

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Monday, 20 June 2022 1:34:23 PM
Attachments: [SES submission.rtf](#)

Your details

Title Mr

First name Peter

Last name Sealy

Email

Postcode 2640

Submission details

I am making this submission as A member of the general public

Submission type I am making a personal submission

Consent to make submission public I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.6 Any other matters Reference my attachment.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [SES submission.rtf](#)
-

I am writing this submission as a former member of the NSW SES. I spent about ten years as an SES member the last five as the Local Controller of the Albury Branch of the Murray Division, as it then was, about 2003-2013 [memory is a little hazy now!].

My earlier background is a NSW Schoolteacher, then I accepted a commission in the Royal Australian Navy and spent about ten years firstly in the Instruction Division and the last seven years in the Naval Intelligence Division as Assistant Director of Naval Security [Personnel]. After leaving the Navy I joined the Commonwealth Public Service and spent about twenty years in the Intelligence/Security environment encompassing Defence Security, Crime Intelligence in Customs/Narcotics, then Australian Federal Police as Chief Intelligence Analyst and finally in Immigration Department as Director of Internal Investigations and then Intelligence. I am only laying out that background to indicate I have experience in personnel management and administration.

After retiring from employment I joined the SES to do my contribution for community service as do most other volunteers.

You will have received many submissions on the excellent work and volunteerism ethos of the SES and I can add nothing there. My only criticism in the day to day SES management is of the quality of the presentation of the internal training regime which I observed, not the content thereof just the actual

delivery. That is just my training as an educator coming out. Meaningful presentation of training courses is a skill, as is the assessment and I found that skill variable. Knowledge of the subject matter does not always make for a successful trainer. Again you will have received many submissions referencing the training levels of SES members. I totally applaud the range and depth of the training environment.

My main concern in writing to you is the recruitment process of volunteers.

My impression is that some of the younger volunteers were immature and some appeared to see the SES as something akin to an older boy scout environment in which you could drive cars, trucks and boats and use chain saws. And thus be seen as important. Unfortunately it also appeared to me that some members had not reached any high level of employment qualities and would not make much progress in that direction. You will be advised that the age range of volunteers is relatively young with not many more mature members. This is a conundrum and I am sure a topic you will have to ponder.

Let me say that I fully understand that everybody has their own level of employment, achievement and in society and we all appreciate and are grateful for that.

But the point must be made that SES volunteers have, by law in some instances [such as evacuation procedures], considerable power and influence in life and death situations.

Which brings me to the point of recruitment requirements. Because of the dearth, and indeed of falling numbers, of volunteers in all facets of the community there was a strong push to take all persons who turned up to volunteer. The sad old cliché of whoever turns up take them on.

Let me illustrate this worrying point: suitability of volunteers to perform the role.

Volunteer recruits had to complete an application form which included declaration of any medical condition which may inhibit their role. There was no compulsion to be honest about this question, the answer was taken on face value and no checking was done subsequently. Two examples from my time: one member in my Unit had a chest or heart condition which was not disclosed at the time of recruitment, another member in another Division suffered a heart attack from a pre-existing condition and had to be evacuated from an SES operation [I only heard about that subsequently and no doubt you will have been apprised of it if necessary].

Another point is that, in my opinion, a member had a psychological condition which was not, to my knowledge, being treated medically. This member was placed in a position of authority. Of course the condition, treated appropriately, should not prevent SES duties.

The overall point I wish to make here is this. Volunteer recruits should undergo a medical examination to determine their fitness to undertake the range of SES

roles, or exclusions if necessary. Of course this would be a cost borne by the organisation. Secondly, volunteers should also be subject to psychological assessment to the same end. SES operation can be very stressful, mentally and physically. It should not be a case of 'anyone or everyone can do this', regardless of the level of training. Professional emergency personnel [Police, Fire, Ambulance] all undergo physical and psychological assessment before recruitment and being permitted to operate in potentially life threatening situations. In some instances, and I only know of one, the Tasmanian Volunteer Ambulance Service, similar testing may be applied to volunteers. Why not the NSW SES.

This brings me to my final point. I don't remember if there was a requirement for a Police Records check for prospective volunteers. If not, there should be. These days even Child Care Workers and volunteers for some other community service work require a clear Police Records Check. A friend of mine who volunteered to assist in refugee settlement required a clear Police Records Check. In one instance a person wanted to volunteer for my Unit, obviously hearing that a new person was in charge, who had been previously removed from the Unit. I was only alerted to this person's previous unsavoury involvement by the memory of a staff member of the Division Administration. The point being there was no central repository of members' unsuitability or Police Records results. There should be.

Also there is the unspoken, but perceptible to me, levels

of concern [I almost said distrust] from some members about the lack of scrutiny of volunteer recruitment outlined above.

I did raise these points at Division HQ level, but to no avail let alone acknowledgement. But of course that would be some time ago now and no notes would be available and all our memories have faded somewhat.