

Submission
No 203

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

Name: Suppressed
Date received: 30/07/2008

Partially Confidential

Dear Committee Members

After reading the submissions to your inquiry, I feel compelled to respond to some of the allegations made about the NSWFB by Ambulance Rescue Officers. It appears that many submissions are an attempt to smear the NSWFB, without any attempt to present facts.

I am a NSWFB Rescue Station Officer with over 10 years of experience. I have instructed all aspects of rescue and worked closely with all other rescue providers in the state. I have also experienced the provision of rescue services around the world.

I was initially concerned after reading allegations about the quality of NSWFB rescue in various newspapers (Maitland Mercury, Newcastle Herald). These allegations are total misrepresentations of the truth by the HSU and need to be addressed.

In the Maitland Mercury, HSU organiser Peter Rumball stated that "Rescue is a medical process not a mechanical process" and that firefighters are not trained to perform the rescue role. These comments are obviously aimed at scaring the community and are totally untrue. To use the HSU's logic, then all 323 rescue units across the state should be ASNSW rescue units, not the 14 they currently have. As NSW is the only place in the world with Ambulance Rescue, then obviously the rest of the world has got it wrong also.

I have been involved in World Rescue challenges around the world, and can assure you that the NSWFB rescue practises are among the best in the world. In fact, NSWFB rescue teams have taken out the World's Best rescue team title on two occasions at the challenges. (http://www.wrescue.org/uk/rescue_challenges/)

Whilst I understand this is an emotive issue, I feel the Committee needs to examine the facts, rather than take submissions at face value.

I would like to address some of the more outrageous claims made by some submissions

Submission 159:

Point 7: The NSWFB did not suggest they should be responsible for all rescue, but offered their services when the management of the ASNSW indicated they would divest themselves of the role. The NSWFB has consistently assisted the ASNSW to maintain their rescue function, including supplying two rescue vehicles to the ASNSW to ensure they could continue to provide rescue services. Over the last three years the NSWFB has been called upon to cover for ASNSW rescue units on over 150 occasions!

Point 8: The NSWFB does provide vertical (SRT) abilities. All NSWFB firefighters are trained to a basic vertical (SRT) rescue level. All Primary Rescue operators have more advanced vertical (SRT) training, commensurate to the risks in their rescue area. The NSWFB actually provides more Vertical Rescue (SRT) units than the ASNSW does. (Source SRB Website)

Submission 181:

The author asserts that Singleton FB achieved their rescue accreditation in 2 days. This is incorrect. A full training program was provided for these firefighters.

All ASNSW USAR Category 2 personnel in the NSWTF1 Urban Search and Rescue Team are SCAT not Rescue. There is a difference between the two. The author implies that ASNSW rescue personnel are USAR Category 2 trained.

One person can not perform two roles effectively. At a rescue incident, rescuers "rescue" and medical personnel "treat". They are two distinct roles for a reason, as both require the utmost concentration on the task at hand. Both roles work together to achieve the best outcome for the patient. This system works extremely well whether the rescuers are NSWFB, ASNSW, SES, VRA or Police.

The figure that Secondary units can only deal with 70 % of road crash incidents is incorrect. Secondary units are only ever called if the Primary Unit is unable to respond, or need further assistance.

NSWFB Secondary training is more than one weekend. I know this because I have participated in it.

"The NSWFB has a track record of expansion at the expense of the people of NSW"
The author provides no evidence or examples. If you are going to make a statement like that you need to provide facts to prove it.

The author states the FBEU ran a public campaign which took rescue from Penrith VRA. The VRA at Penrith was already in trouble with membership, hence the public campaign, not the other way around. The VRA unit actually approached the SRB as they could not provide sufficient operators. This information is in the public domain.

The author states that ASNSW rescue units are dedicated rescue and NSWFB units are not. The ASNSW does not have dedicated Rescue units, as they respond to medical emergencies as well. This is no different to the NSWFB which will respond a rescue appliance to a major fire. The difference is that the NSWFB has the capacity to backfill rescue units, which the ASNSW does not. In fact, the NSWFB regularly covers ASNSW rescue areas when they are not available due to medical incidents and other reasons.

