

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

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Partially Confidential

Dear Honourable Member of Parliament.

I am writing this letter to call on you all to protect the people of NSW from an ill informed recommendation to disband Ambulance Rescue. I call on the Parliament of NSW to reject this proposal in its entirety. In the recently released Parliamentary review into the ambulance service it is recommended that the Ambulance Service of NSW withdraw from Rescue to achieve a negligible financial saving. It draws incorrect conclusions that Rescue and the associated skills are not a core business. Highly trained rescue personnel have and continue to be deployed around the state and country in times of disaster and need so the decision to disband this vital service affects all electorates. NSW is the only state in Australia that can provide Paramedics with this level of training.

It fails to mention that Ambulance rescue crews provided dignitary protection and the CBR response during APEC to the leaders of the world. This was a direct result of the counter disaster training Rescue officers have. It fails to mention that during the Central Coast and Newcastle floods

that rescue officers were responsible for the ambulance response. They attended to persons injured and killed in flood waters and the evacuation of nursing homes, again a direct result of the swift water training provided. It fails to mention the responses to cliff edges with mental health patients threatening self harm. Who else can provide this mental health response?

It may be suggested that SCAT officers will fill this void left by Rescue. That would be 57 scat providing the services delivered by 194 rescue officers. But unfortunately SCAT being retained is not assured - on several occasions the rescue management have had to justify SCAT's continued existence to the services CEO and bureaucrats who again do not see this as a core business.

The incorrect assumption made by this review and other services is that rescue is road crash and nothing more. The best example of this is in the training. All Ambulance rescue personnel must successfully complete a 6 week course covering all aspects of land based rescue as stipulated by the State rescue board. But In Singleton the Fire Brigade achieved accreditation in 2 days.

Even the NSWFB recognize some of our expertise - they regularly refer people and organizations to ASNSW for advice and training in things like confined space rescue, trench rescue, and recreational rescue.

Other agencies have recognized our world leading expertise - we have trained mines rescue, police rescue, Military etc. In fact the next rescue course has two SAS and one mines rescue officer on it.

If Ambulance rescue is lost to the people of NSW the following medical emergency response capabilities will be lost

CBR lose 194 rescue leaving around 50 a/o's trained (around the state)

CBR lose 11 CBR technicians

FE trained lose 241

Confined space lose 241

USAR 1 lose 194

USAR 2 lose 23 (there should be more however the NSWFB would not accept ASNSW rescue on courses - SCAT only. just this year changed this and were waiting for another USAR 2 course).

RAFT (remote area firefighting) lose 115

4WD lose 135

Swift water 1 lose 142

Swift water 2 lose 19

No Public Order Riot Squad trained

No HOBART/CAM trained

No bushfire trained

Lose ability to safely access, treat and extricate patients in bush land in all weather.

Big deal you say - the reason for this training was to provide well trained and equipped officers who could provide clinical care in hazardous environments thus not putting road staff in dangerous situations and/or the patient not having to wait for clinical care once a scene was stabilized.

Who has this capability to fill the Void? The NSW Fire Brigades would lead you to believe that they do. Can they provide medical treatment at rescue's/hazardous incidents? We would be returning to the days of Ambulance Officers waiting for the patient to be brought to them for treatment, depending on the job this may take hours.

Currently they have very limited (approx. 20 trained) confined space, swift water, trench etc ability, and no 'off road' ability i.e. bush craft, 4WD, mapping etc. On their own admission their secondary rescue units can only cope with about 70% of the road crash they attend before needing to call fully trained primary rescue units from other agencies.

NSWFB secondary rescue training consists of one weekend (minus morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea) of basic road crash with one car between 10-12 students to practice on. No other forms of rescue techniques are taught. The SRB doesn't differentiate between the training for primary and secondary however the NSWFB have different training and equipment standards for primary and secondary units. Why have they been allowed to get away with it?

The NSW Fire Brigade has a track record of rescue expansion at the expense of the people of NSW.

During 2006/07 the FBEU (union representing firies) ran a public campaign to take rescue away from the VRA in Penrith. It included a website, so much for

maintaining public confidence in emergency services. The SRB in its wisdom decided to split the area and accredit NSWFB Dunheved as a second primary for the area. (VRA primary, Penrith NSWFB secondary, NSWFB Dunheved primary). The only way the NSWFB could cover this was to send its rescue unit from Blacktown to cover Dunheved.

Since then and as a result of the FBEU campaign amongst other things the VRA's membership dropped to a point where they could no longer respond to rescue incidents and have since folded up. The NSWFB then moved the Blacktown rescue truck from Dunheved to Penrith. Most recently the NSWFB have asked the SRB to strip Penrith NSWFB of its secondary accreditation and make Regentville NSWFB primary rescue. The reason - the aerial appliance at Penrith can't store rescue equipment and puts public safety in jeopardy if it's tied up at a rescue and can't respond to fires when an aerial appliance is needed.

