

**Submission
No 79**

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Organisation: NSW State Emergency Service

Date received: 21 July 2017

NSW State Emergency Service

Legislative Council Inquiry into emergency services agencies

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
A. Prevalence of bullying, harrassment and discrimination and effectiveness of policies and procedures to manage and resolve complaints	4
Policies	4
Training for managers	5
Awareness raising of staff	6
Agency structures and resourcing	7
Process for managing complaints	8
Previous reviews and forward plans	8
Bullying, harassment and discrimination statistics	9
B. Support structures to assist victims	10
Structures available	11
Awareness of and access to support structure	12
C. Mental health related support services	13
Policies	13
Agency structures and resourcing	13
External resources	13
Statistics	14
D. Appropriateness of uniforms	15
Appendix	16

Executive Summary

The NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) comprises approximately 378 paid staff and 8,237 volunteer members.

The NSW SES has zero tolerance to bullying and harassment within the workplace. All reports concerning bullying and harassment are referred to NSW SES Professional Standards for triage, assessment, and investigation if warranted.

The NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics ('The Code') outlines the standards of behaviour expected of all members (staff and volunteer). The Code is supported by policies and procedures setting out mandatory requirements for the reporting of bullying and harassment allegations and includes strategies to be applied in relation to the early resolution of interpersonal workplace conflict to minimise the likelihood of escalation to more serious allegations of bullying and harassment.

Within the NSW SES, formal agency structures have been put in place to ensure the effective management and resolution of complaints. Support structures are in place to support members who may have experienced bullying and/or harassment.

With respect to Uniforms, the official blue uniform issued to NSW SES members is deemed appropriate and in accordance with policy and uniform guidelines. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) complies with relevant national standards. The type and style of PPE is developed in consultation with the Service's frontline volunteers.

A. Prevalence of bullying, harassment and discrimination and effectiveness of policies and procedures to manage and resolve complaints

Policies

The commitment by NSW SES to providing and maintaining a respectful and inclusive workplace is reflected in the implementation of a range of policies and proactive measures which has occurred over many years, including:

- NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics ('The Code') which was last reviewed on 12 July 2015 and is currently being reviewed. As part of the current review process, the revised draft policy will be released for consultation, in accordance with agreed procedures, to all NSW SES stakeholders including the:
 - NSW SES Volunteers Association (NSW SESVA);
 - the NSW Public Service Association; and
 - all NSW SES members.

The current review is focused on development of a policy which is more adaptable to meet the requirements of both staff and volunteers.

- All new volunteers and staff members are required to read and acknowledge their acceptance of the Code of Conduct and Ethics when they commence as NSW SES members. Both online and face to face induction and refresher programs are currently under development for all members which explain the Service's expectations and obligations of members and highlights the importance of the Code.
- All staff will be required to attend Code of Conduct and Ethics training from August 2017.
- An online training program, which reinforces the principles of the Code is under development and will be available to all staff and volunteers from July/August 2017.

The NSW *SES Bullying and Harassment Policy* was last updated 18 November 2014 and is currently under review. That policy:

- Defines bullying, discrimination, vilification and harassment;
- Outlines what is not classified as bullying, discrimination, vilification and harassment;
- Describes the effect of bullying, discrimination, vilification and sexual harassment on individuals and the work environment;
- Details the responsibilities of members at all levels;
- Details the support services available to all members; and
- Outlines the procedures for raising and responding to matters related to bullying, discrimination, vilification and/or sexual harassment.

Training for managers

In 2016, training was provided to peer support duty officers in relation to the receipt, assessment and provision of preliminary advice to volunteers' reports concerning alleged bullying and harassment and related issues, in accordance with the provisions of NSW SES policies.

From January 2017 to March 2017, training was provided to NSW SES Directors, managers and supervisors in relation to techniques and procedures for having "difficult conversations" with NSW SES members in relation to workplace performance, which includes conversations relating to management and resolution of workplace interpersonal conflict. Further training in this area will be provided in 2017-18.

To ensure the appropriate implementation of policies and continued professional development of its members, the NSW SES Professional Standards Unit is currently undertaking a 'Road Show' program of presentations across all 17 NSW SES Regions providing training to Regional staff and Volunteer Controllers in relation to:

- Provisions and requirements of the policies;
- The assessment and management of interpersonal conflict issues at a local level; and
- Escalation and reporting of more serious allegations related to bullying and harassment/discrimination/serious misconduct.

Additional training will be provided to all managers and leaders from September 2017 focusing on developing a positive workplace culture, inclusion, identifying casual factors for bullying and harassment, risk management, positive and early intervention and managing conflict.

