

**THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS OF THE NSW
AMBULANCE SERVICE**

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Partially Confidential

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Please accept this submission as supplementary to my earlier submission (No. 19).

I wish to comment on aspects of supplementary submission 55a by the Health Services Union in regard to ambulance rescue.

Some claims made by the HSU in its submission for the retention of the ambulance rescue units can at best be described as mischievous and at worst simply bogus. I will address the claims seriatim as they appear on pages 10 to 12 of submission 55a.

Performance audit No. 140 “Coordination of Rescue Services’ by Auditor General

HSU claim: the NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) is fudging its figures in relation to rescue call-outs.

Fact: The performance audit unfortunately contains some incorrect information in relation to rescue call-outs in the audited year of 2003/04. The report states at page 14 that there were a total of 10,876 rescue call-outs by the five rescue agencies and that NSWFB accounted for 36% of the callouts which equates to 3915 instances. However, the 2003/04 annual report of the NSWFB records (page 59) 7587 ‘non-fire rescue calls for that year. Up from 5869 in 1999/2000. There has been an increase in each of the intervening years. Based on the figure of 7587 the share of call-outs by NSWFB would be 70% which would be more in keeping with the number of rescue units operated by NSWFB. The number of rescue call-outs by NSWFB has continued to increase as NSWFB has taken over some volunteer rescue units that had ceased to be viable.

Year	NSWFB rescue call-outs
1999/00	5869
2000/01	6522
2001/02	6995
2002/03	7550
2003/04	7857
2004/05	8631
2005/06	9718
2006/07	11555

A significant reason for the increase in later years can be attributed to many volunteer rescue units of the SES and VRA suffering declining membership and local rescue committees have requested NSWFB secondary rescue units to provide a dual primary response. FOI information obtained by me shows that NSWFB is currently providing a dual response with SES units at Bourke, Lake Cargelligo, Cobar, Kempsey, Alstonville, Moree, Tenterfield, Warialda, West Wyalong and Harden and with VRA units at Batemans Bay, Bangalow, Tweed Heads, Barraba, Glen Innes, Coolah, Walgett and Warren.

Multi-agency approach

HSU claim: Loss of ambulance rescue would lead to loss of multi-agency approach. There is a multi-agency approach across Australia as shown in following table.

Victoria	Police, SES, CFA, MFB, VRA
SA	SES, Metro Fire
WA	SES, Fire
QLD	SES, Fire

Fact: It is interesting that the fire services are listed last in the HSU table when it is these services that are the major suppliers of rescue services in those jurisdictions. As an example I quote from the website of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia which says "*The majority of those rescues were performed by especially trained Fire and Rescue Service firefighters. However, volunteers from State Emergency Service units and Volunteer Emergency Service units also undertake this role in designated areas*".

The HSU submission fails to make any reference to Tasmania. This was the only other Australian jurisdiction that had an ambulance rescue role. In June 2005 the Tasmanian government set up the Road Accident Rescue Review under the chair of Dr John M (Jack) Sparrow, former Chief Medical Officer. The Review unanimously recommended that the ambulance rescue role be transferred to the Tasmania Fire Service. The recommendation was accepted by the government and the transfer took effect in 2006.

Police in Victoria are not involved in general land rescue. Like most states they have a small search and rescue squad for bush/alpine SAR and specialist police operations.

The only VRA unit in Victoria is the Echuca/Moama unit. It has been stripped of its accreditation by the SRB as the primary rescue unit for Moama. It is unclear whether it still functions in Victoria.

The actual multi-agency structure in Australian jurisdictions is as follows.

Victoria	Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Country Fire Authority, SES
South Australia	Metropolitan Fire Service, Country Fire Service, SES
Western Australia	Western Australian Fire & Rescue Service, SES
Queensland	Queensland Fire & Rescue Service, SES
Tasmania	Tasmania Fire service, SES
Northern Territory	Northern Territory Fire & Rescue Service, SES
ACT	ACT Fire Brigade
Major Airports	Aviation Fire & Rescue

Vertical rescue

HSU claim: "If ambulance rescue was destroyed, NSW would lose 14 accredited vertical rescue units".

