

**Submission
No 5**

INQUIRY INTO VIOLENCE AGAINST EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL

Organisation:

Name: Mr Greg Golds

Position:

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Submission for Inquiry into Violence against Emergency Service Personnel

27 May, 2016

My name is Greg Golds and I am an Intensive Care Paramedic, employed by NSW Ambulance for the past 22 years.

I am stationed at Murwillumbah Station on the Far North NSW Coast.

I am an administrator and founding member of a social media group called Triple Zero Tolerance (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/zerotoleranceworldwide>), which started as a result of the apparent rise in incidents of assaults against emergency services, together with what the community considers to be repeated lenient sentencing for those found guilty of the crime of “assault member of public office”. The reduction of incidents of assaults against Emergency Service Personnel (ESP) is at the core of our ongoing social media campaign.

I submit that the terms of reference for this enquiry include the following personnel employed as public officers and therefore should fall under the protection of such crimes:

- Paramedics
- Police
- Firefighters
- Nurses, doctors, clerical staff, wardspersons and security officers in Emergency Departments within hospitals
- Correctional Officers
- Volunteer rescue officers
- Remote area nurses
- All Emergency Service Agency Call takers

It is my opinion, through years of first hand experience while employed as a paramedic, that the number of incidents involving assaults against ESP is simply unacceptable, appearing to spiral out of control in recent history.

Together with the number of assaults against ESP, public sentiment is that the penalties and punishments served to those found guilty of such crimes is nothing short of laughable if not for the serious nature of the incidents.

All too often, these criminals that are found guilty of assaulting ESP are simply sent back out into the community to reoffend, with nothing other than a slap on the wrist handed down by the presiding magistrates. In my role as administrator of the social media group that I oversee, which currently has over 7500 members, we are seeing first hand the fact that these lenient sentences and suspended sentencing are occurring with monotonous regularity, and these public officers are at the end of their tether, and three and a half thousand of them have signed the attached ePetition calling for both mandatory and tougher sentences for these criminals.

<https://www.change.org/p/introduce-mandatory-minimum-and-increased-maximum-sentences-for-assaults-on-emergency-service-personnel>

I submit, for your consideration, the introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing of periods of incarceration in prison for those guilty of such crimes, together with

excuses such as alcohol and drug intoxication no longer being considered as excusable reasons for such unforgivable behaviour as has been historically. An immediate 6 month period of incarceration, together with a sliding scale of duration of incarceration for those found guilty of more serious assaults, up to a maximum of 7 years, together with the doubling of that sentence to 14 years if weapons are involved (either real or implied) as is currently in place in Queensland. This mandatory sentencing has been in place in Northern Territory when legislation changed there in 2008 regarding assaults on police officers, and in Western Australia since amendments to their laws were implemented in 2009. There has been a 27%-33% decrease in the number of charges of assaulting a public officer prescribed under the legislation in W.A.. There has been a 30% decrease in the number of charges of obstructing a public officer, which indicates that members of the public may indeed be substantially more cautious of their behaviour when dealing with ESP. (sources: Perth Now Sunday Times <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/western-australia/mandatory-sentencing-review-finds-assaults-against-wa-police-officers-drop-by-one-third-over-four-years/news-story/63fb5736345b5487345fffa193e8f19d> together with WAtoday <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/wa-police-mandatory-sentencing-laws-deterrent-or-not-20140626-zsmnc.html>). Mandatory sentencing has been proven to work as a deterrent for those who would find themselves perpetrating such crimes as is evident in Western Australia since its inception, with a drastic decrease in incidents occurring almost immediately after legislation changed.

Together with mandatory sentencing, I would ask that the Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) laws be enforced more stringently. As a paramedic, I am routinely tasked to attend incidents at pubs and clubs, directly as a result of these premises serving members of the public alcohol until intoxicated. These intoxicated persons, together with the testosterone fuelled peer pressure found in such places, often find themselves striking out and assaulting not only fellow patrons of such establishments, but also the ESP that are tasked to pick up the pieces of their drunken assaults. These laws are already in place, but evidence can be readily seen on any Friday or Saturday night of obvious breaches of such laws, resulting in not only anti-social, but dangerous and sometimes deadly behaviour by these intoxicated persons. It is these persons who the ESP are routinely called to, to provide assistance or from the perspective of police officers, to sometimes contain and arrest to stop them from continuing to cause such incidents. It is also the role of paramedics to march head-long into these environments, armed with nothing other than good intentions and caring natures. Sadly, often these intoxicated persons turn on these paramedics and assault them during transport to hospital. It is not my intent to bring about a state of prohibition, not at all. Instead, to call for appropriate enforcement of the laws which are already in situ in NSW, to decrease such alcohol-fuelled violence borne in licensed premises throughout this State.

I welcome any and all feedback, comments, questions you may have with regard to this submission and may be contacted by [REDACTED]

Kind regards,

Greg Golds