A new program '*Lead, Command, Manage*' is under development to support the professional development of members in leadership roles. Key components of this program include leadership capabilities, people management, performance development, financial and resource management skills and incident management. This will provide a higher level of people management skills for leaders at all levels in the Service.

Awareness raising of staff

The NSW SES organisational values are the reference point for decision-making at all levels and underpin all NSW SES corporate plans, policies and procedures. The NSW SES values are incorporated under the heading of TARPS:

Trust

- Comply with the law, institutions of government and democratic principles
- Be just, fair and reasonable in the exercise of discretion and authority on behalf of NSW SES
- Communicate intentions clearly and represent NSW SES in all things with honesty and integrity
- Provide impartial advice free of political influence
- Build relationships based on mutual trust and respect

Accountability

- Apply the NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics, taking responsibility for decisions and actions
- Make decisions that are transparent, accountable and able to withstand public scrutiny
- Comply with policies, procedures and guidelines of NSW SES and Government
- Act prudently in the efficient and effective use of NSW SES resources
- Be fiscally responsible

Respect for People

- Treat each other, our community and stakeholders with respect and dignity
- Recognise and adapt to needs and special circumstances of our members and stakeholders
- Build an atmosphere that supports teamwork and collaboration between members and stakeholders
- Celebrate diversity and welcome learning from others

Professionalism and Integrity

- At all times place the best interests of NSW SES and public interest over personal interest
- As our conduct is on public display strive to act so as to bring credit to NSW SES
- Consistently act professionally with honesty, integrity and impartiality
- Take responsibility for situations, showing leadership and courage to have difficult conversations and make decisions to improve performance

Safety and Service

- Promote a safe and healthy workplace culture
- Provide services fairly with a focus on community needs and safety
- Be flexible, innovative, reliable and focus on appropriate training and quality service delivery

The organisational values and expected behaviours are embedded in the NSW SES learning and development framework. Induction programs, for both staff and volunteers, outline organisational expectations and obligations of members in terms of conduct and performance as defined in the *NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics*. The *NSW SES Induction and Fundamentals Training Course* contains content in relation to discipline, conflict resolution, managing interpersonal issues and ethical decision making, which are key factors in ensuring the organisational values are upheld.

All members involved in disciplinary/misconduct proceedings either as complainant, witness or respondent are advised of and have access to fact sheets outlining their respective rights and obligations and are referred to the respective policy/procedures under which proceedings are being conducted in relation to them.

Agency structures and resourcing

The *Professional Standards Unit* (comprised of one Manager, ongoing Clerk Grade 11/12; one Professional Standards Officer, temporary Clerk Grade 7/8; and one Performance Management Officer, ongoing Clerk Grade 5/6) provides:

- Day to day support and advice to NSW SES members to support the local management and resolution of workplace conflict issues;
- Minor conduct issues and escalation and formal investigation of more serious allegations which includes bullying and harassment and related issues.

Safety, Health & Wellbeing (SHW) Unit (comprised of one Manager, ongoing Clerk Grade 9/10; one SHW Officer, ongoing Clerk Grade 5/6; a Return to Work and Wellbeing Officer, ongoing Clerk 3/4 and SHW support officer) provides:

- Day to day advice across NSW SES in relation to the management of bullying and harassment allegations and are responsible for the case management of workers compensation claims arising from bullying and harassment complaints;
- Liaison with external agencies, insurance companies and investigators in relation to the investigation and management of workers compensation claims.

Human Resources Unit (comprised of one Manager, Clerk 9/10; one Membership Officer Clerk 7/8; one temporary Project Officer Clerk 5/6) provides:

- Day to day advice across NSW SES in relation to dealing with bullying and harassment
- Supporting members
- Supporting supervisors

Peer Support and Chaplaincy teams (comprised of one Coordinator, ongoing Clerk Grade 7/8; one Senior Chaplain, ongoing Clerk Grade 7/8; one Administrative Support

Officer, ongoing Clerk Grade 1/2; nine on-call volunteer peer support duty officers; seventeen volunteer chaplains; and seventy peer supporters across NSW). Duty Officers receive and respond to calls from NSW SES members on a 24/7 basis.

All members are able to approach their next direct supervisor for support, a chaplain, a peer supporter or access the Employee Assistance Program. Members will also be able to access the dedicated intranet site currently under development which will provide information about support services, contacts, links and procedures for supporting a positive and productive workplace.

Process for managing complaints

Allegations of bullying, discrimination, vilification and harassment are assessed in accordance with the information contained in the NSW SES Bullying and Harassment Policy.

