

Submission  
No 117

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

**Name:** Mr Cyril Brown

**Date received:** 25/06/2008

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Partially Confidential

The Director,  
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street,  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**RE: INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS OF THE  
NSW AMBULANCE SERVICE**

I feel the need to make submissions to the General Purpose Standing Committee's inquiry to express my concerns about the mismanagement within the NSW Ambulance Service (ASNSW) that has embedded itself over the past 10 years.

Initially when first writing this submission I wanted it all to be suppressed from publication and kept confidential by the Committee. I felt this way because I genuinely fear retribution from the highest level of management within the ASNSW for expressing my concerns and opinions. However, I have now decided to consent to the publication of my submission because it is right to speak up not only in the public interest but for all those uniformed and non-uniformed officers who have been mistreated by the current management regime, in particular those officers who took their own lives feeling such pressure.

I have made a protected disclosure to the Ombudsman of this submission.

I note that the submission to the inquiry by the ASNSW is not yet available to be read on your website. On 19 May 2008 the Chief Executive ASNSW issued an Administration Bulletin (document # AB2008-35) announcing for information that the Inquiry had commenced and that a submission would be prepared by the ASNSW. It is quite disconcerting that the ASNSW has not been diligent and expeditious to enable the Committee to publish its submissions for public scrutiny. The decision of the ASNSW not to release its submissions makes a farce of its' *'commitment'* to the principles of open disclosure and is indicative of how the ASNSW senior management manipulates processes to suppress facts in their own self interest.

Recent media coverage of the Inquiry averring to the probable reticence by ASNSW staff to lodge submissions because of deep-rooted problems of intimidation and bullying, has urged me to write my submissions. Also the recent sad news of an Ambulance Officer's suicide is disturbing and reminds me of the other officers who took their own lives too.

The Inquiry should consider not only the workplace bullying and intimidation that is rife within the ASNSW and has probably in some cases lead to suicides. Also the Inquiry should expose the managerial tactics and culture within the ASNSW that contributes to cover-ups and problems being perpetuated in favour of self-serving interests. The Inquiry should seriously listen and consider framing its recommendations solidly relying on the evidence of 'grass-roots' employees and interested parties and discount the likely 'spin' from senior managers within the ASNSW and NSW Health.

## **Professional Standards and Conduct Unit (PSCU)**

Having worked in PSCU for more than 6 years I can understand the resentment that most Ambulance Officers have towards the Professional Standards and Conduct Unit (PSCU).

I believe that (as at April 2008 when I left) the PSCU was on the verge of imploding upon itself under the stress of too much work, lack of effective management and direction.

In my view, the PSCU holds a biased attitude and arrogance that imposes mounting and prolonged pressure on investigated officers. This prejudice appears to be particularly imposed upon officers who are actively involved with the Health Services Union (HSU). I can recall at PSCU staff meetings when the Director and the Investigators made derogatory remarks about the HSU or certain officers under investigation. I believe this anti-HSU attitude won favour with the Chief Executive.

I have observed that PSCU has apparently repeatedly targeted certain Ambulance Officers, often without reaching a lasting and viable resolution. I think many Ambulance Officers have been unjustly intimidated. This pressure must surely make officers' lives intolerable, sometimes with drastic consequences. I believe that a *war of attrition* has been raged against officers, often imposed to break the officers' will to stay.

For personal reasons, including my '*hidden revulsion*' against the mode and manner of how PSCU conducted investigations, some years ago I 'moved' from investigations to coordinating and conducting coronial matters.

There have been several 'reviews' of the PSCU, one external the others internal. I think the real result of these reviews was to benefit those incumbents in favour with the CE.

I can show from personal experience how the ASNSW management breached the NSW Health Policy Directive '*Recruitment and Selection Policy*' PD2006\_059.

I am convinced that PSCU is actually more a '*tool of abuse*' by the CE rather than a responsible professional Unit that should conduct itself without bias and with fairness.

The PSCU should be abolished.

## **Tendering process**

I think that the Inquiry should consider looking to the mismanagement of the tendering process for contracts entered into by the ASNSW and private contractors. In particular, attention should be drawn to the circumstances of recurrent contracts made with the same contractor.

For instance, the plumbing service contract at the State Headquarters, at Rozelle, appears to me to have been entrenched for years with one plumbing contractor.

I understand that there were suggestions of impropriety in relation to plumbing services within other Sectors of the Service.

I am unaware of any specific details of any impropriety but it does appear that due process of tendering contracts by ASNSW is something to be investigated. It appears that once one contractor is engaged the contract seems to be perpetuated without diligent and proper contractual review.

I believe that there may well be other 'business' areas within the ASNSW where public procurement expenditure and tendering should be closely examined.

There may be indications of substantial waste of public monies, maladministration and possibly corruption.

#### **Mrs. Christine Hodder**

No doubt the Inquiry is aware of the 'open' email written early this year by an Ambulance Officer concerning the suicide death of former Ambulance Officer Mrs. Christine Hodder. That email was filled with mixed emotions that must have touched anyone who has a conscience.

I had some knowledge of this matter as I was liaising with the Coroner at Cowra who eventually dispensed with a formal coronial inquest. The Coroner did advise the close relatives of Ms Hodder to contact the Ombudsman if they had any lingering concerns about how the internal investigation was conducted by the ASNSW.

I know what I would have done if I were them.

#### **Conclusion**

I believe that low morale is plaguing the Service, not only for uniformed but also non-uniformed employees. The ASNSW is in a state of serious crisis. The health, welfare and safety of the general public in NSW are at risk so far as ambulatory care is concerned.

I am willing to be subpoenaed to give oral and documentary evidence before the Committee of Inquiry.

I have written this submission in good faith, honestly as to what I believe to be true.

## **Recommendations**

1. I believe that the Committee should recommend to the Premier the immediate termination of the service contract of Mr. Greg Rochford, the current Chief Executive of the ASNSW.
2. The Committee should recommend the immediate appointment of a uniformed senior Ambulance Officer to fulfill the position of Chief Executive pending the review of the operational and management structure of the Ambulance Service.
3. The Professional Standards and Conduct Unit should be abolished.
4. The Committee should consider options to restructure the provision of ambulance services in NSW. For instance, consider the option of a separate Metropolitan Ambulance Service for Sydney, including the Newcastle and Wollongong. Perhaps a separate Rural Ambulance Service for country and rural areas. Executive administrative management of ambulance services could be centralized within NSW Health.
5. Alternatively, enable certain major Area Health Services to control and run local ambulance services.
6. Close the SHQ Administration at Rozelle and make it part of the NSW Health Department.

Cyril Brown  
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4 July 2008