

Submission
No 202

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

Name: Suppressed

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Partially Confidential

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

**Inquiry into the Management and Operations of the
Ambulance Service NSW
General Purpose Standing Committee No.2**

I have been a member of the NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) for almost 30 years. I have been involved with rescue operations for most of this period. My service has seen both country postings and metropolitan Sydney operations. I have been stationed at primary rescue stations in the Central West, in the South of the state and in Northern NSW. I believe I have seen a good selection of both Fire Brigade operations and that of the other rescue agencies.

My submission is based on facts concerning the delivery of rescue services in NSW that can be corroborated with evidence. Many of the submissions to the Standing Committee concerning rescue and recommendation 27 concerning rescue arising from the Head Report, have largely been based on emotion, unfounded information, misrepresented data and furthermore, issues such as world best practice, economies-of-scale and adherence to well recognised training and operations in the rescue field have not been dealt with.

One thing that needs to be established is that the issue concerning the divesting of general land rescue services by the Ambulance Service is that the quality of the ASNSW rescue operators is not the main issue at hand. It is simply the question of can a small number of ASNSW rescue units be easily absorbed, as recommended in the Head Report, into an organisation such as the NSW Fire Brigades? The answer I believe is yes. The Commissioner of the NSWFB, Mr Greg Mullins AFSM has clearly stated in NSWFB Annual Reports that they are ready, willing and able to take on this role. Moreover, the Minister for Emergency Services, The Hon. Nathan Rees has signed the new Fire Brigades Corporate Plan 2008-2011 stating his vision for the NSW Fire Brigades is to be Australia's leading **Fire and Rescue** service. Both the Commissioner and the Minister are now on the public record stating the NSWFB have the capacity and capability to deliver a world class rescue service to NSW. A recent press release from the Chairperson of the State Rescue Board (SRB) also confirms this situation when he announced new NSWFB rescue units.

Fire Brigades around the world have proven fire services have a natural role in the

provision of rescue. This is supported by the fact that all professional fire services in Australia are the main providers of rescue services – especially in urban and regional areas. This situation was well noted by the Auditor General NSW in 2005 when he conducted a review of rescue services. One only has to look at international airports around the world. They are always protected by a **Fire-Rescue Service**, as these two functions naturally go hand in hand. I have traveled around the world and it is **Fire – Rescue Services** that carry out 99.9% of all rescues around the globe.

Ambulance service rescue personnel appear to form the opinion that history should dictate further direction and involvement in rescue. Despite the many claims made as to who was the first agency to have specialist rescue units in NSW, I can state with some conviction that NSW Fire Brigades [NSWFB] staff have been carrying out rescues in both fire and non-fire situations for over 100 years. A picture of a NSWFB Salvage –Rescue wagon dating from around WWI is featured on the NSWFB website, including many references to non-fire rescue involvement, confirming the Brigades role in rescue over many years.

Notwithstanding the claims of historical information and importance, I believe we should be looking at the present, not some connection with the past. The government should be focused on what service(s) are best placed to deliver rescue services to the community.

One only has to look at the facts and figures to realize that firefighters are well positioned to provide rapid, reliable and professional rescue services in NSW. They already provide general land rescue, fire rescue and HazMat related rescue, along with specialised urban search and rescue [USAR] in the state and are the largest provider of rescue services in NSW. The NSWFB is also the largest provider of the fulltime services for primary rescue and is the largest provider of secondary rescue units. NSWFB is the only service [Supported by ASNSW SCAT officers] who provides the rescue function of Category II USAR.

The State Rescue Board of NSW [SRB] manages and controls rescue services by statute under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* [SERM Act]. The SRB are responsible under the SERM Act for the following rescue units: NSWFB 47 primary units, ASNSW 14 primary units, NSWPF 9 primary units, SES 78 and VRA 45 primary units. The NSWFB has 121 and the SES has 9 secondary rescue units. There are 3208 registered rescue operators in the state with the NSWFB having 1833 rescue operators. ASNSW has 181 operators, NSWPF has 99, with the SES having 709 and the VRA 386 rescue operators [See: *SRB Annual Report 2006-2007*]. There have been some changes to these figures since the release of the above report with NSWFB taking on more rescue units in the state, such as in the Wollongong, Newcastle, Penrith and Dunheved areas. Also the NSWFB is currently responding in a joint response arrangement at numerous locations in NSW to assist other services with response problems, this of course includes ASNSW, such as in Cowra in the Central West. The notion that only ASNSW can deliver appropriate rescue and medical care is simply not true.

At rescues where the ASNSW rescue units are not carrying out the rescue there will always be ambulance paramedics in attendance, often supported by doctors on medical retrieval helicopters. This means out of the 323 rescue locations around the state that 309 rescue units are not ASNSW units. The 14 rescue units operated by the ASNSW always work with on-road ambulance paramedics who are the main providers of clinical services to the trapped victim. It is simply a misrepresentation of the facts that only ASNSW rescue units deliver a level of rescue like no others. Based on that rationale' 309 rescue units around the state should be replaced by ASNSW rescue units.

This model would still not cover the areas of fire related rescues, rescues involving hazardous materials and USAR operations which are generally considered to have gas leaks and hazardous situations, which by statute are the domain of the Fire Brigades.

