

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 3 April 2018

Partially
Confidential

3/4/2018

Submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into bullying in emergency services

I understand that the closing date for submissions to this Inquiry was some time ago but in lieu of the Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) Commissioner's recent remarks promulgated to all staff, coupled with the manner in which my bullying case was handled by FRNSW I felt compelled to write anyway.

I should state at the onset that I initially intended to take the matter on the chin, partly for fear of further retribution, but the Commissioner's remarks to his staff last week, in which he insisted that he has satisfied the parliamentary inquiry that FRNSW are doing their best to stamp out bullying, left a bitter taste in my mouth. I don't believe the Commissioner intentionally lied to the Inquiry, but if he genuinely believes that by implementing some websites and services he has somehow changed the brigade's culture on bullying then he has been very misled.

While I concede I am aggrieved at my bullying claim's outcome, my submission here is more to do with the manner in which it was handled.

I submitted a bullying claim to the brigades' 'Stop Bullying' email address on 3/12/ . As I received no response I sent it again on 24/12/ but still didn't receive a response. I then contacted SafeworkNSW who said it is sadly not surprised this inbox is not monitored and suggested I send my concern direct to the department that manages it. I then sent it a third time directly to FRNSW's Professional Standards Unit (PSU) on 3/1/ and soon after received an apologetic email for the lack of response. Oddly, this email conceded they received my complaint in early December but no explanation was offered as to why it wasn't acted upon. It was to be a further fortnight and another email from me until I received a phone call to discuss my situation.

During the next six weeks I was told by two people that they would come and see me; neither did. I was also told I was going to be formally interviewed; this didn't happen either.

I was asked to prepare a report detailing a chronology of my complaint. In it I submitted emails from other high ranking staff members – one of whom apologises for what the alleged bully said to me and another, referring to a separate incident, saying that what he said to me was 'awful.' I also supplied emails from the alleged bully himself where he wrote that he was reporting me to various people, including the PSU, yet the PSU confirmed these threats were false as he never reported me to them.

As my issue involved me being relocated, the PSU said I should lodge and appeal with the Transfer Review Committee (TRC) as a matter of course. They came to their own conclusions about my bullying claim and upheld the transfer more than a week before the PSU sat to review it. Even the PSU were stunned by this and initially didn't believe me when I informed them of it.

As a further fortnight went by without hearing from anyone I emailed the PSU as well as the Commissioner's office on 4/2/ about how shabbily my case was being handled, how the TRC had somehow pre-empted the PSU's decision and how it doesn't fit with the FRNSW's guidelines for resolution of such issues. Again I received no reply.

The PSU then advised they would talk to FRNSW senior management about whether my claim warranted an investigation. The problem here, and I said it to the PSU in my original email, was that I was reporting a high ranking FRNSW officer and that it is difficult to expect an impartial outcome when I have to report someone of such rank, even more so when it is to his own peers.

Ultimately, as I predicted, it was determined there was no case to answer and I received an email to that effect.

Strangely, although the PSU insisted I have not been bullied, attached to their email were details of various mental health services in case I think I was. Also worthy of note is that I told the PSU that, to my knowledge, I am not suffering emotionally or psychologically from this issue. They then suggested that this supported their view that there was no bullying in the first place.

With the exception of the PSU there is not a person I have met in the organisation, including my new boss, who doesn't think that my forced relocation was anything other than the final act in a bullying saga that had gone on for over a year.

Also of concern is the lack of emails I received in preference to phone calls for which I would then receive a brief acknowledgment email of the phone discussions that had occurred. It concerns me that the PSU seem unwilling to put anything in writing.

Furthermore, despite my request I have not been given an explanation as to why I was relocated; this contravenes FRNSW's own transfer policy. I also asked why my claim, particularly the copies of emails I forwarded, did not satisfy the PSU that something was amiss but again, despite FRNSW's policy of fairness and transparency, this elicited no response from them.

In conclusion, I am confident my claim would have been handled very differently, more professionally and in a lot less than 10 weeks if it were reviewed independently.

I am available to discuss this at any time.