

Submission
No 187

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

Name: Suppressed
Date received: 11/07/2008

Partially Confidential

Dear Ms Parker,

As a Rescue Paramedic of more than 25 years I wish to express my alarm at the ineptitude and bureaucracy about to transpire by the efforts of the likes of Ambulance Service CEO Greg Rochford.

The facts of the matter are simple; The Ambulance Service is attempting to divest itself of providing rescue services to the public of NSW yet again, in the mistaken belief that it will help the service provide better and effective care to the community!

This is a complete furphy, simply because one of the truly great inefficiencies of the Health system lies at the feet of people calling ambulances and going to hospital for relatively trivial matters, causing access block. Adding any number of Ambulances to the equation will not fix this issue as it is hospital beds, hospital staff and funding crisis that is the root of the problem and not an ambulance problem at all.

Furthermore, divesting rescue provision from the Ambulance service won't actually free any ambulances up at all in one sense because the current Ambulance Rescue units are already performing a Rapid Responder role, by attending to medical emergencies and triaging patients in their rescue downtime. To remove Rescue units will only serve to bog down even more ambulances at what are already overcrowded hospitals. Thus creating an even bigger issue.

Here's what divesting Rescue capabilities from the Ambulance Service will do....

There would be an initial loss from the system of approximately 200 CBR (Chemical Biological Radiological) trained specialists all of whom are part of NSW Health's emergency ability to respond to terrorist incidents. These Officers are trained by the Ambulance Service Special Operations Group and recertify their training every two years as part of their rescue skills. As a result of losing their rescue status they will now not recertify unless the Ambulance Service initiates further training at a significant impost to the taxpayer. This has the potential to severely compromise NSW's current emergency response plans to terrorist incidents. It will also leave NSW with a remaining complement of only 50 trained officers of this skill statewide. These officers are instrumental in providing antidotes to Chemical, Biological agents in a bio terrorist hot zone and require paramedic skills to diagnose and treat affected patients / victims. The NSW Fire Brigade does not have trained personnel for the medical component of terrorist incident responses. This effectively means that any

patient care or intervention will be delayed significantly more than likely resulting in a higher than expected fatality rate.

- 1) 1) The same approximately 200 skilled specialists would also cease to be available to assist the NSW Fire Brigades in the event of a major structural collapse, i.e. Urban Search and Rescue categories 1 & 2. The NSW Fire Brigade rely on these Officers and their training to assist them in the performance of their duties in such events and removing the medical component of their search teams compromises victim survivability.
- 2) 2) The NSW Rural Fire Service currently in major bushfires deploys Remote Area Fire Teams (RAFT) into difficult terrain to combat outbreaks of fire where vehicles have difficult access or extended travel times. With the disbanding of Rescue, Rural fire Service volunteers will be put exposed to significant risk and danger as a result. The complement of trained officers who can be called upon for this duty is around 115 Officers.

Other areas of workload affected by the disbanding of Ambulance Rescue will be but not be limited to...

- 3) 3) Swift water Rescue:
- 4) 4) Police, Public Order and Riot Squad:
- 5) 5) Hazardous Material Support:
- 6) 6) Confined Space Rescue:
- 7) 7) 4WD response to remote patients:

The Ambulance Service will no doubt be looking to suggest that all these losses can and will be absorbed by the likes of the NSW Fire Brigade, but unfortunately this is not true. The fact of the matter is

For any agency to fill the areas Ambulance Rescue currently cover and "therefore provide the same existing cover to the public AND to provide the same existing standard of fire cover", the NSW Fire Brigade will have to provide 14 primary rescue units to heavy rescue standard. Eleven of those Rescue Units will also need to be vertical rescue accredited. Furthermore if the current secondary units (where they exist with our units) are backed up to primary status then seven further secondary units will need to be created.

The economics of such are astounding and have significant ramifications for the taxpayers of NSW....

14 primary units + equipment cost the ASNSW	\$500K per truck = \$7million
7 secondary units + equipment	\$300K per truck - \$2.1million
14 x 9 people on a 4x4 roster)	126 employed, trained etc
7 x 9 people minimum for secondary =	63 employed, trained etc
TOTAL	189 staff employed, trained

That's just to get these services up and running, also now factor in the cost of all the required maintenance, ongoing training, etc.

If none of the above happens (ie existing units and staff are used) then the public have just had their standard of fire cover and rescue coverage down graded significantly.

If the State Government proceeds with this course of action, the taxpayer will have been slugged with a minimum 9.1 million dollar bill for replicating an existing excellent, efficient service without the emergency medical component intact.

Currently the NSW Fire Brigades prefer to analyze their proficiency in rescue by the time it takes to get to an incident rather than the Ambulance Service who like to measure the time it takes to extricate a patient who is trapped from an incident. I am astonished that the State Rescue Board refuses to measure itself by KPI's that have everything to do with patient outcomes as opposed to traffic congestion.

