

STATE EMERGENCY AND RESCUE MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT (COORDINATION AND NOTIFICATION OF RESCUES) BILL 2013

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Second Reading

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.40 p.m.], on behalf of Mr Greg Smith: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the State Emergency and Rescue Management Amendment (Coordination and Notification of Rescues) Bill 2013. The bill amends the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 to implement two key recommendations arising from Mr Philip Koperberg's report, "Inshore Water Rescue—A review of procedures". Madam Acting-Speaker, you and I had the pleasure of serving with Phil Koperberg when he was a member in this place. Phil was recognised as having reformed and advanced the Rural Fire Service. He did an excellent job and is highly revered in the area of emergency rescue.

As members may be aware, Mr Koperberg was commissioned by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Health to oversight the strengthening of response procedures between different emergency service organisations where a person who requires rescue is in the water. It is unfortunate that sometimes reviews are generated from tragedies that have occurred and the catalyst for this review was the tragic death of a rock fisherman at Little Bay in November 2012. That matter is currently before the Coroner.

To inform the review, a series of stakeholder meetings was held and views were sought on the adequacy of the existing arrangements, areas in need of improvement and how that might be achieved. Agencies consulted included the NSW Police Force, the Ambulance Service of NSW, Surf Life Saving NSW, the Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association, Marine Rescue NSW and the Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter (Southern Region). The Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service was also consulted in his capacity as chair of the State Rescue Board.

Overall, the review noted that New South Wales has some of the most robust emergency response protocols in the country. The review made 18 recommendations, including the two legislative amendments that I present to the House today. Other recommendations relate to enhancements to policies, procedures and the use of technology. These include a requirement for the State Rescue Board to direct all agencies that the NSW Police Force rescue coordinator be notified immediately when a call necessitating a rescue, including an in-water rescue, is received; amending the definition of "marine rescue" in the New South Wales State Rescue Policy to include the rescue of persons in the water; and amending the marine standard operating procedures for accredited search and rescue coordination centres, marine rescue units and marine radio bases to include the rescue of a person in the water, regardless of whether they originated from a vessel or on land.

The New South Wales Government accepted all 18 recommendations arising from Mr Koperberg's review and these are in the process of being implemented. Amendments to the State Rescue Policy have already been made by the State Rescue Board, fully acquitting this aspect of the review's recommendations. Those amendments have been implemented in advance of the review of the State Rescue Policy, which I understand is scheduled to take place later this year. The State Emergency and Rescue Management Act is the overarching

piece of legislation governing rescue arrangements in New South Wales.

Introduced in response to a 1988 report into rescue services, the Act contains clear responsibilities for rescue management and establishes the State Rescue Board. For the effective implementation of rescue arrangements, it is essential that the Act provides clear guidance on which agency has overall coordination of rescue operations. Part 3, division 3, of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act currently states that the senior police officer present at a rescue operation has responsibility for coordinating and determining the priorities of action of the agencies engaged in an operation. However, the Act is silent on the scenario where a police officer is not already present.

The first recommendation in the review is that the Act be amended to clearly provide that the NSW Police Force has primary responsibility for the coordination of rescue operations in New South Wales. The bill seeks to address this by spelling out that the NSW Police Force is responsible for coordinating rescue operations and for determining the priorities of action to be taken in rescue operations. In doing so the Act remains clear that while police have responsibility for the overall coordination of rescue operations, agencies retain control of their staff.

To facilitate the police coordination role, the second recommendation in the review is that the Act be amended to require that all emergency service organisations notify the NSW Police Force of rescue incidents. At present the Act does not contain such a general requirement and the bill implements this recommendation. These amendments bring the legislation in line with contemporary rescue management policy and current practice. All members would be deeply appreciative of the efforts of the professional people involved in the rescue of people in New South Wales, whether they are police officers, ambulance officers, fire officers or the large number of volunteers in the State Emergency Service, the Rural Fire Service, Surf Life Saving and so on. The community is a far better place for having that level of dedication. I commend the bill to the House.