

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 27 March 2018

Partially
Confidential

27 March 2018

The Director,
Portfolio Committee No. 4
Legal Affairs,
Parliament House

To the Director,

I write to provide an (ex) employee's viewpoint of a number of matters discussed during proceedings on Tuesday, 20 March 2018 relating to Fire and Rescue NSW.

One notable omission throughout the matters detailed within the Transcript is that there is no discussion about bullying and harassment where senior staff are involved in this behaviour.

This is the ongoing fundamental systemic failure within FRNSW.

In looking at the results from the 2012, 2014 and 2017 People Matter Surveys (PMS) the same group of employees is identified as being the largest group of bullies is listed as: -

- Number 1 offender – “A senior manager”, and
- Number 2 offender – “Your immediate manager/supervisor”.

These two groups combined, in each PMS, form over 50% of the Bullies!

Despite the KPMG Review and the enormous amount of Public Funds invested by the Government since to re-brand, restructure, update the image, create the Workplace Standards Branch with numerous staff, etc., nothing appears to have been done to resolve the most obvious and most debilitating cause of bullying and harassment.

I believe this is also demonstrated by the poor participation of FRNSW employees in the PMS. This is mentioned within the Inquiry Transcript on Page 2, where there is a section of discussion relating to the PMS, and in particular the poor rate of return of surveys.

In discussion with numerous staff over the 2012, 2014 and 2017 Survey periods, there appears to be two common reasons/explanations I have heard about this poor rate of return.

These are: -

1. Lack of trust/respect in senior management (as shown in the responses within each PMS);
2. A perception, based on continued experiences, that nothing actually changes in relation to the bullying and harassing actions/inactions of senior management (also shown in within each PMS).

Also on this page, the Hon. Lynda Voltz raises the questions about why the number of bullying and harassment investigations being sustained is so low.

As detailed within my submission, it is also clearly demonstrated that the Workplace Standards Branch was not able to remain independent and follow the correct process but, did a complete backflip on their previous advice and supported the wrongful actions of a Deputy Commissioner.

I'm not the only one who has experienced this.

These types of actions/decisions are well known by employees throughout FRNSW.

It is also very difficult to have a matter dealt with openly, with procedural thoroughness and transparency when there is usually some level of a clique, power arrangement, informal network, etc. – particularly when that involves a senior manager/manager.

From my experience, and what I know of other peoples' matters, it's incredibly hard to pursue a bullying and harassment matter when senior managers/managers control every aspect of an issue including obtaining background details, facts of the incident/complaint, witness statements while also determining which process to utilise to deal with a matter.

This enable management to manipulate responses, including those to external agencies that may have a role in a matter such as the Ombudsman's Office, WorkCover/SafeWork NSW, Workers Compensation Insurers and the Workers Compensation Commission.

Should a bullying and harassment matter involve senior management they have influence over an employee's career, transfer considerations and employment, which often provide a powerful motivator to not pursue a matter.

Also, when fighting for justice and having to take a legal option, senior management seem to have absolutely no qualms about utilising public funds on totally wasteful legal costs.

The other thing that occurs that discourages positive engagement by employees in things like the PMS is that when someone does object and actually upholds a set of principles and values to try and get the right thing done, once they've been through the FRNSW process and are completely downtrodden and beaten, the managers then rely on this outcome to discourage others from attempting the same.

In conclusion, I see nothing that's been discussed that identifies a way to eradicate bullying and harassment from the largest group/s (managers) of offenders, repeatedly identified by staff via an external, independent process, who are carrying out this ongoing behaviour within FRNSW.

As with the KPMG Review and the subsequent actions taken, the whole process seemed to be structured by management looking down at those they deemed responsible for it.

This may explain why there has been very little change within the whole organisation in relation to the bullying and harassment culture as the main, and the worst, perpetrators are escaping being held accountable.

This is why I believe an important step in eradicating this culture is the establishment of an independent and external Emergency Services Ombudsman or Professional Standards/Conduct unit that will actually follow all appropriate due processes and legislation and will not be influenced by rank, position, promotion or even employment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this additional information.