The upshot of all this: where once you had a strong volunteer agency providing rescue with proper equipment and dedicated vehicles etc we now have two rescue stations (NSWFB) using pump/rescue vehicles with limited equipment.

ASNSW rescue management offered to supply 24/7 coverage for Penrith (from existing operators and equipment) with a dedicated rescue vehicle however this was rejected by the CEO. (Now we know why).

Why was this allowed to happen? Well let's take a closer look at the State Rescue Board.

The current make up the SRB:

Chair SES

Mullins NSWFB

Rochford ASNSW

Police

SEOCON - Police

RFS

VRA

Chairman of Marine Rescue Council

The SES and NSWFB view is that Metro rescue should be NSWFB exclusively, rural rescue should be the volunteer agencies exclusively (VRA, SES, NSWFB retained) - why? "Too many firies sitting around doing nothing"- It must be noted at this time that the total case workload of Ambulance rescue units is significantly higher that those of the NSW fire brigades and thus providing better cost effective service delivery to the people of NSW. The Police view

- they really don't care who does it and support NSWFB and ASNSW view "as these agencies do the bulk of the work". VRA want to hang on to what they have and don't want to upset the NSWFB for fear of take over as evidenced by the Penrith debacle. RFS and Marine don't have a view as they are not

involved in land rescue.

Case 1 Bundeena

The NSWFB proposed at a district meeting that Bundeena retained (paid volunteers) be made up to primary to "assist" the ASNSW. They would dual respond to National Park road crash. The rescue manager was able to show that ASNSW response times for the number of rescue incidents were more than acceptable. He pointed out that whilst the fire station may have been closer, it can't perform a rescue. Its members have to come from work then get the fire truck and respond. The members of Bundeena work outside of the town and the National Park and have to leave work, travel through the Park, get the truck and then respond to the incident. The District committee considered both arguments and voted unanimously to reject the NSWFB proposal

- yes even the NSWFB changed their mind. The minutes of the meetings went to the SRB where Mullins and Rochford disagreed with the unanimous decision of the committee and proposed that Bundeena NSWFB be made primary. The rest of SRB (who didn't have an interest) agreed and so it is. How does it work practically? Nearly 96% of responses to incidents in the Park do not have Bundeena in attendance, they either can't get a crew or arrive too late. In an attempt to counter that the NSWFB occasionally remove rescue staff from other stations to cover Bundeena on day shift however they still can't get to most (of the very few) jobs before the attendance of the Ambulance rescue unit. Another waste of tax payer's money.

Case 2

The recent Audit review of the SRB recommended that the SRB needed to set performance indicators, get accurate data on workload etc.

During the SRB review, one of the KPI's that they were going to look at was the actual cost per rescue per agency. Julie Newman did some incredible work using ASNSW formulas: she costed ASNSW rescue cost per rescue, dividing out medical work from rescue work, percentage of wage costs etc associated with rescue only. She then used the NSWFB's formulae to get a cost. Using both methods, ASNSW came out as the cheapest of all full time agencies. The SRB, at the urging of our CEO and NSWFB chose not to use cost per rescue as a KPI or reporting tool.

Case 3

Another KPI that was suggested to ASNSW CEO was entrapment time i.e. the time from the rescue unit arriving until the time the patient was released. ASNSW figures have been dropping since 2003 when budget, training, vehicles etc were approved. Our figures have come down from over an hour on average to an average 45 minutes for all forms of rescue. The CEO and the SRB refused to use entrapment time as it may embarrass some other agencies.

The SRB then adopted response time standards - 20 minutes for metro, 40 minutes for rural and 60 minutes for remote rural. No problem - all of ASNSW units/areas comply. Not good enough for the SRB (NSWFB/ASNSW CEO). The SRB asked NSWFB to identify any perceived gaps. (What they should have done was ask each agency to look at their own areas). NSWFB came up with 4 areas that according to their figures did not meet the time. Surprisingly these 4 areas are ASNSW areas - go figure. NSWFB used a system to measure response times that defies belief - 60km/hour maximum road speed, major roads only! They

claimed that Wollongong/Bulli, Engadine, F3 Point Clare and F3 Newcastle were outside the response time of ASNSW units. (ASNSW response time is measured by averaging the time taken over the number of incidents, this includes all responses i.e. R1, R2, day/night, etc so it actually over estimates e.g. Bulli 15mins, Engadine 12mins, Heathcote 12mins, Waterfall 17mins, Mt White 17mins, Belmont 13mins, Wallsend 12mins, Toronto 19mins).

