

Supplementary  
Submission  
No 19a

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

**Name:** Mr Frank Fitzpatrick

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17 July 2008

The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

I am the author of submission No. 19 to the above Committee currently holding an inquiry into the management and operations of the NSW Ambulance Service.

I write to you in regard to Recommendation 27 contained in the Head Report following a comprehensive review of the Ambulance Service of NSW (ASNSW). The report recommended "*That the Ambulance Service rescue function be transferred to NSWFB. The Ambulance Service, in consultation with NSWFB and the HSU, should develop a transition plan (by 1 December 2008) to facilitate the transfer*".

Since the report's release I have been alarmed at the blatant misinformation being published in regional newspapers such as the *Maitland Mercury*, *Singleton Argus*, *Newcastle Herald*, *Tamworth Northern Daily Leader* and *Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser*. Health Services Union spokesmen are muddying the waters with statements intended to curry public concern.

In the *Maitland Mercury* of 7 July 2008 HSU organiser Peter Rumball is reported as saying "*Rescue is a medical process not a mechanical process*". Based on that premise the Ambulance Service should be operating all 323 accredited land rescue services in NSW not just the mere 14 it currently operates. At every rescue incident general duties ambulance paramedics attend to monitor the health of a person trapped. That is their role. The extrication of the person whether by fire, ambulance, police or SES officers is simply a mechanical operation. He perpetuates the alarmist nonsense by saying "*But now we are to have a group of people (fire officers) performing a medical function they are not trained to do*".

The above misinformation is repeated in the *Tamworth Northern Daily Leader* of 8 July 2008 by HSU representative Sean O'Connor. HSU Riverina sub-branch vice-president continues with the same theme in the *Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser* of 11 July 2008. And today in the *Singleton Argus* Peter Rumball repeats the fiction of rescue being a medical operation. He added "*The majority of people once they are rescued need medical attention, and firefighters aren't trained to provide this*". Once again he fails to mention that this is the role of general duties paramedics.

My research has taken in various fire rescue departments in the United States where most paramedic services are provided by the local fire department / service. Private ambulance companies operate in areas where paramedic services are not run by fire departments. Senior officers I spoke to at various fire halls / stations emphasised that although a fire department paramedic vehicle turned out with the fire rescue truck when responding to a rescue incident, the paramedics did not perform the rescue extrication but were there to provide clinical medical advice only. The same officers said that their paramedics would be compromised if they were to act as rescue operators as they could not objectively perform the dual roles of rescue operator and paramedic. They said that during a rescue operation decisions have to be made that may cause conflict between the perspectives of the rescue operator and paramedic and for

the same person to wear both hats has the potential to cause a conflict of interest that may result in the wrong decision being made.

I recently wrote to the Newcastle Herald to bring some balance to an article that appeared in that paper on 8 July 2008. The paper published an edited version of my letter. On 13 July I received an anonymous letter (attachment B) from a serving ambulance paramedic in Newcastle with 25 years experience. He states that 90% of ambos do not support rescue as a core role of the Ambulance Service. In the course of my research I speak to many emergency service personnel and the only ambulance officers that support rescue are the ambulance rescue officers themselves. Even SCAT would like to see rescue go to another service so that their specialty can have a much needed financial input.

I should point out that the author of the letter incorrectly infers that I am a 'firey'.

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.

With only 14 rescue units out of 323 statewide, the Ambulance Service is a boutique player and should concentrate on its core role of emergency medical response and pre-hospital treatment and leave rescue to the other emergency services as recommended by the Head Report. This would enable at least 181 ambulance paramedics to return to full-time core ambulance duties, a role for which they were originally recruited.

I trust that this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Frank Fitzpatrick