

**Submission  
No 66**

## **ASSETS, PREMISES AND FUNDING OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE**

**Organisation:** Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS

**Date Received:** 10 May 2024

## **Submission by NSW RFS Menindee Headquarters Brigade**

# Public Accounts Committee Review into the Accounting Treatment of RFS Assets 2024

To the Chair Mr Jason Li and committee,

The NSW RFS Menindee Brigade is located in the Far West of NSW approximately 110km from Broken Hill and is situated along the Darling River within the Central Darling Shire Council area (CDS Council) and is the only emergency fire suppression, marine operations and Road Crash Rescue service provider to this community.

Menindee is a unique part of NSW with a population of approximately 550 people that live within the town limits and on surrounding rural properties where the RFS are the primary volunteer-based support for fire operations both structural and wildfire we also have a road crash rescue function as well. The Brigade recently acquired 2 small marine craft for operations along the Darling River.

The Menindee Brigade is central to the safety of its community and where required has deployed to out of area requests for support of other RFS teams.

Our current fleet consists of:

- 2 x Cat 1 large tankers
- 2 x Cat 7 off road light trucks
- 1 x Cat 16 personnel carrier
- 1 x Large rescue boat
- 1 x small inflatable boat
- 1 x Road Crash Rescue Vehicle
- 1 x Pump trailer

The Menindee RFS Brigade undertakes the following roles:

1. Firefighting including village and grasslands
2. Assist Ambulance service with patient extractions from premises
3. Road Crash Rescue response
4. Assist with vehicle recovery, stranded or bogged vehicles, Central Darling Shire (the largest Shire Council in NSW by area) has huge area of unsealed roads
5. Flood mitigation mainly the pumping of water

6. Post flood clean-up of premises
7. Undertake runway safety inspections for the Royal Flying Doctor ariel service at all hours of the day to ensure there are no kangaroos on the runway to ensure the aircraft and crew safety.
8. Undertake community welfare checks where the Police are not available
9. Boat retrievals and assisting recreational boat occupants to safety
10. Conduct Darling River inspections using our craft at the request of government agencies
11. Support local community events such as ANZAC Day, school functions and other community sporting events.

The current ownership of RFS assets remains the responsibility of the NSW RFS, vehicles and boats are clearly marked as NSW RFS and whilst we support the local council and community where we can with non-operational support, this is done only when there is no operational requirement and solely at the discretion of the Brigade Captain.

The current arrangements for the provision building assets and resources such storage sheds, the allocation of land and the fuel supply has until recently been done under the control of the CDS Council.

Under the standing arrangements fuel for the above list of vehicles has until recently been provided by CDS Council by way of fuel card for each vehicle. Some months ago, CDS Council stopped honouring this agreement and as such RFS Menindee has since and continues to rely on the goodwill of the local fuel provider for after hours access to pumps. This remains a huge impost on that business and the Brigade as we are unable to provide out of area support as our vehicles cannot be refuelled enroute. This situation would be eliminated if the NSW RFS had control of its assets and resources and make the volunteers jobs a lot more streamlined.

The RFS Menindee Brigade currently has 48 members with 25 members being active currently. We have 9 accredited Road Crash Rescue operators, 4 boat trained members and have a terrific working relationship with surrounding RFS teams of our area. Should the NSW RFS gain control of its assets, buildings and resources these relationships can only get stronger resulting in a more efficient and cost effective RFS across the state.

The NSW RFS is a structured organisation with the capacity to manage building assets, red fleet vehicles and has the capacity to utilise its existing financial management team to effectively take on the additional responsibility. This process would simplify the steps taken in the process which currently requires both organisations to liaise and manage such resources. This is both ineffective and financially doubling the administrative cost to support the NSW RFS by NSW taxpayers.

Menindee Brigade refutes the viability of continuing to operate as the NSW RFS does now, it is the not best option and is not cost effective. NSW RFS needs to be

able to stand on its own loREALS and run its own organisation as an emergency service provider to the communities of NSW.

The current processes places additional burden on the CDS Council and frustrations on the volunteers. The CDS Council and the unincorporated areas are the only two local government areas without NSW Fire and Rescue. The CDS Council is currently under administration and the running costs far outweigh revenue raised by the council which places the NSW RFS in a very tenuous position.

We are now in the twenty first century and it is time that the NSW RFS be allowed to stand up, run and be responsible for its own assets and equipment without the additional layer of local government being responsible for asset and financial management of the NSW RFS, it is common sense to bring the RFS into a statewide service provider environment.

The lives and the property of NSW residents and visitors to our state depend on the NSW RFS being both operationally effective and cost effective for the people of NSW. This can only be achieved if the NSW RFS has total control over its assets and resources without having to rely on local government politics to acquire land, buildings and funding for operational support costs.

The Captain and volunteers of the Menindee RFS Headquarters Brigade invite the committee to come and see for yourselves how frustrating and ineffective the current arrangements are and speak to our members to appreciate just how much easier it would be for them to serve their community under a better independently managed organisational structure within the RFS.

Thankyou for the opportunity for us to provide you with the views of the 'boots on the ground' volunteers and why the NSW RFS must be independent of local government restraints for funding and building assets. We look forward to seeing you.

Kind regards,

Rob Woods

Secretary

Menindee Headquarters Brigade

NSW RFS