

**EXAMINATION OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL'S
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORTS SEPTEMBER
2013 – JULY 2014**

Organisation: NSW Rural Fire Service

Date Received: 24 September 2015



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



Mr Bruce Notley-Smith MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly – Public Accounts Committee
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Your reference:
Our reference: HQ15/1250

Dear Mr Notley-Smith

Auditor-General's Report on the Fitness of Firefighters

I am writing in response to your letter dated 6 August 2015 requesting the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) provide to the Legislative Committee a response to the Auditor-General's *Report on the Fitness of Firefighters*, tabled 1 April 2014.

I am pleased to provide your office with this report that documents the action taken by the NSW RFS in response to the four recommendations of the Fitness of Firefighters Performance Audit. This report also addresses in more detail the action plan that was developed by the NSW RFS in addressing the requirements of the four recommendations.

- Implementation of Recommendations in the preferred format. Attachment 'A'.
- A list of reference material used by the NSW RFS in relation to the Fitness of Firefighters Project. Attachment 'B'.

The approach of a Health and Fitness Plan for the NSW RFS has been approved by the NSW RFS Executive; (this has evolved from the Fitness of Firefighters Project and involves strategies and timetables for the future implementation of initiatives identified by the process). The draft Health and Fitness Plan is currently in the consultative phase through the NSW RFS' Work Health & Safety (WHS) Harmonisation Working Group, a consultative group that comprises a combination of NSW RFS management, employee and volunteer representatives.

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I would also like to address the action taken by the NSW RFS in respect of the Performance Audit and the NSW RFS Corporate Plan 2014-21. Under Key Focus Areas and Objectives:

- 4.1 Safe, supportive and inclusive culture and practices
- 4.2 A diverse, flexible, adaptive and sustainable Membership that is representative of the community
- 4.3 Informed, engaged, capable and valued members.

The NSW RFS has taken specific action to include the Fitness of Firefighters into its ongoing Corporate Planning cycle and this will continue to be the case as this action is seen to be of positive benefit to all NSW Members. This will ensure that it remains a key focus of the planning strategy for the NSW RFS in the coming years.

It should be noted that the above - builds on the work that the NSW RFS already undertakes and was reported on through this Audit in respect of some key workforce segments requiring a higher level of fitness testing, namely Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus, Remote Area Firefighting and the State Mitigation Teams. Additionally we have the stringent requirements placed upon staff and volunteers who participate as part of the Aviation Response Teams.

Overall, the NSW RFS involvement in this audit and through implementing the resulting recommendations it has had a positive impact on the NSW RFS. The effectiveness of the audit was due to the positive and professional nature of the audit team. The audit itself was conducted in a very collaborative manner. In regards to the request by the Public Accounts Committee for feedback on the effectiveness of the audit process, the effectiveness of the audit was enhanced by the time the audit team took at the commencement of the audit to understand the complexity and diversity of the NSW RFS as a major volunteer community based organisation. This time spent on the explanation and discussion proved invaluable during the site visit where the auditors were interacting with the cross section of the Service's membership.

As the scope of work had already been prepared there was considerable time taken by both parties on understanding how the scope of work could logistically be completed in a timely fashion to meet the audit needs. While the audit need was met in regard to this audit, it would be of benefit for future audits for discussions regarding the practical audit aspects to be commenced prior to the final scoping. The benefit of having consistent auditors, one team and a centralised contact cannot be underestimated in relation to the effectiveness of the audit. The NSW RFS found that it enabled the internal contacts to be more focused on the practical aspects of the audit.

On occasion the time constraints, based on the audit also being coordinated with Fire and Rescue NSW, meant that the timeframe for review and comment was restricted. This prevented a more thorough and detailed review with relevant persons.

The benefit of the audit can be seen by the accelerated the approach that the NSW RFS had commenced, with regard to task analysis of firefighting roles, and provided a body of work which has triggered a strategic approach to programs for improvement. These include:

- The continuation of a health & fitness strategy for the Corporate Plan 2015/16
- A draft Health & Fitness Plan
- Consideration of a specific Working Group for consultation, review and monitoring of the final plan activities

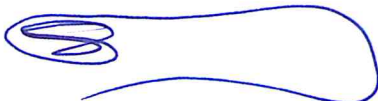
The audit also increased members awareness of the NSW RFS as a public sector agency and increased the transparency of management process for our members.

The NSW RFS did not use a quantified cost approach to the audit as the additional value to the existing direction of the Service was recognised. No additional resources were provided for the audit and any additional costs were absorbed by the Agency.

The main opportunity for improvement would be as discussed earlier, an initial opportunity for auditors to meet with relevant NSW RFS members to increase the auditors' knowledge and understanding of the Service and enable any scope of work to be defined according to that knowledge.

Should your office require any further information, please contact the Director Membership Services, Mr Daniel Moroney on 8741-5558 or by email at danny.moroney@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shane Fitzsimmons', enclosed within a blue oval shape.

Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM
Commissioner

24-9-15

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

NSW Rural Fire Service
Fitness of Firefighters

	Recommendation	Accepted or Rejected	Actions to be taken	Due Date	Status Comment (completed, on-track, delayed)	Responsibility
1	by April 2015 undertake a risk analysis on the current approach to managing the health and fitness of volunteer members, particularly those who actively fight fires (page 34)	Accepted	a) Identify and collect existing and relevant NSW RFS documents, procedures and processes associated with the management of health & fitness of NSW RFS volunteers.	31/08/14	Completed	Health, Safety & Welfare Section (HSW)
			b) Appropriately skilled and experienced external provider undertakes risk analysis of all materials collected in Action 1(a) and provide a report with recommendations associated with current NSW RFS approach to health and fitness of volunteer members.	30/09/14	Completed	Executive Director of Membership & Strategic Services (EDMSS)
			c) NSW RFS Working Group to analyse outputs from Actions 1(a) and 1(b) and provide a report with recommendations to the NSW RFS Executive	31/12/14	Completed	HSW

	Recommendation	Accepted or Rejected	Actions to be taken	Due Date	Status Comment (completed, on-track, delayed)	Responsibility
2	by April 2015 introduce health and fitness initiatives to encourage volunteer firefighters to maintain their fitness (page 34)	Accepted	a) External provider (who conducted work in Action 1(b)) to prepare and submit a report with recommendations of initiatives that are appropriate for NSW RFS development and implementation to support the goal to promote and encourage NSW RFS volunteer firefighters to maintain fitness levels.	30/11/14	Completed	HSW
			b) NSW RFS Working group established in Action 1(c) to consider report submitted by external provider (Action 2(a)) and prepare draft plan for NSW RFS health and fitness initiative.	28/02/15	Completed	HSW
			c) NSW RFS Executive to review, update and endorse Health & Fitness initiative plan	31/03/15	Delayed The NSW RFS Executive have considered the Ethos Health report and the recommendations from the FOFWG. The approach for development of a phased plan has been approved. The draft Health & Fitness plan is in the consultative phase and will be forwarded to the EDMSS for endorsement at the end of the consultative period.	EDMSS
			d) Commence implementation of approved programs of work of Health and Fitness initiatives	30/04/15	Completed Health and Fitness initiatives to commence with Leadership Conference May 2015	HSW

ATTACHMENT A

	Recommendation	Accepted or Rejected	Actions to be taken	Due Date	Status Comment (completed, on-track, delayed)	Responsibility
3	by April 2015 establish a checklist to assist brigade captains in managing the health and fitness of their members (page 34)	Accepted	a) External Provider utilised in Recommendation 1 and 2 to develop a checklist for Brigade Captains to assist in managing the health and fitness of brigade members.	31/10/14	Completed	HSW
			b) NSW RFS Working Group reviews output of Action 3(a) and submits checklist to NSW RFS Executive for approval.	30/11/14	Completed	HSW
			c) Distribute and communicate Executive approved checklist to NSW RFS Captains and supported with relevant information to Captains and other NSW RFS members.	31/01/15	Delayed A checklist has been developed. Modification has occurred based on internal consultation and feedback. Distribution has been delayed until an education and awareness campaign is conducted.	Executive/HSW
4	by April 2015 consider a three-year renewal of self-assessment and declaration of medical conditions by volunteers (page 34)	Supported 'in principle' subject to recommendations from 1	NSW RFS Executive analyse outputs from Recommendation 1 to determine if a 3 year renewal of self-assessment and declaration of medical conditions by volunteers is an appropriate action.	30/04/15	Completed	Executive

References relating to the NSW RFS Fitness of Firefighters Project

The following references can be obtained from the HSW Section on request:

- 1 Terms of Reference (TOR) for Fitness of Firefighters Working Group (FOFWG)
- 2 Ethos Health Report: *NSW Rural Fire Service Volunteer Firefighter Health and Fitness: Risk Analysis and Recommendations Version 3: 1st October 2014*
- 3 FOFWG – Risk Analysis Report, MEMO/HSW/1438, 23 December 2014
- 4 Ethos Health Report: *NSW Rural Fire Service Volunteer Firefighter Health and Fitness Initiatives Version 1: 21st November 2014*
- 5 FOFWG – Health & Fitness Initiatives, MEMO/HSW/1518
- 6 Ethos Health Report: *NSW Rural Fire Service Brigade Captains Checklist V2.0 18th November 2014*
- 7 FOFWG – Brigade Captain Checklist MEMO/HSW/1429
- 8 FOFWG modified checklists to become Guides to meet NSW RFS culture and IMSAFE principles
- 9 Advice from Clayton Utz lawyers, 17 March 2015
- 10 Ethos Health Report: *NSW Rural Fire Service Recommendations for 3 year renewal and other beneficial processes Version 1: 19 December 2014*
- 11 Review of Ethos Health Recommendations for 3 year renewal and other beneficial processes, MEMO/HSW/1514