The author states the NSWFB vertical manual is a 10 – 12 page draft copy. I have a copy of the NSWFB's vertical rescue manual in my hands right now. The basic level manual is 51 pages and the intermediate level manual is 72 pages. I do not have a copy of the advanced manual on hand, but I know it is over 30 pages. The information provided by the author is incorrect. These manuals are available from the NSWFB Rescue Section on request.

The "duplication" section of this submission seems a straight out attack on the NSWFB, and has no real relevance to the issue at hand. In the interest of accuracy, here are some facts:

NSWFB Investigation Unit – The role of the FIRU (Fire Investigation and Rescue Unit) is to provide a strategic range of prevention strategies to both Government and the Communities of NSW. The unit provides a range of investigative and research services to both internal and external customers. Research into human and structural behaviour during fire, and, the associated impacts for performance based building design, are both key areas being researched by members of the unit. Additionally, the unit publishes technical papers and post incident analysis of the incidents to which front line firefighters respond. That means it investigates and researches with a view to fire safety. How is this duplicating the Police Arson unit, which investigates arson with a view to prosecuting offenders? (Source: NSWFB and NSW Police websites)

SES – The NSW State Storm and Flood Plans defines the role of the NSWFB, which is to assist the SES when requested by the SES. In the initial period following the impact of the emergency, the NSWFB also receives requests for assistance from the public via the Triple Zero system and may attend to the initial tasks. This is because the NSWFB has the necessary skills and equipment to respond in a timely manner to save life and property. Many of these jobs are then handed over to the SES. This means the NSWFB supports, not duplicates the role of the SES. (Source: NSWFB/SES MOA)

EPA –The EPA are still involved in Hazmat. They provide guidance at Hazmat incidents, and the NSWFB provide the manpower to render the site safe, usually under the direction of the EPA at major incidents.

The author states that prior to 1989 the NSWFB did not have rescue units. This is incorrect. The NSWFB has had rescue/salvage units since the early 1900's. An original blueprint (circa WW1) for a rescue/salvage unit is framed on the wall at Burwood Fire Station. There are recorded incidents of the NSWFB carrying out rescues from over 100 years ago including Heights, Depths, and Confined Spaces using Breathing Apparatus. (Source: NSWFB Historian, State Library Newspaper archives.)

Bushfires – NSWFB never replaces RFS volunteers with firefighters on OT. NSWFB operate at bushfires on the urban interface, protecting property, where as the RFS operate primarily in a rural environment. The NSWFB/RFS has a cooperative approach to firefighting.

The NSWFB heavy rescues do attend Third alarm fires, but another NSWFB rescue unit is always moved up to ensure coverage at all times of all rescue areas. In fact the NSWFB RIT procedure states that NSWFB rescue personnel must not be used for Rapid Intervention teams, but may be used to assist a RIT.

ASNSW did not introduce Trench Rescue Training. Prior to the ASNSW organising a Trench rescue course at Roselle in July 04, (on behalf of the SRB) the NSWFB had attended trench rescue training in Melbourne and had a published Trench Rescue manual.

ASNSW did not introduce Swiftwater rescue training. The NSWFB rescue unit at Burwood was the only Swiftwater rescue team in the metro area for many years, and the only NSW Police/NSWFB/ASNSW team in the state until recently, when ASNSW and NSW Police rescue personnel were trained.

ASNSW did not introduce atmospheric monitoring. NSWFB rescue/salvage units have carried atmospheric monitoring devices for over 20 years, whereas ASNSW has only introduced gas detectors in the last 5 years. Gas Detectors are an integral tool of firefighting and Hazmat, and have been for years.

Submission 183:

Section 4:

The author states that ASNSW rescue units can attend incidents outside of their rescue area. If the ASNSW rescue unit is responded outside their rescue area, who will cover their rescue area? Why not use SCAT officers for these medical access roles, who are highly trained, and do not result in a rescue area being left unprotected?

SCAT officers are not Ambulance Rescue officers as suggested in this report. Whilst some SCAT officers come from a rescue background, the level of training is totally different. I know this from working with SCAT officers as part of the NSWTF1 USAR taskforce.

