

Marc Stigter PhD MSc MMgnt MBA

4 August 2023

Ms Abigail Boyd MLC
Chair, Public Accountability and Works Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney
NSW 2000

By Post and Email

Dear Ms Boyd

Inquiry into the NSW Government's use and management of consulting services

I refer to your letter of 28 July and the attached copy of the submission (**Submission**) provided by the Fire Brigade Employees' Union (**FBEU**).

I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to respond to the Submission which is replete with factual errors, allegations portrayed as facts and deliberate mischaracterisations.

Introduction

The Submission is described by the FBEU as a "case study" which has been submitted by the FBEU to address issues raised in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. In fact, it is simply another step in the FBEU's long running campaign against Paul Baxter, the now former¹ Commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW (**FRNSW**) and the implementation of the 'Plus Plan'.

First, the attitude of the FBEU to the former Commissioner, and indeed the entire leadership of FRNSW, can be seen from its description of its leadership and management as "*careerists obsessed with achieving their own KPIs to advance their own fortunes*".

Second, from the outset, the FBEU mischaracterised the Plus Plan. It was not, as suggested in the Submission, a rebranding exercise. Rather, it was a fundamental transformation of the agency, the implementation of which has been the subject of much criticism by the FBEU.

The FBEU's approach to these issues is clearly reflected in the Submission and it would seem that my engagement is being used to further that campaign.

My Background and Expertise

The expertise I bring to my clients is the product of my academic and research background; some twenty years working in senior corporate roles in the UK, Australia and the Middle East, and the consulting practice I have conducted since 2006.

In 2010 I was awarded a PhD by the Lancaster University Management School. I also hold three master's degrees.

I have served as a Program Director at Melbourne Business School and an Honorary Senior Fellow at the University of Melbourne.

I have published two books with a third forthcoming on strategy and culture.

My Engagement by FRNSW

¹ At the time the Submission was provided to the Committee Mr Baxter was the FRNSW Commissioner.

The scope of my engagement

Contrary to what the FBEU asserts in the Submission, I was not engaged by FRNSW to undertake a “rebranding initiative” or to create a new “identity” for the agency. Rather, I was engaged to assist FRNSW to develop and implement a strategy for transforming it from a traditional fire brigade to an organisation that was equipped and capable of responding to the full range of risks faced by the people of New South Wales.

The Plan focused on seven immediate priorities –

1. **Safety and wellbeing** – Reducing firefighter exposure to carcinogens and building mental health and resilience in all staff.
2. **Training** – Improving the agency’s programs and delivery methods to provide training that would better prepare retained and permanent firefighters.
3. **Develop organisational approach to risk reduction** – Increasing the agency’s accountability at all operational and management levels to not only reduce risk, but to influence legislative changes and prevention education so the community is better prepared.
4. **Enhancing response capabilities** – Increasing the agency’s core competencies, including counter terrorism and emergency medical response.
5. **Communication** – Improving communication with the community and each other so that the agency and its staff would better informed and prepared.
6. **Reducing red tape and bureaucracy** – Streamlining the agency’s processes and removing barriers so that the agency would be better prepared and could react faster in any situation.
7. **Inclusive workplace** – Improve the agency’s culture and removing unwanted behaviours.

The Submission is similarly misleading in its description of my work with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (**FENZ**). Once again, it was not a simple rebranding initiative. Rather, it involved a large-scale strategic amalgamation combining all urban and rural fire services across New Zealand into a single, integrated fire and emergency services organisation.

My relationship with Commissioner Baxter

The Submission asserts that Mr Baxter had a conflict of interest in relation to the engagement as he was a “*personal friend*” of mine.

I was not a personal friend of Mr Baxter.

In 2008 Mr Baxter attended the Advanced Management Program at Melbourne Business School, Melbourne University where I was the Program Director. I was subsequently engaged by what is now known as Fire and Emergency New Zealand to advise on a strategy that led to the major restructuring of New Zealand’s urban and rural fire and emergency services as referred to above.

In 2015 I published a book with Sir Cary Cooper entitled *Solving The Strategy Delusion*. Mr Baxter was one of 15 people from several organisations with which I had previously worked who provided an endorsement. Neither he, nor the other 14 people, received any payment or other benefit, save for a copy of the book following its publication, for that endorsement.

The engagement process

I am unable to comment on the assertions made in the Submission in relation to the processes used by FRNSW to engage my services. I am unaware of how FRNSW applied its internal procurement processes.

What I can say is –

1. I was not engaged by Commissioner Baxter.
2. My first engagement came about after the office of then Deputy Commissioner for Strategic Capability, _____ asked me to submit a proposal. This request came after I was contacted by Mr Baxter who told me that FRNSW was proposing to undertake a transformation of the agency similar to that which had been undertaken in New Zealand. That engagement involved the design, preparation (including interviews), facilitation and delivery of FRNSW's Annual Strategy Conference in 2017 with the Executive Leadership Team and Directors.
3. My subsequent engagement to develop the Plan was submitted in response to a request from the then Director of the Project Management Office, _____ asked me to submit two proposals: one for FY 18 and one for FY 19, which I submitted accordingly.
4. My fees reflect my academic and research standing, my professional experience, and the perspectives I bring from over 30 years practice in the field. The fees I charged FRNSW were similar to those charged to FENZ and reflected the discounted rate applied to government as is common in the consulting industry.

The OCM Investigation

At page four of the Submission the FBEU has set out what it describes as a series of allegations made in a Public Interest Disclosure (**PID**) involving what it describes as the "*relationship between Commissioner Baxter, Dr Stigter and FRNSW*".

In February 2021, the Independent Commission Against Corruption (**ICAC**) referred the allegations to FRNSW for investigation. FRNSW then engaged a specialist investigation firm, O'Connor Marsden & Associates (**OCM**), to investigate the matter prepare a report for the ICAC.

While the next 10 pages of the Submission are devoted to an attempt to make good those allegations it is not until the final page of the Submission that the FBEU begrudgingly concedes that **none** of the allegations were substantiated.

I note that this submission will be published on the Committee's website.

Yours faithfully,

Marc Stigter PhD MSc MMgnt MBA