



Government House  
Canberra ACT 2600

As the proud patron for this year's International Year of Volunteers, I have been honoured to meet, work, talk and plan with many volunteers who have inspired me. It is something that I know a bit about, having been involved, for more than 40 years, with the whole voluntary cause.

I rejoice that this year is an opportunity to promote the great significance to our nation and to the world of voluntary service.

It is based on a tradition of mutual support, of mateship and practical help that goes back over 200 years of our history in this harsh, unyielding and sometimes dangerous land. It was an obvious thing for the young men in 1914 to be volunteers. They were simply doing what their forebears had always done in time of need and crisis to come forward and offer themselves. That's what you have done as volunteers.

Today there are many people in our society who may feel powerless to address the social problems around them. Many worry about the future but then see its protection as being someone else's responsibility.

Volunteers are different. Volunteers form the fabric of a civil society. They are its lifeblood. It is not only important what you do—of profound significance though that is—it is also important who you are, and what you stand for, and what you contribute to the building of a nation.

In their contribution to society and their support of others, I sense that many volunteers are able to feel a deep inner peace, a feeling which comes to all of us when we give ourselves to others.

But that does not mean that volunteers don't need recognition, back-up, encouragement and support, and indeed good management.

And that brings me to the theme of the National Summit for Emergency Management/Services Volunteers 'Value your volunteers, or lose them'.

It's hard to imagine that people who have played such a significant role in Australia's history as emergency service volunteers could ever be undervalued. I don't believe volunteers are or have been. But there's always an opportunity for a timely reminder.

When the nation needs volunteers, they are there—on land, sea or air; in times of fire, flood, cyclone or civil calamity. And that's always been the way over the past 100 years of our nationhood. But while the wider community salutes the efforts of volunteers in high profile emergency situations, I know that volunteer contributions behind the scenes continue day-by-day, month-by-month and year-by-year.

It should be said that not everyone is cut out to be an emergency volunteer. Many volunteers are required to take considerable risks. They are called out at short notice. They are expected to work

in uncomfortable, trying and sometimes dangerous conditions. In many ways that is the cutting edge of volunteering.

The National Summit focused on legitimate areas of concern to volunteers in leadership and management positions throughout emergency services in Australia. It's a credit to the organisers of the National Summit to have placed the key issues of recognition, funding, training and legal liability squarely on the agenda.

The Australian community as a whole wishes all volunteers well in considering these important issues and thanks volunteers for their continued work on its behalf.

*(This message is based on the opening speech for the National Summit for Emergency Management/Services Volunteers, 11 October 2001.)*

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Commonwealth of Australia