



SHARON CLAYDON MP  
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEWCASTLE  
2/06/2021

### VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS

I'm very pleased to speak on this motion before the Chamber today, moved by my colleague and friend the member for Parramatta. It is important indeed that we take an opportunity to stop, pause and reflect on the extraordinary contribution of volunteers in our nation and in each of our communities. I know that each member speaking wishes to do that. I certainly have a tradition in Newcastle where I hold an annual event to recognise the extraordinary contribution of volunteers in the federal electorate of Newcastle. I have been doing that since I was first elected in 2013, and I have awarded almost 270 individuals and at least 17 community based groups and organisations with recognition.

It is unimaginable. Our community would be a very, very different kind of place without volunteers who are working in our surf clubs, our sporting associations, our historical societies, our school P&Cs and our cultural institutions like community based cinemas. Our community service organisations ensure there is adequate food for people in our communities and reach out to those suffering mental ill-health. It always blows me away how each one of those volunteers is incredibly humble, does not expect to receive recognition and always thinks they're not deserving of recognition, yet thousands of other Novocastrians clearly disagree when they're nominating them to receive these awards each and every year.

There's another very important part of this motion which I want to bring to the attention of the Chamber. We don't get to just stand up here and pat ourselves on the back, congratulating our volunteer organisations. I have listened very carefully to the government contributions, and there has been little mention of the fact that our volunteer resource centres now—in regions like yours and mine; certainly in Newcastle—are being starved of funds. They are being literally starved of funds. We recognise that the volunteer organisations have increased need now because of the global pandemic, and the stress on volunteer organisations has been immense throughout COVID-19. But organisations that help make sure that our community has the volunteering capacity that is required, organisations like the Hunter Volunteer Centre, are about to lose their funding altogether. So let's not pat ourselves on the back, members of this government. This is not a time for hubris or self-congratulations. The Hunter Volunteer Centre has been assisting volunteers in my region for more than 45 years now. They have an extraordinary track record of assistance. More recently, in the past 20 years, they have directly assisted over 26,000 people to find volunteering opportunities in our community. They reach out to organisations to build their capacity to attract, sustain and maintain their volunteering base. It's incredibly important work.

What we learnt from the recent COVID restrictions is that people are willing to socially distance. They are willing to do what is necessary. But there is a very strong desire to reconnect now in our communities, for our regions to come together. So for the Hunter Volunteer Centre the decision of this government to effectively take away funding from regional centres, like the Hunter, and allocate it just to big state peak bodies is devastating news. It is effectively assigning local volunteer resource centres to the history books—not good enough. Members opposite should be lobbying their minister, as I am, to overturn this decision, to back our local resource centres— *(Time expired)*