

STATE EMERGENCY AND RESCUE MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT (CO-ORDINATION AND NOTIFICATION OF RESCUES) BILL 2013

Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Michael Gallacher.

Second Reading

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Hunter, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) [4.07 p.m.]: I am pleased to introduce the State Emergency and Rescue Management Amendment (Co-ordination 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". Members may be aware that Mr Koperberg was commissioned by the Minister for Health and me to oversee the implementation of new emergency response protocols for inshore water rescues.

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The catalyst for this review was the tragic drowning death of a rock fisherman at Little Bay in November 2012. That matter is before the coroner. In accordance with the terms of reference, Mr Koperberg was asked to oversight the strengthening of response procedures between different emergency service organisations where a person in the water requires rescuing.

To assist with the review, a series of stakeholder meetings were held and views were sought on the adequacy of existing response arrangements and the areas in need of improvement and how these improvements may be achieved. Agencies consulted included the NSW Police Force, the Ambulance Service of New South Wales, 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 NSW Rural Fire Service was also consulted in his capacity as chair of the State Rescue Board. The Koperberg review identified a number of opportunities for the establishment of more robust protocols for inshore water rescues. Eighteen recommendations were made, including the two legislative amendments included in this bill. Largely procedural in nature, the remaining recommendations included: 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; a requirement for all emergency services to amend existing procedures and protocols to incorporate common guiding principles, including that the NSW Police Force be recognised as the tasking authority for rescue coordination; and that multi-agency notification protocols be exercised on a regular basis.

The recommendations also included that the definition of "marine rescue" in the New South Wales State Rescue Policy be amended to include the rescue of persons in water; the Ambulance Service of New South Wales amend its computer-aided dispatch system to include a category of "person in water" rescue; and that the marine standing operating procedures for accredited search and rescue co-ordination centres, marine rescue units and marine radio bases be amended to include the rescue of a person in the water, regardless of whether they originated from a vessel or on land. The Government has accepted all 18 recommendations arising from Mr Koperberg's review, and these are in the process of being implemented. I am pleased to advise that those recommendations that require an amendment to the State Rescue Policy have already been approved by the State Rescue Board. These will be implemented in advance of the review of the State Rescue Policy, which I understand is scheduled to take place later this year. I commend the bill to the House.