Previous Investigations, Inquiries and Reviews

There have been numerous investigations, inquiries and reviews concerning ASNSW involvement in rescue over the last 30 years or so. It is time to have a model that truly represents a modern and efficient rescue service(s)

Some of the reviews and reports include but are not limited to:

The Grey Report - *NSW Rescue Services 1988*

Audit Office of NSW - *Readiness to respond 2001*

Auditor General's Performance Audit Report - *Co-ordination of Rescue Services 2005*

Auditor General's follow up Report - *2001 Performance Audit of Ambulance Service 2007*

Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW. - *Review of Ambulance Service NSW*. NSW Premiers Dept. 2008

NSW Fire Brigades. *Various Annual Reports and Corporate Plans*

Rescue services the national and international model.

As mentioned in the introduction in all states of Australia the fire service [often the **Fire-Rescue Service**] is the responsible service for rescue operations. This is also the situation around the world. Fire-fighters fight fires, carry out rescues and attend to spillages and hazardous materials incidents, along with other emergency related operations, such as natural disaster relief work. Fire services can provide a holistic approach to rescue and emergency services and work in well with other allied emergency services such as police and ambulance services. The medical providers deliver pre-hospital care and treatment of those trapped or injured, whilst the rescue team free and release the victims. All work together to form a multi-agency approach.

The NSWFB is the responsible service for carry out rescues involving fires and hazardous materials and of course carry out general land rescues where a NSWFB unit is accredited to perform rescues. The NSWFB is the recognised lead agency under DISPLAN to carry out urban search and rescue [USAR]. In no other state are the ambulance involved in general land rescue operations. Only in the last few years was the small Tasmanian Ambulance rescue service reviewed and ultimately disbanded and handed to the Tasmanian Fire Service. There has been a seamless transition of rescue services with the fire service providing the rescue operations with the ambulance service providing pre-hospital care and treatment. This is the model around the modern world.

Also of interest, is every NSWFB fire pumper, whether rescue accredited or not, along with specialised rescue units, in the NSWFB, carries hydraulic rescue equipment, cutting equipment, vertical rescue equipment, breathing apparatus, gas detection equipment, lighting and a large amount of other rescue gear that allows all NSWFB stations to have a rapid intervention rescue capacity and capability. The NSWFB also have a wide range of hydraulic turntable ladders and ladder platforms for effecting rescues from heights and below walls and structures. In other areas of rescue such as confined space rescue the NSWFB has the required equipment and vehicles to carry out the task supported by highly

technical HazMat Response trucks, with associated breathing apparatus teams and support inventory.

I have noted through various submissions and data presented that on many occasions [over 250 times] in the last 5 years ASNSW rescue units have been off-line for any number of reasons over various durations, with the NSWFB having to backfill such vacancies for ASNSW. The NSWFB has also provided two rescue vans to the ASNSW to keep ASNSW rescue units viable. ASNSW literally removed NSWFB markings and stickers and retro fitted ASNSW emblems.

Overview:

As mentioned above, I believe, supported by written confirmation in NSWFB Annual Reports and Corporate Plans that the NSWFB are well positioned to increase its rescue units in NSW as recommended by the *Head Report - Recommendation 27*. This recommendation clearly tables the transferring of ASNSW rescue duties to NSWFB.

Such recommendations and information are listed to confirm this claim:

In the NSWFB 2002/03 Annual Report p. 25 that *“significant whole-of-government savings would be realised if the Ambulance and Police Services decided to transfer their relatively small rescue responsibilities to the NSWFB.”*

Also at p. 4 that *“the NSWFB’s core competencies of rapid reliable response and multi-skilling mean that there is significant capacity to assist with expanded/new roles, for example rescue and basic life support to assist NSW Ambulance response.”*

Furthermore, p. 81 of the same report states: *“The NSWFB provides primary and secondary rescue services at 161 locations throughout NSW, making us the largest rescue provider in the State. Every first response fire appliance carries rescue equipment and every fire-fighter is trained in rescue. This means that the NSWFB has significant latent capability to assume more rescue responsibilities quickly and efficiently, which provides the potential for significant efficiencies and significant savings to Government.”*

NSWFB Commissioner Greg Mullins AFSM speaks of an increased role in rescue for the NSWFB with the 2006/07 annual report stating at p. 82 that *“The NSWFB responds primary and secondary rescue units from 169 locations throughout NSW, and around 2000 of our fire officers are registered as rescue operators with the State Rescue Board. This makes us the largest rescue provider in the State. Every first response fire appliance carries rescue equipment and every fire officer is trained in rescue”.*

The Auditor General in his report : *Coordination of Rescue Services - State Rescue Board of NSW*- 2005, the Auditor General found *“NSW is unique in having five emergency services involved in rescue, whereas most jurisdictions divide the role between urban fire brigades and the state emergency service”.*

It is clear that NSW is in need of a rescue over haul. Times have changed. The recommendation tabled in the Head Report could easily be carried out and the small rescue responsibility currently being performed by ASNSW could be undertaken by NSWFB units.

This would allow around 180 ASNSW paramedics to bolster the much needed front line ambulance officers who are in urgent need of assistance carrying out their core role of medical response. It is well documented that the HSU have called for around 300 new ambulance paramedics. By carrying out the recommendation of the Head Report almost two thirds of that number could be placed back on the road to support ambulance service core business.

By redirecting funds that were originally used to support ASNSW rescue units, ASNSW could use such funds to recruit and train more Specialist Casualty Access Team [SCAT] paramedics. This team of highly trained paramedics could then be used at rescue operations, police support functions and medical access incidents to support other agencies in top-end medical situations. Based on experience the amount of SCAT officers currently in NSW requires expanding to meet the challenges and dynamic work of this highly respected and renowned team of medical access professionals.

I trust the above information will assist the Committee to make a sound judgement based on investigation of the facts and enable the matter of ASNSW rescue units to be assessed to meet the growing demands on the Ambulance Service of NSW.