The NSWFB then proposed that they could cover the "gaps" by creating primary units at Bulli, Wollongong, Engadine, extend Berowra's area, new primaries at Belmont, West Wallsend (retained), Toronto (full time mon-fri business hours, retained after hours). It would take 12 months to train the firies, approx 99 people (their figures) and only 4 additional items would need to be placed on the fire trucks (hydraulic pump, air bag, tirfor winch, and reciprocating saws) to bring the trucks up to primary standard - 12 months to train people on 4 tools ?? And remember Penrith - they can't fit the gear

on the truck?? What cost to the tax payer?

At the following SRB meeting the Ambulance Services Operations Manager Mike Willis represented and put forward an alternate position - Bulli, go from secondary to primary providing no area changed, Engadine, not required, Newcastle, not required we would move Hamilton to Charlestown. The SRB held the decision over to the next meeting, where, you guessed it, the CEO Greg Rochford was back from holidays. The end result at this stage - Bulli go to primary and expand its area reducing our area, Engadine go secondary and dual respond (duplication), Toronto and Belmont go primary and reduce ASNSW area, ASNSW Hamilton move to Charlestown.

Case 4

Another thing they chose not to do or cease doing as it would embarrass the NSWFB:

Independent audits (audit teams from all agencies) of equipment levels, vehicles, training records etc. used to occur some years ago. This still occurs for marine rescue however the SRB refuse to do it for general land.

When all agencies were asked for copies of their training manuals, curriculum etc the only agency that would not do so was NSWFB. More recently all agencies were asked to provide their vertical training manuals etc. The NSWFB provided a 10-12 page "draft" document - how long have we all been doing vertical and the best they can come up with is a draft!!

Case 5

Rescue management also had the data, dollars and everything else to enable Wollongong to go 24/7. If they could do it without employing more staff they would get the green light. The number crunching began and showed that Wollongong was actually 7 staff over establishment. There were plenty of rescue trained officers and all it would take was the transfer (voluntarily) of 4 staff to Wollongong station. The CEO would not approve and so commenced

the industrial action. The result to date - through the SRB a "trial" at Wollongong commenced whereby ASNSW and Police would respond during the day, the NSWFB would respond during the night. No benchmarks were set, no data was recorded etc etc. What was being "trialed"?? The SRB are now considering making the current arrangement permanent.

One reason given for disbanding Ambulance Rescue is duplication of resources? From my position there is no duplication as the ambulance rescue is the only agency able to provide medical treatment and medical orientated rescue in hazardous environments.

However the NSWFB have mastered the art of duplication:

Fire investigation unit - Police arson squad detectives

Storm response - SES (combat agency)

HazMat - used to be done by the EPA until overtaken by NSWFB

Rescue - prior to 1989 the fireies didn't have dedicated rescue units, they had salvage units for cleaning up at fires.

Bushfires - yes they should help out however do they need to replace RFS volunteers with fireies on OT.

The review mentions that NSW is the only state with Ambulance Rescue. This is correct. But the services statement of being a world leader demands that we set the standard. Why then does the standard get set to what other states

and/or countries are doing, thus making us a world follower. The practice of utilizing multiple rescue agencies is not uncommon,

Victoria - Police, SES, CFA, MFB, VRA

SA - SES, Metro Fire

WA - SES, Fire

QLD - SES, Fire

Even New York has Police and Fire

The argument that NSWFB are always available for rescue is a furphy. It is their SOP that a rescue appliance MUST attend every Third Alarm fire for the duration to act as a rapid intervention crew for the other fire fighters. Like all agencies their rescue units get tied up at fire brigade incidents and other agencies cover for them. This is one of the strengths of having 5 agencies involved in rescue. Having all the agencies involved produces healthy competition. Every one watches what the others are doing and implements good ideas. E.g. ASNSW introduced trench rescue training - Police and Fire followed suit, ASNSW instigated swift water training - Police, Fire

and SES followed, ASNSW introduced atmospheric monitoring - Fire rushed through a program for all fire fighters. Five agencies provides surge for major incidents. When one agency (Fire) is stretched (every bushfire season) the other agencies can cover. (SES needs help during storm season).

The CEO of the Ambulance Service and the commissioner of the fire brigade have given an offer to the dedicated ambulance rescue officers. That is Transfer to the Fire brigade. Whilst on the surface this may appear reasonable, on closer inspection it is not. The CEO's offer to transfer to NSWFB is not a transfer - staff would have to resign from the ASNSW, apply

to join the NSWFB, pass all the entry requirements, commence duties at the bottom of the wages and skill level, be posted to any permanent station in the state causing family upheaval, then in 3-4 years try and transfer to a rescue station for training.

In Closing I request that parliament of NSW gives a commitment to the people of NSW and the dedicated officers that Ambulance rescue will be retained.

Sincerely