

# Submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee regarding the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)



the climate centre







## National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)

The Climate Centre wishes to contribute a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee regarding the proposal for the establishment of a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army). As per the terms of reference provided, the proposal is: “The formation of a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) to respond to the immediate aftermath of natural disasters in Australia, with particular reference to:

- (a) establishing targeted initiatives to encourage young people to participate in the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army);
- (b) exploring strategies to enhance volunteer engagement, including systems to recognise and compensate volunteers to promote satisfaction and positive culture;
- (c) integrating volunteer opportunities within educational institutions to increase student participation in volunteer organisations;
- (d) creating a nationally recognised qualification scheme that provides tangible benefits to volunteers and formally acknowledges their skills and contributions across sectors
- (e) investigating whether there are appropriate laws and safeguards to protect the health and safety of volunteers;
- (f) the structure and governance of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army);
- (g) comparison of relevant overseas models and best practices; and
- (h) any other related matters.”

The Climate Centre is supportive of this initiative. We wish to make further commentary regarding points a), c), d), and h), as detailed below.

### ***(a) establishing targeted initiatives to encourage young people to participate in the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)***

#### **Partnerships with Not-for-Profits**

Not-for-Profits are described by the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission that a not for profit is an organisation that does not operate for the profit, personal gain or other benefit of particular people (“Not-for-profit | ACNC,” 2025). They often have a community or environmental focus and give back to society. Many have a significant membership of volunteers with some operated exclusively by volunteers or assisted by paid staff.

Not-for-profits contribute to Natural disaster preparation, response and recovery across the entire system. Not for profits contribute to community resilience by encouraging collaboration between organisations and community members, improving information sharing, and building greater community trust overall (McDermott and Volunteering Australia 2022). In a natural disaster context this helps the community mobilise and prepare for upcoming disasters. For example, the Red



Cross provides training on crisis response processes and identifies areas of risk in the community as well as providing first aid training.

Not-for-profits deliver many of the key responses to natural disasters such as Foodbank that provides essential supplies, including food, water, groceries and cleaning products to those impacted by natural disasters. Foodbank also provides items that are scarce during the beginning of a natural disaster such as bottled water, batteries, toilet paper and food that do not require refrigeration and cooking due to a lack of power in the area before, during and after the natural disaster (Kasif 2023).

Not-for-profits contribute to the natural disaster recovery and act to get people on ground to volunteer. For example, BlazeAid is a not for profit that recruits volunteers to help to rebuild fences and other structures that have been damaged or destroyed during a range of natural disasters (BlazeAid, 2025).

Another not-for-profit that plays a role is Disaster Relief Australia which is a Veteran led volunteer organisation incorporating veterans and other volunteers to support natural disaster effected areas by ways such as education on risks posed by natural disasters, incident management for disaster management activities, ariel damage assessment and mapping, work order management, debris removal and restoring access, chainsaw operations, basic house repairs, spontaneous volunteer management and logistics management (Disaster Relief Australia 2024).

Since not for profits are so involved in the climate response space they should be included by partnerships with the proposed Climate Army to allow collaboration and integration of pre-existing services. This means that the Climate Army and existing not-for-profits can share the load of services and increase their impact through synergistic partnerships. In addition, youth involving not-for-profits with a focus on empowering youth should be a priority to form partnerships with. These organisations such as Scouts Australia or community service groups such as Rotary who have a culture of international and regional travel and volunteering can encourage their membership to engage on climate response issues the Climate Army is focused on.

### **Youth Led, Youth focused Recruitment**

Research by the Australian Communications and Media Authority states that 60% of 18-34 years olds compared to the 44% of 35+ year olds feel that digital technology gives them more control over their lives (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2021). The study also shows that only 41% of 18-34 years olds compared to 68% of 35+ year olds find that the changing digital technology landscape is too difficult to keep up with it (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2021). This shows that the younger generation and the target of the Climate Army are more confident and active on digital technology and that it is an avenue for them to use to engage with others and continue to keep up to date with. The engagement is especially strong on social media where 85% of Young Adults using at least one app (application) in the 6 months before June 2020: 91% of young people used Facebook, 83% used YouTube and 81% used Instagram with smaller proportions using other apps (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2021). The strong stance of



18–24-year-olds using digital technology and social media calls for a digital technology focused recruitment process that could be led by creative young people who are already engaged in the Climate Army to easily link partnerships and initiatives between young people.

***(c) integrating volunteer opportunities within educational institutions to increase student participation in volunteer organisations***

The VET sector is a key sector in Australia that is popular among young people as is university study. Engagement with these sectors can be key to supporting the membership of the Climate Army. According to NCVER data in 2023, 83% of students were non apprentices or trainees (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2025) meaning they studied in the VET sector without ongoing practical training to go with their studies. Of these VET students 21% were unemployed (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2025). There would be value to offering placement or volunteer roles targeted at students studying relevant courses to gain practical skills, this could also be targeted to university students studying relevant coursework. The volunteer roles and placements within the Climate Army should be considered more than just normal day to day activities of the organisation, but also by encourage students to bring and leverage a diverse skillset to benefit both their learning and the Climate Army.

***(d) creating a nationally recognised qualification scheme that provides tangible benefits to volunteers and formally acknowledges their skills and contributions across sectors***

**Recognised prior learning in the Climate Army**

Recognition of Prior Learning (or RPL) is described by the Australian Skills Quality Authority as part of the VET sector that recognises the skills gained from experience and provides a way to have skills recognised into qualifications and increase employability. Qualified assessors must undertake individual competency-based assessment to identify the training required to fill gaps in a person's knowledge and skills to meet the requirements specified in a training package ("Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)," 2025).

In a report in 2020 by NCVER the Diploma of Public Safety (Emergency Management) in its previous course version in 2020 was found to have over 92% of awards given as recognised prior learning rather than coursework (Osborne, Serich, and National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2020). This puts the possibility of the Climate Army providing this and similar qualifications as RPL likely to succeed. For example, the volunteers of the Climate Army may achieve the qualification by being an active volunteer for multiple years alongside earning additional qualifications as chosen to be relevant by the Climate Army's provider or in house volunteer led assessors.

***h) any other related matters***

The Federal Governments funding of natural disasters is significantly focused on relief rather than preparing for natural disasters. Between 2005-2022 \$23.99 billion was spent on disaster relief when only \$0.51 billion was spent on disaster resilience (Lefebvre, Reinhard, and The McKell Institute 2022). This should also be a focus of the



Climate Army to support disaster resilience and preparedness which would better support those impacted by natural disasters before they occur.

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## About the author

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## About The Climate Centre

The Climate Centre is a volunteer-run charitable not-for-profit focused on building bridges between research, policy and communities. It achieves this by undertaking research relevant to local communities, providing digital materials and outreach initiatives that make it easier to interpret climate information and apply it to a local scale, as well as engaging in policy analysis and advocacy to government, and fostering conversations and understanding at individual, community, and national scales through its various projects.