



Australian Multicultural Acton Network Inc

Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy JP
PRESIDENT

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

From:

Ravi Krishnamurthy, President
Association of Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)

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To:

Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: +61 2 6277 3535
Email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

I write on behalf of the Association of Multicultural Action Network (AMAN) in response to the Senate's referral of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) for inquiry. AMAN, an organisation representing a broad spectrum of multicultural communities across Australia, firmly supports the creation of a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme to address the increasing challenges posed by natural disasters, particularly those exacerbated by climate change.

This submission will address the key elements of the Terms of Reference outlined in the inquiry and offer our insights on how to make the Climate Army an inclusive, effective, and sustainable initiative that benefits both volunteers and the Australian community.

1. Encouraging Young People to Participate (Terms of Reference a)

The youth of Australia are crucial to the long-term sustainability and success of any volunteer-based scheme. To engage young people in the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army), we recommend establishing targeted outreach programs in schools, universities, and community centres. These programs should be designed to inform young Australians about the importance of climate resilience and disaster recovery, and how they can make a tangible difference by volunteering.



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Moreover, the scheme should consider partnerships with organisations like local youth groups and multicultural organisations, which can help mobilise diverse communities. Providing financial incentives such as scholarships, grants, or funding for higher education could further encourage youth participation.

2. Enhancing Volunteer Engagement and Recognition (Terms of Reference b)

To ensure long-term volunteer satisfaction, the scheme must incorporate systems for recognising and compensating volunteers. This could include:

- A points-based reward system where volunteers accumulate points for their hours worked, which can be exchanged for benefits such as training opportunities, travel discounts, or career advancement resources.
- Formal recognition programs, including awards ceremonies and certificates, to publicly acknowledge the critical contributions made by volunteers.
- Providing a ‘volunteer care’ system, offering physical and mental health support, and ensuring a safe working environment.

We also recommend creating a digital platform that allows volunteers to track their contributions, access learning resources, and connect with fellow volunteers.

3. Integrating Volunteer Opportunities into Educational Institutions (Terms of Reference c)

Educational institutions can play a significant role in fostering a volunteer culture. We suggest that the Climate Army collaborate with schools, universities, and vocational education and training (VET) institutions to integrate volunteer opportunities into the curriculum. This could be achieved by:

- Offering credit towards qualifications for students who participate in climate-related volunteering.
- Organising disaster-response simulations and practical volunteer experiences as part of the learning process.
- Encouraging educational institutions to create a “Volunteer Week” to raise awareness and engage students in real-world volunteer opportunities.

4. Creating a Nationally Recognised Qualification Scheme (Terms of Reference d)

To formalise the skills acquired by volunteers and enhance their employability, we recommend the establishment of a nationally recognised qualification framework. This should align with existing competency standards in the emergency management and environmental sectors.

Such qualifications should:



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- Be portable across different regions and industries.
- Allow volunteers to gain certifications in fields like disaster management, first aid, or environmental conservation.
- Provide formal pathways to full-time employment within sectors that benefit from volunteer work, such as emergency services or environmental agencies.

5. Protecting Volunteer Health and Safety (Terms of Reference e)

Volunteer safety is paramount in any disaster-response operation. The National Volunteer Incentive Scheme should include strict guidelines and training to ensure the physical and psychological health of volunteers is prioritised.

Specific measures could include:

- Offering comprehensive insurance coverage for all volunteers engaged in Climate Army activities.
- Regular mental health and wellbeing workshops for volunteers.
- Setting up emergency protocols and first-aid training to ensure volunteers are equipped to handle any situation.

6. Structure and Governance (Terms of Reference f)

A clear governance structure is essential to the effectiveness of the Climate Army. We recommend a multi-tiered governance model that includes:

- A central coordinating body to oversee national operations and policy implementation.
- State and local level coordination to manage regional volunteer needs and ensure that volunteers are deployed where they are most needed.
- Partnerships with community organisations, local councils, and businesses to facilitate on-the-ground volunteer efforts.

7. Comparison with Overseas Models (Terms of Reference g)

To maximise the impact of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme, it is important to review best practices from overseas. Models such as the United States' National Response Framework, which utilises volunteers in disaster response, and the United Kingdom's National Citizen Service, which encourages youth engagement, should be considered for their effectiveness in mobilising large-scale volunteer efforts.

By learning from these successful models, we can ensure that Australia's Climate Army is not only large in number but also effective in its operations.

8. Additional Matters (Terms of Reference h)



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In addition to the points raised, we urge the committee to consider the following:

- Promoting diversity and inclusion within the Climate Army by ensuring equitable representation from all cultural and ethnic communities.
- Leveraging technology, such as apps and social media platforms, to increase volunteer mobilisation and coordination.

In conclusion, the establishment of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) is a critical step toward building a more resilient Australia. By creating a system that engages young people, recognises volunteer contributions, integrates educational institutions, and ensures volunteer safety, we can develop a robust framework that will serve the community in the face of future climate challenges.

We look forward to the committee's review and the successful establishment of this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Ravi Krishnamurthy
President
Association of Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)