

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY

Organisation: NSW SES Volunteers Association

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**NSW Parliament
Legislative Council**

**Inquiry into the fire and
emergency services levy**

Public

Submission by

**NSW SES Volunteers
Association**

Acknowledgements

The NSW State Emergency Service (SES) has a new Commissioner and is undergoing a period of significant transformation. During this period it is essential that the Commissioner is provided with the necessary resources that are required to continue the support of the existing volunteers but also growing the organisation so that it can support communities before, during and after emergencies and disasters.

Recent cuts to the NSW SES budget, specifically for ongoing funding of the Fleet Program have raised concerns among the Volunteers of the organisation.

The Volunteers Association hopes that the outcomes of this Inquiry provide the Commissioner with the necessary resources required to transform and grow the NSW SES.

The Volunteers Association is making this submission under Parliamentary Privilege without prejudice.

Questions concerning this report should be directed to:

NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers Association
Unit 1, 2-6 Lindsay Street
Rockdale NSW 2216
Phone: 1300 073 782
Fax: 1300 273 782
Email: office@nswsesva.org.au

Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

The Volunteers Association is privileged to be able to make this submission in support of the volunteer members of the NSW SES who give their time freely to make their communities safer before, during and after disaster by making this submission.

The Volunteers Association does not express an opinion on how funding is derived by the government for the NSW SES, only that it funds the organisation appropriately so that volunteers are supported with the necessary resources, training and equipment.

The Volunteers Association would like to see the Government recognise the commitment and dedication of serving NSW SES Volunteers by providing them with an exemption or a discount from any proposed levy.

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Introduction

The Volunteers Association is a not-for-profit registered charity that was established in 1998 to represent and support the volunteer members of the SES.

The Volunteers Association became an incorporated association in 2000 and a registered charity in 2005. In recognition of the need for the SES volunteers to have a member body and a voice to Government the Volunteers Association was included as a consultative body in 2010 into the *State Emergency Service Act 1989* (NSW) (SES Act).

The Volunteers Association is an organisation set up for the benefit of the thousands of volunteer members of the SES. From its humble beginnings the Volunteers Association has always stated that it is not a Union as it has no rights to represent volunteer members under any industrial relations legislation.

These are the men and women wearing orange that you see on the news and in the media. They are all volunteers that freely give their time training and responding to emergencies, as well as advising communities about what they can do to prepare for floods and storms.

They are highly trained professional volunteers with skills in general rescue, storm damage, flood rescue, car accident rescue, alpine rescue, vertical rescue, urban search and rescue. You will see them tarping roofs, rescuing people from floodwaters, sandbagging, removing fallen trees, rescuing people from car accidents, from heights and depths or alpine areas as well as searching for lost loved ones.

The Volunteers Association provides representation and support services for these volunteer members. It works closely with the SES to achieve common goals and represent the interests of its volunteer members, advocating for them when appropriate.

Benefits provided by the Volunteers Association include the provision of a NSW SES Volunteers Association Welfare Fund, SES Unit grants and personal scholarships, and other support funding schemes. Various fundraising activities are required to fund these support activities including raffles, donations, sponsorships, merchandise sales and advertising commissions.

Objectives

The Volunteers Association needs not only to comply with all legislative requirements but also operates in accordance with its constitutional objectives being:

- Provide a means for the consolidation and representation of the views and concerns of SES volunteers via such mechanisms as may be appropriate.
- Provide tangible benefits to SES volunteers, plus other beneficiaries as directed by the Board, from time to time.
- Provide public education (Letting people know what we do and what they can do – how they can help!).

Strategic Plan

the NSW SES Volunteers Association will commence a new corporate plan from 2018. This plan has been developed based on a culture of values based leadership, transparent governance, equity, sustainable financial viability and growth with four simple objectives:

Growth - Growing the Volunteers Association to support its members

- Getting the right people in the right roles
- Improving the way we collaborate and communicate

Change – We are a contemporary organisation that can change quickly

- Building our identity and reputation
- Remaining relevant by responding to changes to meet the needs of our stakeholders

Culture - Our culture facilitates growth and minimises risk

- Transforming our culture so it reflects our values and is present in all our leadership

Risk - Our governance processes enable us to manage risk and realise opportunities as they arise

- Managing risk and taking advantage of opportunities as they arise
- Governance processes are clear and transparent and the Association decisions are aligned with community expectations

The SES volunteer members will always be the prime reason for the Volunteers Association's existence. These goals have been developed based on the strong values of leadership and sustainable financial viability and growth.

Mission

“Volunteers Supporting Volunteers”

Vision

“Volunteers supporting volunteers to improve our Service”

Values

Our values describe what we believe, how we act and our commitment to serve our volunteer members and the community.