If the matter is assessed as being bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, the process outlined in the *NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics* will be followed to investigate and resolve the matter. This may involve dealing with the matter:

- Under NSW SES Internal Grievances Policy and related procedure if the matter does not relate to misconduct by a volunteer or staff member; or
- If the matter relates to an allegation of misconduct, the matter will be investigated in accordance with provisions of NSW SES Allegations of Misconduct Procedures for Volunteer Members (if the member is a volunteer), or the misconduct provisions under the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, Regulation and Rules (if the matter relates to a staff member).

Matters that are not deemed to be bullying, harassment and/or discrimination are dealt with in accordance with the NSW SES Internal Grievances Policy and related procedure and are dealt with at the lowest level appropriate.

The NSW SES Professional Standards Unit (PSU) plays a significant role in analysing, reporting and acting upon complaints as well as providing advice, training and mentoring relating to professional standards matters.

Previous reviews and forward plans

In March 2017, NSW SES initiated the Positive and Productive Workplace Strategy that incorporates a review of the NSW SES workplace to establish lead indicators and identify the incidence and location of workplace interactions giving rise to allegations of bullying and harassment and related issues. It will also identify and implement proactive strategies to develop a collaborative and inclusive workplace across the NSW SES free from bullying and harassment.

Key elements of the strategy include:

- Environmental audit to gather data for evidence base regarding the existence and extent of bullying and harassment within the organisation.

- Branding based on NSW public sector “Respect Reflect Reset” and development of key messages.
- Development and delivery of a case study based face to face awareness program for all staff to support identification and prevention of bullying and harassment.
- Additional workshops for leaders including developing a positive workplace culture, inclusion, identifying casual factors, risk management, positive and early intervention and managing conflict.
- Development of online induction and refresher programs for Code of Conduct, and identification and prevention of bullying and harassment.
- Inclusion of Code of Conduct and identification and prevention of bullying and harassment in member inductions.
- Workshops for volunteer peer supporters and chaplains.
- Development of resources including posters, health check tools, web banners, and presentations to support team discussions.
- Establishment of an intranet site with resources, links and information regarding building positive and productive workplaces, including Code of Conduct, building effective teams and prevention of bullying and harassment.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination statistics

2015-16

Bullying and Harassment Matters	Discrimination Matters	Total
29	0	29

2016-17 (as at 16 June 2017)

Bullying and Harassment Matters	Discrimination Matters	Total
35	2	37

Notes:

- Figures are only available for the last two financial years as the Professional Standards Unit was established in September 2015 when record keeping commenced.
- It is considered that the increase in numbers from the 2016-17 financial year was due to the implementation of the Professional Standards Unit in September 2015 and the increased resourcing of that unit in early 2016, which led to improved dissemination of information and increased member awareness of how and where to report these types of matters.

The NSW SES comprises approximately 378 paid staff and 8,237 volunteer members.

The NSW SES has zero tolerance to bullying and harassment within the workplace. All reports concerning bullying and harassment are referred to NSW SES Professional Standards for triage, assessment, and investigation if warranted.

Since 1 July 2016 to 16 June 2017, a total of 37 reports of alleged bullying and/or harassment were received within the NSW SES Professional Standards Unit. Of note:

- 16 matters currently open pending finalisation of investigation or triage/assessment;
- 10 matters were formally investigated of which 2 reports were sustained, 8 were not sustained;
- 4 matters where respondents resigned upon notification of a pending investigation;
- 3 matters where complainants failed to provide sufficient information/details to support the allegations;
- 4 matters referred back to Directorate or Region level for management and resolution at the local level;
- 14 staff workers compensation claims received (7 physical injury claims and 7 psychological injury claims);
- 7 psychological workers compensation claims – 4 claims relate to alleged bullying and harassment. None of the allegations were sustained.

These cases have informed procedural changes and strategies for management of complaints.

The 2016 *People Matter Survey* highlighted concerns held by NSW SES members around bullying and harassment, and employees also reported concerns about a perceived lack of adequate response and managerial action in relation to these types of issues across the organisation. The 2016 *People Matter Survey* showed improvements on the 2014 survey in relation to witnessing or being subjected to bullying at work. These results are a driver in the development of a Positive and Productive Workplace Strategy within NSW SES to build on these improvements.

B. Support structures to assist victims

Structures available

Within the NSW SES, formal agency structures are in place to ensure the effective management and resolution of complaints. Support structures are also in place to support people who may have experienced bullying and/or harassment.

The NSW SES Peer Support and Chaplaincy programs provide a 24/7 response function carried out by highly trained volunteers who manage a 1800 number and provide telephone support and triage to members experiencing difficulty. They are able to deploy peer supporters or chaplains for face to face and other support as required. This service is underpinned by a Clinical Psychologist who provides appropriate clinical support and supervision.