Fact: The SRB website shows that ambulance rescue only has 10 of its 14 units accredited for vertical rescue. The NSWFB has more vertical rescue units and has both the capacity and capability to have more accredited.

How can ASNSW deliver such rescues with two operators? One rescue operator will go down to the person trapped, the second rescue operator is up the top running the rescue. How can one rescuer haul up a rope with two persons on the end, despite the use of mechanical advantage and hauling systems? World wide best practice is four to six operators for a vertical rescue. NSWFB always responds with safe and effective crewing. In any case a SCAT operator would usually be providing the medical component of the incident with the rope recovery being done by the accredited rescue agency or helicopter.

Chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) incidents

HSU claim: Ability to respond to such incidents would be diminished with the demise of ambulance rescue.

Fact: Under the State Disaster Plan (DISPLAN) and the Fire Brigades Act, the NSWFB is the combat agency for CBR/HAZMAT rescue.

Special Casualty Access Team (SCAT)

HSU Claim: Inference that SCAT would also be at risk.

Fact: According to Ambulance Service insiders there needs to be more SCAT paramedics in NSW. SCAT paramedics will not be disbanded or down graded in any way, in fact it is possible that by divesting the ASNSW rescue role that more money may be available to be injected into the highly respected and professional services of SCAT.

Confined space rescue

HSU claim: Loss of expertise if ambulance rescue to cease.

Fact: How can the ASNSW rescue units claim and moreover, carry out confined space rescue with only two rescue operators? You need at least one rescuer as the outside controller and two rescuers in breathing apparatus (BA) as BA teams must work in pairs. For every rescuer inside or below ground you need the same amount of back up personnel. This means, two rescuers in and two rescuers ready to back-up those inside. Plus the person running the operation, makes a minimum of five. NSWFB is the only service that can truly deliver BA teams and Confined Space rescue due to their numbers, training and equipment. NSWFB always respond with safe and effective crewing and has specialist HAZMAT units to support their rescue teams if needed.

Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)

NSWFB is the lead agency in this highly specialised rescue role. A number of rescue operators from all five agencies have been trained to Category 1 level. This is a 'first responder' role and is the level to which ambulance rescue officers have been trained. NSWFB USAR officers have been trained to the higher Category 2 level. This is the level to which ambulance SCAT officers, not ambulance rescue officers, have been trained by the NSWFB and are part of the USAR team with NSWFB rescue officers and HAZMAT technicians.

Fire Rescue

The NSWFB is the combat agency for all rescues involving fires in their areas of operations. No other rescue agency is equipped with appropriate PPE, training and equipment to do this.

Can Ambulance Rescue provide a 24/7 rescue service?

The HSU states that ambulance rescue units have a 'surge capacity'. Only a couple of years ago ambulance rescue was in such dire straits that NSWFB lent two of its rescue trucks in order for it to continue operating. In a number of locations, such as Cowra, the NSWFB are responding to fill short falls of ambulance rescue. In any case the same if not better capacity would be given by NSWFB units, plus they would have more personnel on each fire rescue unit providing a greater weight of attack. Ambulance rescue trucks have a maximum of two rescue operators on board.

The ability of the Ambulance Service to continue to provide a 24/7 rescue service is highly questionable. Information obtained under FOI from NSWFB shows that in the 2004/05 financial year NSWFB had to provide rescue cover for ambulance rescue units on 149 occasions due to them being off-line. There were 60 occasions in 2005/06, 69 occasions in 2006/07 and 51 occasions for the first eleven months of 2007/08. I emphasise that these occasions are only reported off-line availability by ambulance rescue and I suspect that the true figures may be much higher.

The information contained in this submission may be of assistance in posing questions to potential witnesses including subject matter experts of the Ambulance Service of NSW at the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Frank Fitzpatrick