Independent - We determine our own destiny through planning

Team Focused - We work as a team to lead our organisation making decisions based on merit

Advocacy - We are a voice for the volunteers, speaking up for and supporting their interests

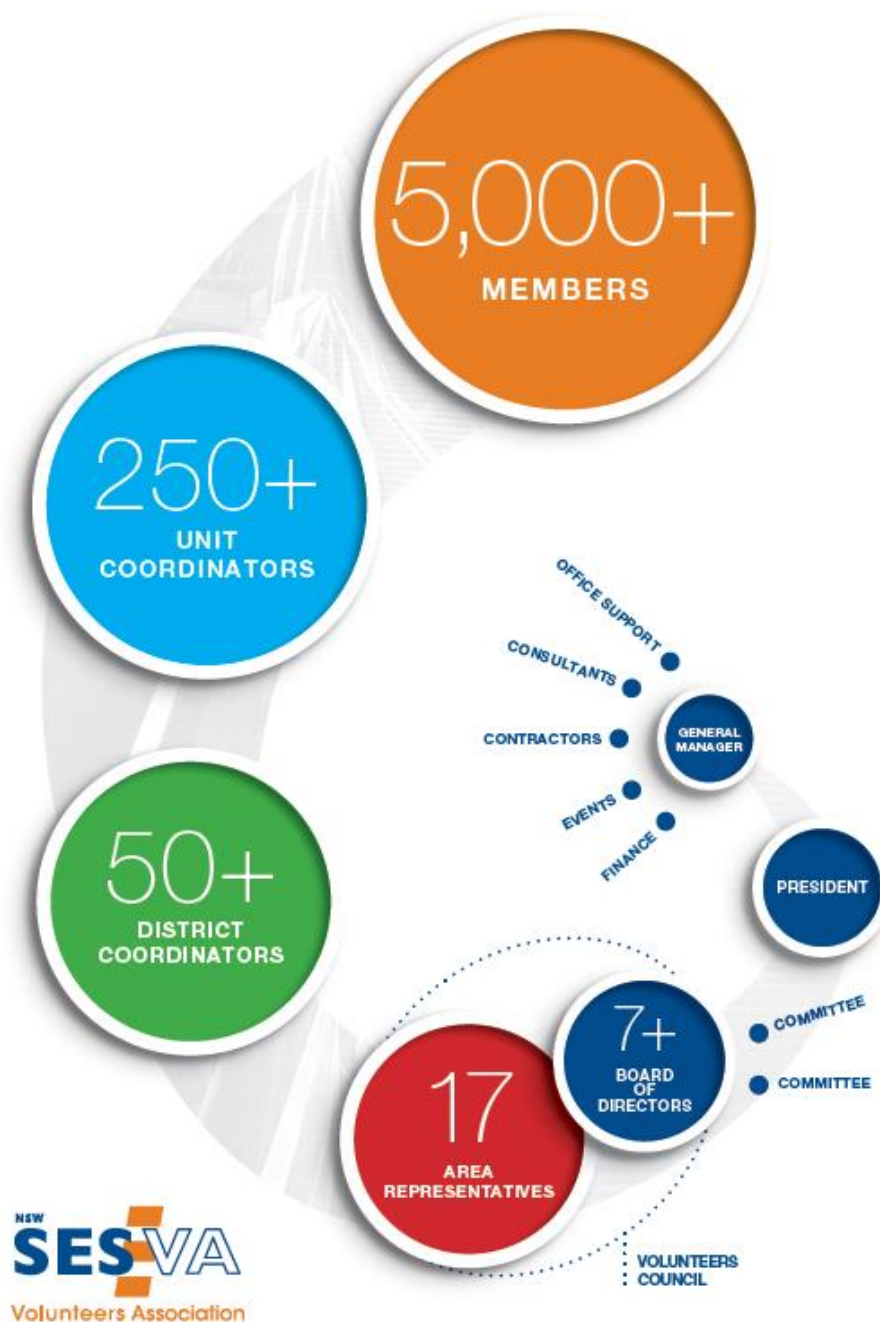
Stewardship - We maintain and grow a sustainable organisation that diligently maintains its resources and invests in its people

Professionalism - We act, lead and support our people, inspiring them to achieve successful outcomes

“We are an independent organisation made up of a diverse group of professional people that work together to care for our members and to speak up on their behalf”

Structure & Management

With over 5,500 members, a small team of dedicated people work to support the aims and objectives of the Volunteers Association. Lead by the President and Board of Directors, our volunteer representatives provide a communication and support channel to our members in over 250 locations throughout NSW.



The Submission

This submission is being made under Parliamentary Privilege without prejudice.

Response to Questions

- a) The policy process and financial modelling underlying the provisions of the *Fire and Emergency Services Levy Act 2017*,**
- b) The policy and financial implications for all stakeholders of repealing this Act,**
- c) Alternative models for ensuring that fire and emergency services are fully funded in a fair and equitable manner; and**
- d) Any other related matter**

The Volunteers Association makes the observation, regardless of the policy, process and financial modelling selected by the Government, that it maintains and grows the funding available to the NSW State Emergency Service so that its volunteers are adequately resourced as determined by the Minister and Commissioner. This would include but not be limited to things such as vehicles, training, facilities, boats, equipment, clothing and protective equipment so that the volunteers are able to support their communities before, during and after disasters or emergencies.

In the event that the Government implements any form of Levy, the Volunteers Association requests that the Government provides either an exemption or significant discount to serving NSW State Emergency Service Volunteers in recognition of their service to the Community and the hundreds of millions of dollars in savings that they provide to the Government.