

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

**Name:** Suppressed  
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Partially Confidential

The Director, General Purpose Standing Committee No 2,  
Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000.

**Re: Inquiry into the Management and Operations of the NSW Ambulance Service**

To Members of the Committee,

I wish to make a submission to the inquiry into the Management and Operations of the NSW Ambulance Service.

I joined the service in the eighties and after nearly two decades resigned disillusioned. I served in Sydney Division, Northern Division, and Western Division. I was an Advanced Life Support (Level 4) Ambulance Officer. I also acted as Station Officer (Branch Manager). I also spent a number of years dealing with Occupational Health and Safety Issues.

The road staff were poorly treated and viewed the management with utter contempt. Staff called the organisation, 'The NSW Ambulance Circus' (because it was run by Clowns). State HQ (Rozelle) was known as Roswell (Where strange things happen). People you never heard of, were given jobs with titles you never heard of.

Ambulance management in itself is dysfunctional. Staff had no faith in management. My biggest grievance was management's persistence in hiding operational problems. A District Officer said to me, 'I fully agree with everything you say, but if I was to tell Sydney about all these problems, I'd be committing career suicide'. (No pun intended)

These were his exact words. I had reason to raise another matter of concern with another manager who asked me nicely to 'knock it off'. And when I asked why, I was told, 'Your damaging my career'.

Harassment and bullying is systemic throughout the organisation mainly due to the cover-up mentality that persists.

Numerous past inquiries have contained mostly the same findings yet, how many of these recommendations were ever implemented? The organisation is extremely resistant to change.

I saw many examples of nepotism which was encouraged. People would know who was getting the jobs before they were advertised. This system succeeded in promoting 'YES' people. I strongly believe that recruitment and promotion should be conducted by an external agency (Stop the Jobs for the Boys).

The Professional Standards and Misconduct Unit should be abolished altogether. (Its like the Police investigating the Police)

Again, give the task to an external agency, it's the only way to stop the rot.

I support the idea of a uniformed officer as Commissioner to bring the Service in-line

with the Fire and Police Services (Absolutely vital in Disaster and Major incidents).

I personally never met Mr Rochford nor had any dealings with him. The staff have lost confidence in his abilities to effectively manage the organisation. Mr Rochford should accept this fact, and move on.

There is currently a push for 300 extra officers.

Why should the NSW Taxpayers fund an additional 300 staff when the NSW Ambulance Service cannot effectively utilize its existing resources in a cost effective and productive manner.

The Ambulance Service is a finite resource, however, the service is being abused by certain sectors of the community. Paramedics are attending thousands of frivolous calls. Examples from my own experience include: tight fitting dentures, squeeze my pimple for me, light my cigarette, a lift to the local shops, I can't sleep, tight fitting shoes, help me put my cardigan on; and all coming through the '000' network.

Water is vital for life, when the resource is in short supply, we limit its use.

The same principal should apply to the NSW Ambulance Service.

Ask any Paramedic how many frivolous calls they attend. The committee would be surprised at the figures. Consideration should be given to introducing a call fee.

A public education (media) campaign is necessary to educate the public, as a significant number can't tell the difference between a Taxi and an Ambulance. I was dispatched on numerous occasions to give advice to the public. The Co-Ordination Centre would apologize and say 'sorry mate we have to send you'. A media campaign may be considered expensive, but its a lot cheaper than 300 Paramedics. What would the Paramedics prefer ? 300 extra staff or thousands of less frivolous cases.

Look at the ratio of emergency (Paramedic) and non-emergency (Patient Transport) cases. I suggest the ratios of the workload does not reflect the ratio of Paramedic/PTO staffing levels. Why are so many Paramedics tied up with routine cases ? The Ambulance Service currently does not have a skill mix that reflects the workload. Rosters do not reflect peak periods of demand. (For example: Afternoon shifts and use of Part Time staff utilized in peak times).

Better resource allocation can be achieved through skill mix and rostering.

Look for solutions to overcome/reduce hospital block.

Hand over the heavy rescue to NSW Fire Brigades, maintain/increase the Special Casualty Access Team Officers. The Ambulance Rescue men and women do a great job, and I am proud of them, BUT, in times of stretched resources, we need them to handle patients, not a piece of mechanical equipment. You will still have SCAT.

Instead of employing 300 extra staff, stamp out the harassment and bullying to prevent 600 from leaving.

If the situation is still not resolved, then ask the tax payer to fund additional resources.

Like most Ambulance Officers, I had OH&S concerns in a number of areas.

One was the issue of fatigue. Officers were demanding a fatigue policy and rest breaks. When I suggested we end the 14hr night shifts things turned real nasty.

How can you address the issue of fatigue when Ambulance Officers insist upon doing 14 hr night shifts. The rationale that was given was; 'If you reduce our 14 hr nights, we'll have to work 12 hour days, and we just won't do that'.

Reduce the 14hr night shifts to a maximum of 12hrs.

When I worked in the rural areas, periods of long distance driving were common.

We would work all night, and we were expected to front up the next morning and work all day. It can be best summed up by the following equation:

More Work=More Money; More Work=More Fatigue/Stress

Less Stress/Fatigue=Less Work=Less Money

Some Ambulance Officers are earning large amounts of money in overtime, but are also accumulating large amounts of stress and fatigue. They are reluctant to change as this will result in less money. Some of them have grown accustomed to this level of income.

This is an issue that requires further attention.

Whilst serving in a rural area I was assisted by honorary officers.

One of them applied to join the Ambulance Service. After 6 attempts

and 6 failures they gave up but still remained an honorary officer.

The reason given on all 6 occasions was; failing the driving test.

This person had driven many times whilst I was attending a seriously ill patient in the back of the Ambulance. I found the honorary officers driving to be good.

The Honorary Officer was deemed not competent enough to be an Ambulance Officer and get paid, BUT, deemed competent enough to be an Honorary Ambulance Officer and do the same job and not get paid. Does this sound rather odd ?

During my time in the Ambulance Service I know of eight suicides; three of them I knew personally, and one who tried and failed. I find it incomprehensible, that in a job with two and a half thousand work colleagues that these people felt they had know one too turn to and were left with only one option of resolution.

I spoke to a peer de-briefer only once. It was a trivial matter and not that important.

However, I was alarmed when my entire conversation was repeated back to me by a senior manager. This peer de-briefer was promoted 8 weeks later(Confidentiality).

There is a significant number of people that I observed in the Ambulance Service who exhibited signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder who were either unaware or in denial (This issue needs to be addressed urgently).

I did not intend to resign but merely wished to go from full-time to part-time.

I tried to discuss this matter with a District Officer who said; 'If you don't like it, leave'. Strange as it was, it was the best advice I ever received from an Ambulance Service Manager. I'm now much happier and stress free. I still know people in the job who are reluctant to make a submission to your committee for fear of reprisal.

The issue of flexible work practices needs to be addressed as with the issue of part-time employment.

I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to present my submission.