

**INQUIRY INTO RESPONSE TO MAJOR FLOODING
ACROSS NEW SOUTH WALES IN 2022**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 22 May 2022

Partially
Confidential

(b) The role, composition and resource allocations of Resilience NSW, the NSW State Emergency Service and other relevant Government agencies,

Below is a list of important issues that need to be addressed during this enquiry.

The amount of requests for Flood Rescue were overwhelming on the 28th of February there was no way Lismore SES could cope on its own without the support of the public.

Zones

The NSWSES is divided into zones across the state.

Over the past several years the NSWSES has undergone a transition from Region based control to Zones. Lismore is part of the Northern Zone stretching from the Tweed down to Hexham and controlled from Metford.

This has taken away the paid staff in Goonellabah needed to run the organisation effectively and dropped it into the hands of a smaller group at Metford in the Hunter. Without disrespect to the efforts of paid staff, the area is too big, remote and varied to control from the area of the Northern Rivers.

The onus has then been put back to Unit Controllers to take up the slack and manage the day to day business duties. For Unit Commanders it has now become a full time 'voluntary' job giving no remuneration and consuming working hours the Unit Commanders could be spent in paid positions outside the organisation.

During events local knowledge has been lost, volunteers are overworked with non-operational tasks and this gives feeling to a lack of support all round in order to save money.

During Flood events in Lismore a small handful of Unit members seem to be able arrange, act and manage operations more thoroughly than asking for assistance from the ICC set up in Goonellabah and Metford.

Flood Rescue

The NSWSES is the lead agency for Flood, Storm and Tsunami. Over the last several years the SES has seemed to concentrated its resources on maintaining its General Land Rescue capabilities and maintain it Road Crash Rescue capability (NSWPF is the lead agency for this) while neglecting its three core roles, most importantly Flood Rescue. There is limited budget in this area that needs addressing.

Over the last several years I have been a member of the FORCDG. This team of dedicated experienced and well versed group have struggled over time to grow and implement a stronger capability of the NSWSES. A lot of good hard work seems to be offered up and then lost in the system.

An example of this is FR operators still asking for new wetsuits suitable to the warm conditions experienced on the Northern Rivers. This has been over 4 years in discussions yet still no two piece wet suits. Our operators are overheating whilst performing rescues. Operators feel disillusioned by this type of thing.

NSWSES Flood boat fleet has been neglected over the years, here on the Northern Rivers we are working with boats up to thirty years old. In 2016 the fleet was to be replaced over a four year period. It is disappointing to see the RFS receive funding for, or a budget that allows two new Cessna Citation aircraft to be put into service and yet SES struggle to have good quality up to date boats available.

I volunteered to be part of the CDG to implement and offer recommendations into building this new fleet. We adopted classes of vessels based on need and working environment. To date the only class of vessel that has gone into active service is the Class 4 Bow loader. This vessel released to us is based on a Victorian design and not to the specifications we require here in NSW. In short the Fleet team in Wollongong did not follow our recommendations and gave us a cheap alternative. I truly hope the fleet is implemented soon or I fear operators or victims may perish attempting future flood rescues. This last event was just pure luck no one died in a boating accident. They did occur.

Our biggest issue on the 28th February was the lack of available vessels at Lismore unit. We generally have five motorised vessels available and three Ark Angles Rescue Inflatable paddle boats. A bow Loader (Class 4) 2 shallow V hulls (Class 2) and a Deep V (Class 3) and 2 Small tinnies (Class 1).

One of our shallow Vs was sent to Casino SES Unit on loan as they had nothing available for rescue and was extensively used. Our two tinnies were underpowered and not suitable for such a large rescue operation but used out of necessity that day.

The Bow Loader was used from dawn to dusk and as the operator I can say the lack of recommended design features I had asked for prior to their release were problematic and dangerous.

Our Deep V Hull was commandeered by Police Rescue and used by them exclusively throughout the day.

To date, excluding the Class 4, flood boats have still to be rolled out and the process has bogged down.

THIS IS OF HIGH IMPORTANCE.

