

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

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The Director, Portfolio Committee No. 4
Legal Affairs, Parliament House,
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

The Hon. Robert Borsak

My name is _____ and I was a well-respected member of the NSW Rural Fire Service, as both staff member and volunteer fire fighter. I joined in _____ 1997 as a volunteer and worked as a paid employee from _____ until _____. I state WAS because I resigned my position as _____, _____, due to ongoing bullying and harassment by my former _____.

Without going into lengthy details about this issue, I was on workers compensation for over six months and an internal investigation was undertaken to establish the cause of the conflicts. Documentation can be provided upon request.

The investigation concluded in _____ 2010, in which found that there was insufficient evidence to hold _____ accountable for his actions and that I had to return to my place of work under his management. This was in direct conflict with my work medical investigation stating that my mental health issues WERE a direct result of bullying and harassment and that any return to work must be in another district and not in the same location as _____. This was rejected by the RFS. I resigned in _____ 2011 and moved my family interstate to start a new life away from what I considered to be a very toxic situation.

This however was not the only case of bullying and harassment I experienced during my tenure with the NSW Rural Fire Service. Prior to my appointment at _____, I worked at the _____ where I, along with other staff members were harassed by the administration officer. Although in this instance I did not need to take time off work, it did have a resounding effect on my relationships with others and the ability to form long lasting friendships. In both cases, I was made to feel as though I was the guilty party and both people accused of the bullying remain in their positions to this day, and have on all accounts continued their behaviour right under the noses of their superiors.

The following how this affected my family and me.

- I could not leave my house if fear of running into in the street. I would jump at the sight of any RFS marked vehicle, or . I became a prisoner in my own home.

This had a profound impact on my health as I was then left to look after our two small children on my own with no family support. It also had an impact on my marriage.

- Memory loss was impacting on my ability to function in day to day situation such as housework, cooking, shopping and caring for our children. This lasted for well over a year after I left my position.
- I had to attend several medical appointments, sometimes driving up to 3 hours for appointments as nothing was available in my town.
- I was unable to work for over six months which impacted my self-confidence and self-worth.
- Initially offers of support were coming from the peer support office at the RFS in Sydney, however once the investigation was concluded, the person who I liaised with was unobtainable.
- The feeling that as the 'whistle-blower' there is no protection when lodging complaints and that a stain is permanently placed on your service record. As a victim, this should not occur.
- The expert investigator, who was supposed to be 'independent' was hired by the RFS shortly after the investigation to work in their ethical standards unit. This made me feel as though there was no impartiality.
- After the conclusion of the investigation, I made several attempts to apply for transfers and other positions within the RFS all of which unsuccessful. I was required to return to my substantive position regardless of the contradiction to the workers compensation return to work requirements.
- I felt I had no alternative but to resign as even the union told me that this was a 'fight I could not win'. Defeated I gave up something that was my passion.
- My family moved interstate to escape any trace of 'black mark' against my name. This came at a great cost financially and emotionally for my family.
- I still find it difficult to trust people and the thought of going into a manager's office for any reason, still leaves me feeling nervous and afraid.
- It has had negative impact on my relationship with my husband over many years.
- Job security and financially stability were severely impacted as a direct result of my resignation, which I believe would not have occurred had the outcome been different.
- The impact to my children's health and mental wellbeing seeing their mum suffering with and recovering from mental illness.
- I still have ongoing issues with anxiety and high levels of stress when I must deal with conflict or any confrontational situation.

It is my hope that there is

- Acknowledgement that bullying and harassment exists within the NSW Rural Fire Service and it there is little to no ongoing support for the survivors of this invisible heinous treatment.
- Protection for whistle blowers who identify issues within the Service and support is given when required, independently.
- An end to the 'boys club' mentality where senior officers protect one another at the expense of survivors who are clearly damaged because of bullying and harassment.
- A system of external investigation, transparency and timely response to all matters of bullying and harassment
- Ongoing support for survivors and their families regardless of investigative outcomes.
- A process where, transfers between departments and or areas within the RFS are made available upon request for survivors to reduce further trauma and suffering.
- A review of current management to determine suitability of positions
- Training and development for all managers from District level and above to adequately identify and deal with bullying and harassment before it becomes an epidemic.
- A review of the current Service Standards and procedures that protects survivors from further harassment.
- Opportunities for survivors to be retrained in other fields should it be untenable for them to return to their substantive positions.
- A review of management positions whereby managers are relocated after so many years in one office, to avoid what I would deem to be 'sociopathic and narcissistic behaviour'.
- a system in which those accused of bullying and harassment are suspended with/without pay until an investigation is concluded. Whilst ever they can remain in their positions during such investigation and survivors are made to go on workers compensation, it will appear that the survivors will remain the guilty party.

My apologies for such a long-winded response, however I have given a great deal of thought over the years as to what I would say if ever asked about my experiences. It is not my intention to relive each moment of my traumatic experience, rather to provide a snap shot that will paint a picture of the systemic problems that seem ongoing within the Service. I am still in contact with many of my former colleagues who tell me that it is getting increasingly worse and morale is low.

I also feel an end to the 'boys club' within the RFS head office needs to happen and a full relocation out of the area, to a regional part of the State, would not only service the people of rural NSW more adequately, but break the cycle of cronyism and nepotism currently seen within the RFS.

A relocation to regional areas such as Parkes or Dubbo, would provide not only an injection to a rural economy, but enable a new management team to be given an opportunity to return the NSW Rural Fire Service to an organisation that anyone would be proud to serve.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this vital inquiry. Please feel free to contact me should you wish to speak with me further.

Kind regards