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10 November 2003



Mr M Brown MP
Chairman
Public Accounts (Legislative Assembly Committee)
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir

I write to you as chair of the 'Ambulance Service of NSW: Readiness to respond Inquiry'.

On reading the transcript of the 5 November 2003 hearing of the inquiry, I was surprised to read that no mention was made of the non implementation of one of the key recommendations of the performance audit report:

"review the contribution the Service makes to the State's rescue capabilities".

Pages 95-97 give information supporting the recommendation. The thrust of the recommendation was that the Ambulance Service should review its role in rescue and concentrate on its core roles and suggested that the NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) and/or the State Emergency Service (SES) could take over its role in rescue.

At its meeting on 20 July 001 the Ambulance Service Board decided in the first instance to withdraw its rescue units in the Sydney Metropolitan Area. This would involve ambulance rescue units at Bankstown, Camden, Caringbah, Parramatta, St Ives, and Gosford (which for rescue is included in the Greater Sydney Area). On 28 August 2001 the Ambulance Board put its proposal to the State Rescue Board (SRB), which determined to consider it in the context of a review of rescue services across NSW. The SRB was to make a recommendation to the Minister for Emergency Services (Hon. Bob Debus) following its next meeting on 27 November 2001. The rationale for the Ambulance Service Board's decision was "to enable us to establish more rapid response units and is intended to release more officers for the delivery of clinical care and to improve responsiveness to all cases."

Following a concerted public campaign by the ambulance rescue officers union, the Health and Research Employees Association (HREA), the Ambulance Service withdrew its proposal at the subsequent 27 February 2002 meeting of the SRB.

It was therefore alarming to read in the 6 November 2003 edition of the Daily Telegraph of the continuing inability of the Ambulance Service to improve its performance benchmark of responding to emergency calls within ten minutes. It had only increased from the abysmally low level of 52.8 per cent to 53.1 per cent in the last financial year. The millions of dollars currently spent each year in maintaining an ambulance rescue service (vehicles, equipment, personnel and training) would be


better spent in concentrating on its core services such as improved response to medical emergencies and leaving rescue to the NSWFB and SES.

It is pertinent to ask why the Ambulance Service is involved in rescue when you consider that it only has 14 primary rescue units out of 193 across the state. Of the other 179 primary rescue units across the state, there are 44 NSWFB, 77 SES and 49 VRA (Volunteer Rescue Association) and 9 Police.

The spurious assertion by ambulance rescue officers that only they were competent to perform rescue work because of their basic medical training is mere humbug and a non sequitur. Based on that absurd premise ambulance rescue should be the provider of rescue services in all 193 rescue districts. Empirical experience has shown that it is better for an ambulance officer to provide objective advice to NSWFB or SES rescue officers during a rescue operation rather than an ambulance rescue operator acting subjectively.

Has your committee finished its deliberations and if not can the issue of rescue be revisited ?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Fitzpatrick', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Frank Fitzpatrick