



RFSA

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The Director
Portfolio Committee No.4 – Legal Affairs
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Inquiry into Emergency Service Agencies

Attached responses to questions taken on notice during the proceedings before Portfolio Committee No.4 – Legal Affairs Emergency Services Agencies on 18th September 2017 are referred for the information of the Committee.

Further to my responses to the questions taken on notice I wish to provide additional information to the Committee:

1. It is noted that during the hearing, witnesses representing the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association (VFFA) referred to a survey they inferred had been facilitated by the VFFA. From the respondent figures quoted at the hearing, this appears to be the 2016 National Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey (<https://www.vfbv.com.au/?ui=desktop>) which was conducted by the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA) of which the NSW Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) is the largest member.

The RFSA has already provided Committee members with a full copy of a report analysing the volunteer firefighter responses in the 2016 National Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey. The RFSA also referred to relevant NSW firefighter specific findings of the survey in its submission to the Inquiry.

If there is, in fact a separate VFFA survey then we encourage the Committee to seek further information to determine whether the conclusions match those of the National Survey. We would also encourage the Committee to obtain the full data set from the survey together with details of its methodology and not just a 'summary' of the results.

2. We note that the witnesses representing the VFFA refused to disclose any details of its membership numbers when asked by the Hon. Catherine Cusack MLC. We understand that the VFFA has consistently refused to provide this information to

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its own members. We would ask that the Committee continue to pursue the disclosure of this information and ensure it is made publically available for the benefit of both NSW Rural Fire Service members and the general public.

3. In responding to a question raised by the Chair (see page 20 of transcript) relating to information contained in RFSA Executive Report 2016/17 tabled at the hearing, I agreed with his observation that during that year the Association changed its corporate structure. In fact the change took place in 2012 at the request of the NSW Department of Fair Trading due to financial thresholds on income, assets and expenditure for incorporated associations.
4. I also need to clarify that, whilst we did not specifically say to every member "have you been bullied" (see page 26 of transcript), information about the Parliamentary Inquiry including its terms of reference was communicated to members through various sources including the State Council and Facebook networks. Members were encouraged to make a submission to the Inquiry by the closing date. Additionally the National Survey sought responses to the following statements:
 - ❖ *Workplace bullying is not tolerated in brigades of which I have been a member.*
 - ❖ *The Agency (NSW Rural Fire Service) works actively to discourage bullying.*

I trust that the answers provided to the questions taken on notice together with the additional documentary evidence will be of benefit to the Committee in its deliberations.

Thank you once again for providing this Association with the opportunity to appear before the Committee and on behalf of our members I wish you well in your endeavours.

Yours faithfully,

Ken Middleton
President