

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Name: Name suppressed
Date received: 23 July 2017

Partially
Confidential

I offer the following comments for consideration by the Legal Affairs Committee in its inquiry into the emergency services of New South Wales in my capacity as a volunteer member of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service over the last seventeen years. In my paid employment, I am a professional human resource manager with responsibility for bullying, harassment and discrimination policy, procedures and response in a large government organisation as well as being a professional human resources manager and an accredited mediator.

1. That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Legal Affairs inquire into and report on emergency services agencies, and in particular:

a) the prevalence of bullying, harassment and discrimination, as well as the effectiveness of the protocols and procedures in place to manage and resolve such complaints within emergency services agencies...

My experience over seventeen years has been that there is almost no bullying, harassment or discrimination in the NSW RFS. There are some areas with a male dominated culture, but I have found that those areas have welcomed all types diversity when their leaders have provided good leadership and role modelling. I have also dealt with some individuals who have complained that they have not been treated the way they expected. In all of those cases, my professional opinion is that it is the complainants' inappropriate behaviour that has been properly managed – reasonable management action undertaken in a reasonable manner.

b) the support structures in place to assist victims of workplace bullying, harassment and/ or discrimination within emergency services agencies,

My experience with the very few people who have claimed to be bullied, harassed or discriminated against in the RFS is that their leaders, peers and the independent support services (such as Critical Incident Support Service, Chaplains, RFSA) have provided effective support to those members.

c) the support services available to emergency services workers and volunteers to assist with mental health issues resulting from workplace trauma and the effectiveness of those programs,

I have suffered trauma on the fire ground and worked with crews who have suffered trauma greater than mine. My personal experience and my experience as a leader of people who have received support services from the RFS is that they are first class services provided without question at any time and in any location that they are needed.

d) the appropriateness of uniforms provided to personnel in emergency services agencies,

As a volunteer, I do not have uniform and I believe that is appropriate. I also believe my protective clothing and equipment is appropriate, although I do not see any need for its colour to be changed.

e) the relocation of the New South Wales Rural Fire Services Headquarters to Orange, Dubbo or Parkes,

In my opinion, the RFS Headquarters needs to be located in an area that balances the access needs of senior (eg Ministerial) visitors at short notice during major emergencies, partner agencies at all times including during emergencies and volunteer and paid members of the RFS from across the state. That location is somewhere to the west of the City of Sydney with easy access to one or more major freeways that link to the city and major regional routes. To me, that means close the Light Horse Interchange at the junction of the M7 and M4 and the current and future sites both meet that requirement. A move to Orange, Dubbo or Parkes would inconvenience more people and would effectively limit access to the Headquarters when close collaboration should be the primary objective.

f) any other related matter.

Any proposal to move the RFS Headquarters should be as a result of a proper business case that includes the value of volunteers' time over the life of the decision and not based on political expediency.