The author makes claim about the quality and length of other agencies rescue courses. The level of training for rescue operators is stipulated by the State Rescue Board, not by individual agencies. All agencies must meet this basic level.

Submission 184:

The author states the NSWFB does not keep records or have training manuals. I can assure you this is not the case, as I have maintained these electronic records in my role as an instructor. I have also contributed to the training manuals. Full copies of these records and manuals are available for the NSWFB rescue section.

The author states that ASNSW personnel can apply both rescue and medical skills. As mentioned earlier, the rescuers role is not to treat the patient, but to extricate the patient. A paramedic is tasked with providing patient care. You cannot do both jobs at the same time effectively.

The submission states that ASNSW rescue units provides a first responder role. Wouldn't a first responder be much safer and more efficient in a car rather than a 10 tonne vehicle?

This author mentions Confined Space rescue. NFPA 1670 is the North American standard for technical rescue, and is World's Best Practise. This standard states that the minimum number of rescuers for a confined space rescue is 4. This is to allow for Breathing Apparatus back up crews. All ASNSW units only carry 2 personnel. This means they can not provide a back up crew as per best practise. The NSWFB can provide Breathing Apparatus back up crews as all NSWFB firefighters are trained Breathing Apparatus operators, and all NSWFB appliances (at 328 stations in NSW) carry atmospheric monitoring equipment. Only 14 ASNSW rescue units carry this same equipment.

Submission 186:

This submission is at odds with other in that it states ASNSW rescue units are multiple response, i.e. respond to rescues and medical jobs, where as other submissions state they are dedicated rescue units. Likewise this submission also states the NSWFB rescue units are dedicated rescue units, when other submissions state they are not. Obviously some there is confusion amongst ASNSW rescue personnel as to their role.

The author states having the least amount of rescue officers makes the ASNSW more efficient. This is not necessarily a good thing. Many rescues (Confined Space, Trench, USAR and Swiftwater, for example. Source NFPA 1670.) require more than the 2 operators to be carried out safely. The facts about NSWFB manning are incorrect. SRB policy states a minimum of 2 operators are required on a rescue unit. NSWFB metro based Heavy Rescues carry 2 rescue operators, but are usually supported by a Pump/Rescue with another 4 firefighters. Country units of the SES, VRA and NSWFB will usually have more than 2 operators. Primary Rescue Units can also be supported by USAR/ Technical Rescue Vehicles based in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. Whilst these vehicles are available to assist any agency, they are rarely called upon by other agencies due to inter service rivalries.

Submission 187:

The author states that 200 CBR personnel will be lost. In a CBR incident, patients usually undergo mass decontamination before being treated. The rescue and decontamination of these people is the responsibility of the NSWFB under state legislation. In most cases, only limited numbers of Ambulance officers (usually SCAT) will be required in the hot zone.

The author states over 200 specialist USAR personnel will be lost. This is incorrect as any ASNSW personnel can be trained to USAR Category 1 (First Responder) level, like all NSWFB firefighters, many SES, and NSW Police officers. The SES can provide well over 200 Category 1 USAR personnel, without depleting rescue resources from around the state. Who will cover the ASNSW rescue areas if the rescue operators aren't there? The only Ambulance Service Category 2 USAR personnel on NSWTF1 USAR taskforce are SCAT officers, not rescue officers.

Hazmat Support will not be affected as it can be performed by Paramedics operating in the Cold Zone with only Hazmat awareness training.

Confined Space workload will not be affected. Confined Space will actually be safer as the ASNSW rescue do not have back up Breathing Apparatus (BA) crews to ensure their safety. Only ASNSW Rescue and SCAT officers are BA trained. All NSWFB firefighters are BA trained.

The financial figures are incorrect as the NSWFB does not need to purchase trucks or equipments, as they are already part of the NSWFB inventory. In fact the NSWFB will have two rescue vehicles they loaned to the ASNSW returned. New firefighters do not need to be employed as they are already in place, and only require upgraded training.

The above information is an overview of some of the obvious mistakes and misleading information in some submissions.

Please do not take my word about these facts, investigate them for yourselves, as the facts are easily obtainable from the public records.

Please feel free to contact me for further information.