

**INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INQUIRY INTO THE
MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS OF THE AMBULANCE
SERVICE OF NSW**

Name: Mr Frank Fitzpatrick

Date received: 17/01/2010

13 January 2010

Hon Robyn Parker MLC
Committee Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

Dear Ms Parker

**Review of the implementation of the recommendations of the
Inquiry into the management and operations of the Ambulance Service of NSW**

I refer to your letter of 24 November 2009 and the invitation contained therein to make a further submission to the above Inquiry. I have much pleasure in accepting your invitation and submit the following brief submission.

As stated in my original submission of 10 June 2008 I have been researching the delivery and operation of general land rescue services in NSW for thirty years. I have read all 216 submissions to the Inquiry and its subsequent Report (No. 27) as well as the NSW Government response of May 2009. I will therefore limit my comment to the partial divestment of the rescue function Of the Ambulance Service of NSW (ASNSW) to the NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB)

Over the years a litany of reviews and inquiries recommended that ASNSW dives its rescue function to another rescue agency on the common ground that general and rescue was not a core function of ASNSW whereas other agencies such as NSWFB, State Emergency Service (SES) and the Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA) have rescue as a core role. The premise was that the divestment of the rescue function would enable ASNSW to focus on the core functions of emergency medical response and patient treatment and transport.

After failure to act on the recommendations emanating from these reviews and inquiries, the then Health Minister, acting on the recommendation of the Head Inquiry (vide recommendation 27, June 2008), announced in September 2008 that the ambulance rescue units at Bankstown, Caringbah, Camden, Parramatta, St Ives, Point Clare (Gosford), Wollongong and Hamilton (Newcastle) would be disbanded and their roles taken over by NSWFB rescue units. The remaining six units at Wagga Wagga, Bomaderry, Cowra, Singleton, Rutherford and Tamworth were not affected.

The decision was the catalyst for an at times over-the-top media and industrial campaign by the Health Services Union (HSU) and some ambulance rescue operators involving outrageous and unsubstantiated claims designed to scare the community including the line that 'people would die' as a result of the Minister's decision. The other part of their claim for reinstatement was the line that 'rescue is medical not mechanical'. Such a statement ignores the fact that NSW is the only jurisdiction in Australia that has the ambulance service involved in general land rescue and that in the rest of the developed world the local fire service or dedicated rescue service is the rescue provider. To further demolish this spurious claim is the fact that at every rescue scene ambulance paramedics are in attendance to monitor the medical condition of an entrapped person whilst NSWFB /SES / VRA rescue personnel effect the mechanical extrication.

Notwithstanding the heated media campaign and pleas to the new Health Minister to reverse the decision, the State Rescue Board (SRB) endorsed the original decision to disband the eight units. Minister Della Bosca did however appear to succumb to HSU pressure by approving the creation of a 'special operations' category to cater for former rescue operators affected by the decision. This decision compromised the original statement by Minister Meagher that the 80+ rescue officers would boost the number of available paramedics. The new category which was seemingly created purely as a political solution to pacify disaffected rescue officers has been described in some quarters as 'SCAT Lite', a paler version of the elite Special Casualty Access Team (SCAT).

To bring the whole issue into perspective, it is relevant to note that the SRB website shows that as at 19 January 2009 there were a total of 317 accredited rescue units in NSW comprising 176 NSWFB units, 84 SES units, 42 VRA units, 9 Police units and 6 ASNSW units. To contend that the loss of 8 ASNSW rescue units was going to seriously imperil the safety of the NSW community was not only bizarre but also casts a slur on the operational capability and capacity of other rescue agencies.

There has been a seamless transfer from the eight disbanded ASNSW rescue units to the NSWFB and in my view there is now no arguable reason for the remaining six rural based units not to be disbanded and their rescue roles be taken over by the NSWFB or SES.

Yours sincerely

Frank Fitzpatrick