The team also provides a range of more intentional interventions that are job specific and are aimed at looking after the mental health needs of the members. The training for these interventions is accredited under the umbrella of Critical Incident Management Australasia (CIMA).

Support services available for members

The NSW SES Peer Support team (comprised of one Coordinator, ongoing Clerk Grade 7/8; one Administrative Support Officer, ongoing Clerk Grade 1/2; nine on-call volunteer peer support duty officers; and approximately 70 peer supporters (66 volunteers and 4 staff)) provides support services as needed across NSW. Duty officers receive and respond to calls from NSW SES members on a 24/7 basis.

The team provides support in relation to difficulties or stress/anxiety/depression resulting from interpersonal conflict within NSW SES, within their personal relationships or as a result of their NSW SES operational experiences. The peer support team takes a proactive approach in educating and guiding members about how to identify signs and manage stress and anxiety.

Chaplaincy Program - comprised of one Senior Chaplain, ongoing Clerk Grade 7/8, supported by 17 volunteer chaplains across NSW, has the following functions.

- Advice to all members of the NSW SES and their families on cultural, spiritual and pastoral matters;
- Direction, training and support of the SES chaplains;
- Support for new and ongoing operational activities both inter and intra state;
- Support to leaders at all levels;
- Support and encouragement of the spirituality of members and their families by the provision of ceremonial and religious services;
 - Supervision of the provision of chaplains, internally or externally sourced, to meet the chaplaincy requirements for critical incident interventions both intra and inter-state;
 - Support for the health and wellbeing aspects of the Work, Health and safety and Employee Assistance Programs.

NSW SES engages a consultant Clinical Psychologist who is responsible for providing clinical supervision for the Peer Support and Chaplaincy Programs and further assessment and short term counselling in relation to NSW SES members experiencing difficulties or stress/anxiety/depression as a result of interpersonal conflict within NSW SES, within their personal relationships or as a result of their NSW SES operational experiences.

All members involved in workplace conflict issues or formal disciplinary processes are advised of and afforded access to external support agencies which include Employee Assistance Program services and external counselling providers.

The NSW SES Diversity and Inclusion Strategy focuses on promoting an inclusive culture in the organisation in order to break down stereotypes and prevent discrimination.

Awareness of and access to support structures

Awareness of the Employee Assistance Program and the Peer Support and Chaplaincy Programs is included in induction and on-boarding processes. The services are also promoted extensively face to face by peer supporters and chaplains at volunteer unit meetings, during discussions with volunteers at weekly training, and by posters and cards in all Unit and State Headquarters locations.

Pre-incident Education and Mental Health Awareness training (called MY5) is provided by peer supporters who conduct information sessions about the program on how to manage the effects of stress and develop healthy coping strategies and is part of an annual process of peer supporter visits to SES Units. This includes information about how the program works and how to access support from the Peer Support team.

The programs are supported by a 1800 telephone number staffed by dedicated and highly trained volunteer peer supporters and chaplains on a 24/7 basis. Members are able to access these services through the 1800 number or through direct contact with peer supporters and chaplains. The programs are also regularly promoted through the intranet and internal communication mechanisms.

Additional online and printed information made available to staff and volunteers includes the following:

- Employee Assistance Program brochure and cards
- Critical incident Stress Information sheet
- Critical Incident Stress Significant Other information sheet
- Difference between burnout and stress
- Grief Information Sheet – Understanding Grief
- Grief Information Wallet card
- Fear Information sheet
- Stress Management Techniques
- Trauma Information sheet
- Suicide Information sheet
- Please Listen sheet

C. Mental health related support services

Policies

The *Employee Assistance Program Policy* provides a framework to provide a confidential, independent counselling and support service to staff and volunteers by exception in NSW SES.

The *Chaplaincy Policy* (2012) outlines the scope, principles, procedures and accountabilities of the Chaplaincy Program. SES Chaplaincy is built on essential ministerial qualities of availability, compassion, integrity and confidentiality. The Chaplaincy program specifically provides spiritual support to volunteers and staff and their families in times of death, illness and personal tragedy and generally overlaps with other areas in providing a range of morale and welfare matters. The policy has been reviewed and will be released for consultation by August 2017.

The *Critical Incident and Support Program Policy* (2014) outlines the principles, processes and accountabilities within the Critical Incident Support Program (CISP), which provides a comprehensive and integrated, systematic and multi-component crisis intervention system. The policy is currently under review.

Agency structures and resourcing

The Peer Support Program and the Chaplaincy Program are separately funded and resourced programs within the NSW SES People and Culture Directorate. They have their own budgets sufficient to carry out their mandated tasks.

