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## Your details

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

Emergency services personnel

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**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public**

I would like this submission to remain anonymous

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

I am currently employed as a District Officer in the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS). I have been in this role for 2.5 years. Prior to this I was a permanent firefighter with Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW). I also have experience in defence and international development.

I feel compelled to make a submission to this inquiry due to the gross inadequacy of the current bushfire response arrangements in NSW. At best the sector is highly inefficient, worst highly negligent

Please thoroughly investigate response data from the NSW Rural Fire Service. Dig a little beyond the surface and you will find many anomalies.

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## Terms of Reference (optional)

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The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

The narrative needs to shift from hazard reduction to impact mitigation.

The Japanese don't try to suck all the water out of the oceans so that they aren't effected by Tsumanis. The Turks don't try to bind tectonic plates together so that they aren't effected by earthquakes.

Why do we continue to talk about 'hazard reduction' in relation to bushfire in Australia? We can NEVER remove the hazard.

We need to talk about impact mitigation - When out of control bushfire occur or do we ensure that they don't destroy use.

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### 1.3 Response to bushfires

First Issue

The reality of the the RFS is that:

There is no minimum standard of fitness, technical capability, interpersonal skills or merit - anyone can be a member. To join the RFS you must successfully pass a brigade interview. There is no standardised or systematic way this is one. There is no transparency around the conduct of interviews or the measures used to assess applicants suitability. Applicants must pass a Police check. This is the only measurable criteria to joining the RFS.

Progression through levels of seniority is based on popular vote, not merit. Leadership roles in local brigades is based purely on popular vote. Training opportunity to fulfil leadership roles are given to those who are successful in popular vote. Merit, quality or competency are never consider or measured for any volunteer position.

In a similar way, access to specialised roles is never based on suitability, only willingness to do the job. Anyone could become a air observer, catering officer or truck driver, regardless of their suitability - they only need to do the training.

There is no standardised and systematic way of ensuring ongoing competence. Once you have completed training a member of the RFS might never attend training or incident again, but would nevertheless remain as a 'operational member'.

There is no standardised 'minimum response'. That is, a fire truck is a fire truck. The type, size and the number and technical capacity of the people on that truck are not measured.

Paid staff position are almost exclusive recruited from volunteer ranks. This is because many positions require internal qualifications to apply for the job. This greatly reduces the availability of this positions to the greater public and the ability to recruit high quality candidates.

All of this leaders to a highly, highly, highly inefficient labour force. The RFS's volunteer labour is highly inefficient. Just

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because someone wants to do something doesn't mean that they are the best person to do it.

#### Second Issue

The RFS has no guaranteed response. This should keep the Premier of NSW awake at night! The NSW Rural Fire Service cannot guarantee that it will respond to an emergency, within the area that it has taken sole responsibility for. Volunteers are under no obligation to respond to an emergency. While this might seem obvious from the individual volunteers perspective, from the point of view of the organisation it is a substantial risk.

Volunteers are great for surge capacity. There can be many of them, with limited capabilities, but many. They can not be mobilised quickly but can respond in force or a prolonged period.

As an analogy; volunteers are like the Australian Defence Force's Reserve members.

In the opening hours of the Australian deployment to Timor Leste, Australia didn't send the Reserves; we sent the Special Forces. Why? Because they were highly trained, specialised, established to undertake such missions, and ready to go at a moments notice. However, there aren't many of them so they can not continue to operate indefinitely. That is where you need regular soldiers and eventually reserve soldiers.

If some bush on the outskirts of the city is alight, why send an agency that might send two 70 year olds, when another agency has four under 65 year olds ready to go. Why send an agency that might get there, but will be at least 45 minutes, when a another agency will definitely be there in 30 minutes?

However, when it becomes clear that the bushfire will continue for days, weeks or months - volunteers are the best option.

I encourage you to analyse the data that the RFS keeps about its response. Dig further than - did a truck respond? Look for; What was the incident - was there even a fire, or just a 'good intent' call?

After how long did it take to respond?

If/when it did, who was in it?

How often does this truck actually get used for firefighting?

You may be surprised at the hollowed out core you find in the data.

### **Supporting documents or images**

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