and governance standards.

Comment

Point 20 on page 5 of the Discussion Paper and point 53 on page 10 indicate a fundamental philosophical flaw in the paper's approach which demands addressing.

The Government does NOT provide “a substantial financial contribution to Not For Profit (NFP) entities through tax concessions”. The contribution through tax concessions is from the donor community, which OWNS its money until it generously donates it to such NFP's for the purpose of achieving one or more elements of the public good. That achievement of the public good is work the government is relieved of doing and therefore doesn't need the tax revenue to undertake it.

A second concern that demands comment is the 10% of DGR's are government entities (which are precluded from being classified as charities). There are a number of examples of government entities raising funds from the broader community to achieve their core purpose by backfilling budget shortfalls. There are examples in the Health and Arts sectors.

This has the effect of government entities competing for the philanthropic community's support. Government clearly has no business competing with charities for the donors' dollar. Therefore, government entities should be precluded from DGR status. Should donors wish to support such entities, this should be done by giving through a separate entity, such as a foundation, with a separate board, which can hold DGR status and has control over the application of the donated funds, so they are not used to underpin core operating costs or returned to consolidated revenue.

Response to Consultation Questions

1 & 2 Currently registered charities and ancillary funds are eligible for DGR endorsement. This should be through registration with the ACNC in the first instance. This registration should then automatically qualify the entity for DGR1 (charity) or DGR2 (ancillary fund). The current rules should remain where DGR2's can only support DGR1's.

3 Nil response

4,5 & 6 Once registered with the ACNC, its Annual Information Statement process is the appropriate vehicle. If additional information about advocacy is thought to be necessary, then it should be requested on a case by case basis. There is no need to burden the majority of entities with supplying information, when questions will arise in only a few cases.

7 Nil response

8 To maintain the public trust, donated funds should always be applied to the purposes for which they were solicited. It is more relevant to apply a level of accounting standard and transparency of reporting than the current public fund requirements. Donors to disaster relief understand that there is a cost involved in getting the assistance to the victims it was given for. It's important to measure and accurately report that cost of administration rather than restrict organisations to a system of quarantined buckets. It makes sense to allow organisations to be endorsed in multiple DGR categories, which will facilitate more effective and efficient administration and reporting.

9 & 10 A rolling review program is an imposition on hard working organisations that are already complying with adequate ACNC requirements. Any such distraction will divert resources from serving the public good to serving bureaucracy. Annual certification is a reasonable way to prompt senior managers to review their compliance, especially where those managers change and take on the responsibilities of predecessors. When the ACNC has cause to look deeper at a DGR, either through failure to file or through complaints or tip-offs, then it should do so. It should begin with offering a helping hand and progressing the process and any revocation of DGR should be a last resort in the interest of protecting public confidence in the sector.

11 & 13 A sunset clause of any time frame is an unnecessary impost. Where there is reason to investigate a DGR's practices, the ACNC should do so, backed by the power to impose sanctions in order to prompt improved practices. The ultimate sanction would be the withdrawal of DGR status.

12 Arguably, advocacy and public education constitute environmental remediation.

In summary, all DGR's should be registered with the ACNC, probably as charities, including all ancillary funds and excluding all government entities. The ACNC should be the sole instrument of compliance and should have the power to impose sanctions to prompt compliance, with the power to withdraw DGR as a last resort.

Finally, there is a disturbing tone from the bureaucratic side of this community consultation. DGR is not a gift or support – the support comes from the philanthropic community. The work done by DGR's is the responsibility of government, which in many cases it has shifted its duty to NFP's and charities. The beneficiary is the broader community. In this context, the bureaucratic approach should be to minimise the burden of compliance, while protecting the public interest.