A cursory look or even audit of KPI's shows clearly that per rescue performed the Ambulance Service of NSW is by far the least expensive and the most efficient at rescue provision.

I would also sight for your interest the 2005 – 06 State Rescue Board Annual report that shows that Ambulance are the second highest provider of rescue services in the state with an average of 204 jobs per year per unit, whilst the Fire Brigade are only performing 23.9 jobs per year per unit. This clearly shows that we are far more efficient because we are performing our rescue role and our clinical / medical role at the same time.

An interesting highlight to all this is that Ambulance CEO Mr. Greg Rochford is the only man in the history of ASNSW to recommend the disbanding of the Ambulance Rescue Squad and he has called for it twice now. My question to pose is why keep returning to this proposition and spending taxpayer's money on fruitless exercises and reviews? There is no history of

previous State Superintendents, other agencies etc suggesting the squads disbandment in any form.

Furthermore, the Ambulance CEO Greg Rochford has a history of partiality in his dealings with the Ambulance Rescue Squad and the State Rescue Board. His dealings indicate that he votes frequently against his own organizations suggestions as how to better rescue provision in NSW and an appearance of somehow being beholden to elements of the NSW Fire Brigade that I believe are worthy of referring for further investigation. I sight as examples of my concerns...

1) Ambulance CEO Greg Rochford's decision to overturn the District Rescue Committees advice regarding the accreditation of Bundeena Fire Brigade as a secondary rescue unit, and instead supporting the NSW Fire Brigades proposition despite contrary evidence from his own State Rescue manager.

2) Ambulance CEO Greg Rochford's decision to vote for the opening of a secondary rescue unit (NSWFB) in the Engadine area in Sydney's south despite advice to the contrary and at an added cost to the community.

3) During the last audit and review of the State Rescue Board it was recommended that the SRB set performance indicators and obtain accurate data on workloads etc. It was during this period that the ASNSW was revealed to be the cheapest agency per rescue, yet at the urging of our CEO and the NSWFB this was rejected as a KPI or reporting tool!

4) Another KPI that was put forward was "entrapment time" that being the time from rescue unit arriving to the time the patient released. ASNSW figures show that average times for Ambulance rescue units are 45 minutes down from 60 minutes in 2003 for ALL forms of rescue. This KPI was again was rejected by our CEO and the NSWFB as it may cause embarrassment to some other agencies?

I severely question this CEO's abilities, especially as someone that has involved himself in review after review of the Ambulance service, constantly asking questions and seeking the answers that he wants but failing to deliver on key issues like that of bullying and harassment of staff, fatigue in the workplace, low morale and seemingly pushing for the disbandment of one of the most unique and effective rescue services in the world. To the point that in the midst of the Beaconsfield Mine disaster, who's expertise did they call for? The NSW Ambulance Rescue Squad!

What is even more interesting to note is that many of the other agencies Fire, Police, RFS, look to Ambulance Rescue to assist them especially in regard to training and in the performance of their duties. Agencies like the Police Rescue Squad. These agencies are not calling for our disbandment though?

How this issue can be considered in the light of such startling and contrary statistics and evidence from the Greathead, Performance Review of June 2008? Some of the statistics for this can be seen to be lifted straight from the NSW Fire Brigades Annual Report!

The NSW Fire Brigade suggests in the Greathead review that they performed approximately 11500 non fire rescues in 06 - 07 (fig from 06 – 07 NSWFB Annual report). This indicates a tripling of the NSW Fire Brigades workload yet with other agencies involved in rescue provision in NSW showing no significant increase or decrease in their workloads. This leaves us with several possibilities...

- a) a) A lot more people in an emergency are ringing the Fire Brigade directly rather than ringing 000.
- b) b) The figures are inaccurate or fudged.
- c) c) The Fire Brigade are not tabulating incidents the way that the State Rescue Board does, and that is by crediting every rescue agency for a rescue performed with what is termed an RCO (Rescue Coordinating Officer) number. These are the only truly accurate figures to use to verify rescue agency workload. It may interest you to know that the NSW Fire Brigade does not and cannot account for 11500 RCO numbers for the year 2006 – 2007.

Conclusion: Recommendation 27 of the Performance Review of June 2008 is based on false and misleading data.

Recommendation 27 can only lead to

- a) The duplication of current services effectively deployed and utilized.
- b) The wastage of taxpayer's money to the approximate minimum tune of 9 million dollars.
- c) It will ultimately lead to a decrease in the overall provision of rescue excellence in NSW.
- d) It will compromise patient safety and patient outcomes definitely in the short term and more importantly in the longer term in NSW, especially in relation to terrorist incidents and structural collapse events.

I await your considered reply, I can also be counted on to make myself available to assist you in any way at any time should you be desirous of such.

Yours sincerely