As outlined above, the NSW SES has approximately 70 trained peer supporters (66 volunteers and 4 staff) and 17 volunteer chaplains across the state. These teams are supported administratively by a Coordinator and administration clerk.

The number of peer supporters and Chaplains will increase during late 2017 with the next planned intake of additional peer supporters. The focus is on expanding the number of staff peer supporters and on expansion in geographic areas in which there is an identified need for more volunteer peer supporters.

Peer supporters and Chaplains are supported by relevant training including Mental Health First Aid and Psychological First Aid.

External resources/expertise

The NSW SES is a member of two NSW based inter-agency emergency service groups, the Response Agency Staff Support Alliance (RASSA) and the informal Senior Chaplains Network (SCN) that foster cooperation and the development of policy for interagency chaplaincy and peer support matters.

The NSW SES works closely with industry stakeholders to ensure the support services provided to its members are based on current research and industry practice. The Clinical Psychologist engaged for the program has conducted research to assess and improve the effectiveness of the NSW SES education program for all members, to promote resilience.

The NSW SES works with the NSW Mental Health Commission and other emergency services agencies. NSW SES worked closely in development of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for First Responder Organisations in NSW, which is an overarching mental health strategy launched by the NSW Mental Health Commission in October 2016.

Statistics

Intervention hours for peer support, chaplaincy services and Employee Assistance Program during 2016-17 (as at 1 May 2017) are as follows:

2016-17	Peer Support Hours	Chaplaincy Hours	EAP Hours
July	81	40	49.5
August	415	105	67.75
September	123.5	23.5	57.5
October	305.5	55	35
November	193.75	47	57.5
December	N/A	N/A	N/A
January	27	N/A	29.5
February	N/A	N/A	N/A
March	104	52.75	38
April	110	86	40.5
Total	1,359.75	409.25	375.25

D. Appropriateness of uniforms

The official blue uniform issued to NSW SES members is deemed appropriate and in accordance with policy and uniform guidelines as agreed by the NSW SES Volunteers Association in collaboration with the Service.

A review is currently being undertaken with regard to the operational and corporate nature of duties as it relates to the requirement to wear official blue uniform.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) complies with relevant national standards. The type and style of PPE is developed in consultation with the Service's frontline volunteers.

In collaboration with Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council (AFAC) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Technical Committee, NSW SES has developed a guideline for standards Australia/New Zealand (AS/NZS) in PPE/Personal Protective Clothing (PPC). This guideline was developed with specific regard to the operational response roles undertaken by NSW SES volunteers and includes:

- One and two piece fire retardant PPE as the general issue to all volunteers with long sleeve light weight shirt for hot and humid conditions as an option;
- Appropriate helmets and boots for general land search and road crash rescue events;
- All PPE/PPC is embossed with AS/NZS standard compliant retroreflective (day/night) tape and is constructed of appropriate fluorescent coloured material;
- Wet-weather 4-in-1 jacket and pant;
- Flood Technicians (level 3) are issued with specialist wet-suits, Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), helmets, boots, gloves, goggles, Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and lights for submersion Search and Rescue (SAR) events;
- Boat Operators (level 2) are issued with appropriate flotation (PFDs), PPC, helmets, PLBs and 4-in-1 jackets;
- Volunteers working in Alpine conditions are equipped with high standard alpine PPC inclusive of outer-shells, pants and primary layer thermal garments inclusive of gloves, beanies, PLBs, 4-in-1 jackets, boots and goggles;
- The NSW SES is presently reviewing specific PPC/PPE for members specialising in vertical and cave SAR, all of which include the basic PPC/PPE with specialist iterations as required;
- Sun protection is also provided via appropriate hats.

The NSW SES participates in both AFAC and NSW State based collaboration with other agencies to ensure that innovation and fit-for-task is the key focus across PPE/PPC in protecting NSW SES members.

Appendix

Existing policies, and when last updated

- NSW SES Bullying and Harassment Policy – updated 18 November 2014 (currently under review);
- NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics – updated 12 July 2015 (currently under review);
- NSW SES Allegations of Misconduct Procedures for Volunteer Members – updated 15 December 2016;
- NSW SES External Complaint Policy – updated 15 December 2016;
- NSW SES External Complaint Procedure – updated 15 December 2016;
- NSW SES Internal Grievances Policy – updated 15 December 2016;
- NSW SES Internal Grievances Procedure – updated 15 December 2016;
- NSW SES Chaplaincy Policy – updated 1 April 2012 (currently under review);
- NSW SES Critical Incident Support Program Policy – updated 1 January 2014 (currently under review).