When working with FORCDG the idea of Class 1 vessels to be cached and stored in various places around the state was discussed. This still hasn't happened. They could have been loaded and sent to us via helicopter at short notice. This was the perfect occasion for this to have taken place.

I hope this enquiry will ensure better Flood Rescue equipment.

Reliance of Other Agencies

The NSWSES seems to rely on other outside agencies to bolster its front line Flood Rescue numbers in its initial response. Usually an agency has the resources and numbers to cover the early stages of an event. For example RFS will deal with a section 44 fire utilising its own assets before requesting front line fire fighters from FRNSW or NPWS and out of state volunteer fire service. NSWSES rely on FRNSW, Ambulance NSW and Police Rescue Flood Rescue operators to provide a paid service to be available. Volunteer, SES highly trained 'In water operators' find it difficult to manage their flood rescue responsibilities and their professional jobs.

We rely on NSWFRS to provide helicopters through the State Air Desk. We do have NSWSES manage the Airbases but it still requires involvement of the RFS to access these Aircraft.

NSWSWS has no operators trained in 'Down the Wire Rescue'. I was told many years ago this will never happen due to cost. This is simply not good enough. RFS have rescue operators trained specifically in Down the Wire techniques. These operators are available to rescue victims in harm's way of fire and during flood time rescue victims from floods. This is a job that should be done by highly trained SES In water Operators, not firefighters with only a Land Based Flood Rescue qualification. As SES are highly trained in both Rescue operations and to work effectively in a flood environment it stands to reason RFS need to allow SES members access to Down the Wire training and provide places for SES to be trained and mentored in this space.

NSWSES needs a full time paid capability and response group set up primarily for Flood Operations and Rescue. This could be based on similar systems National Parks and Wildlife run with the Enhanced Bush Fire Management Program or RFS system of their Fire Mitigation Crews. They need to be rescue operators and not trained in IMT.

SES could have these paid operators respond around the state when needed to bolster local volunteer crews. When not active their normal business duties could focus on training themselves and others and maintaining equipment and public education.

Beacon System

Beacon has many great features but is so often overlooked by older volunteers as being too difficult to use. I noted in many cases the system falls down due to power and telco outages and its optimum usability relies on a laptop or PC access. Many people were relying on Facebook and other social media systems to circumnavigate the SES and get the job done themselves. I have no answers to this but it needs addressing.

Over many floods throughout the years I have witnessed SES field teams responding to a single job several times or rescue jobs that are several days and have without doubt been

addressed but not completed on Beacon. This comes down to the chunkiness of Beacon and the difficulties on not being able to finalise jobs quickly.

Paid Staff

The lack of continuity of paid staff and the temporary filling of roles within the NSWSES is overwhelming for both paid and volunteers. The headquarters in Wollongong is regularly sending out temporary recruitment roles for various jobs.

These roles should not be temporary and give no continuity of SES experience and expertise. Temporary positions give no security to individuals who would otherwise be dedicated to having a strong SES instead as soon as a person is placed to a position and settled in they are removed. This is a ridiculous way to operate.

Their needs to be paid staff within large Units or at least replace the old system of Region full time staff for continuity.

Bringing paid staff up through the ranks gives more continuity and a greater understanding of the work environment and an understanding of the difficulties both paid and volunteers need to overcome to maintain a consistent service.

Recommendations

Quick deployment of a paid workforce with deployable cached vessels that can be sent by Helicopter anywhere around the State.

Increase paid staff back into the service in a full time capacity.

Training and necessary equipment to run operations efficiently are borrowed (Aircraft, High clearance vehicles etc) or just not available. This needs funding to be able to address its capabilities.

Increase funding and full time trainers

Future funding equivalent to what the NSWRFs receive needs to be made available. If a round-a-bout in Sydney can attract \$100 million to repair, \$65 million spent on our fleet of vessels that are run down and old is simply not enough to bring it up to today's standards.

Review of current boat fleet and increase fleet and technologies to meet future requirements.

Focus on core roles within the SES Flood, Storm and Tsunami. Only then should the service fill roles assisting other agencies.

More paid full time staff, not bureaucrats, but trained field operators focused around flood Rescue and Operations available on a full time basis.