



# SitRep 22

## Keelty's Tathra review – update #1

SitRep 21 concluded by questioning the independence of the Tathra Review, suggesting the Government already knew the Review's findings and recommendations before it commenced. This quote below from the Minister back on 21 March, when the Review was first announced, confirms that it was already a foregone conclusion:

*"Mick Keelty will be focused on what is the model, Tathra, also looking at other examples across the State - what is the best model to make sure fire appliances are deployed, no matter what badging is on the side of them, whether they have the capability to go to any fire without boundaries being an issue, so having a consolidated effort, a call centre if you like, each agency has their own individual ones, as do ambulances, as do police, as do the SES which work with triple-0 and their own reporting lines. This is the way we will take away any ambiguity, take away any questions that come up and take away the opportunity for union opportunists who are preying on the suffering and misery of victims at the most inappropriate time."*

That last sentence also confirms the Minister's real motives here: payback, and denying "union opportunists" the ability to ever get access to similar facts again in future. It certainly has nothing to do with improving call taking and dispatch services.

The Minister's crocodile tears about "the most inappropriate time" is the same angle run by the gun lobby and NRA whenever someone in the US dares to question America's gun laws after another mass shooting. We reject this. If there is a problem then let it be seen, otherwise it will simply happen again. At no stage, then or since, has the Union criticised the effort of the firefighters on the ground that day, but it is ridiculous to argue that additional resources would have made no difference at Tathra. The Union has not preyed on anyone except the Minister and the dysfunctional turf war between the services for which he is ultimately responsible.

A joint statement from the two Commissioners on Saturday advised (in part) that "*The 12 recommendations will be referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners to progress and implement*". This is not how to conduct industrial relations. Had they said "*The 12 recommendations will be referred to the Fire Services Joint Standing Committee to review and discuss*," then all sides could have proceeded in a calmer and far less adversarial manner. The Union will now seek the assistance of the Industrial Relations Commission to oversee negotiations that should have been initiated by the Minister and Commissioner.

The Review's 12 recommendations, the Government's response to each recommendation and the Union's comments and position on each point is attached to this SitRep, confirming our support (in whole or part) for some of those recommendations and our rejection of others, in all cases with reasons given.

**Leighton Drury**  
**State Secretary**

**FBEU comment on both the Keelty Tathra Review's 12 recommendations, and the Government's response to those recommendations**

Recommendation 1	Government response	Union position and comment
<p><b>Cross agency representation at briefings and press conferences</b></p> <p>In recognising the success of the work of both the volunteer based RFS and the full time FRNSW members in joint operations – both agencies should be represented at major briefings or press conferences to reinforce successful integrated collaborative efforts rather than individual agency achievements.</p>	<p><b>Implemented</b></p> <p>Routinely, both agencies have a joint presence during briefings for major weather events and major operations.</p> <p>It is noted that the Commissioners of FRNSW and RFS have also released two joint media statements describing collaborative changes following the Bega Fires. Joint representation of the Commissioners has also been noted at the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRNSW's winter safety campaign launch,</li> <li>• 2018 Australasian Education and Fire Awareness Conference,</li> <li>• Internal agency conferences for RFS district managers and FRNSW zone commanders.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supported, but rarely practiced</b></p> <p>While the concept of joint representation is sensible, its real world application is far from even. Media reporting and filming of bushfire events and briefings is routinely conducted at the RFS state operations centre by RFS staff only with little or no regard to the FRNSW appliances and crews engaged in those operations. On the rare occasion that one is present, FRNSW officers are positioned off to the side and mistaken for Police. The RFS pursuit of the media spotlight and marginalisation of FRNSW is pervasive, even extending to the provision of TV reporters with their own RFS-look-alike firefighting gear.</p> <p>Professional firefighters attend more bushfire incidents than volunteers, yet the public is led to believe that FRNSW only fights structure fires – a misunderstanding reinforced by the disingenuous public comments of the RFS Commissioner and Deputy following the Tathra disaster in their attempt to justify the refusal of FRNSW's offers of assistance.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b></p> <p><b>Eliminate fire boundaries for call and dispatch purposes</b></p> <p>Take immediate steps to eliminate fire boundaries for call and dispatch purposes to create an agnostic approach to the threat of fires from both a departmental and organisational perspective.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners to develop an implementation plan.</p> <p>The Commissioners of FRNSW and the RFS have committed to an over-riding principle that the fastest and most appropriate resource is responded so that the community can have confidence in the delivery of emergency services.</p>	<p><b>Union position and comment</b></p> <p><b>Supported in principle</b></p> <p>The Berejiklian Government's contempt for workers and their unions is on display here. Any change to the boundaries and/or current response procedures has direct industrial implications that require negotiation with the Union, and cannot therefore be simply agreed to by the Commissioners and Government. The IRC will be notified of a dispute.</p> <p>The Government has forgotten why the Fire Services Joint Standing Committee Act was passed and the FSJSC formed. The Review (or at the very least this and the related</p>

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	<p>The agencies are exchanging location and capability data of their resources, focusing initially on areas of greatest interaction between the services. FRNSW in collaboration with the RFS are testing the RFS mobilisation data being entered into FRNSW dispatch software in support of this recommendation.</p> <p>A Joint Operations Task Force has been established, co-chaired by the Deputy Commissioners of the two fire services, to look at the operational interoperability of the services.</p>	<p>recommendations) should have been referred to the FSJSC for initial advice to the Minister.</p> <p>The current service boundaries and associated mutual aid zones and agreements all exist to help determine what the quickest and most appropriate resource is, so while removing those boundaries seems sensible and simple enough, deciding what will go in their place will often prove anything but.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b></p> <p><b>Remove or update relevant policies</b></p> <p>Remove those policies, guidelines, memoranda of understanding and committees that are made redundant as a result of adopting recommendation #2 while updating any remaining policies that are considered to still be relevant.</p>	<p><b>Government response</b></p> <p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners for implementation.</p> <p>It is envisaged that a number of collaborative documents between the fire services will require modification to incorporate the new dispatch arrangements.</p>	<p><b>Union position and comment</b></p> <p><b>See point 2</b></p> <p>This cannot be decided by the Commissioners alone. Most if not all of the policies, guidelines, memoranda of understanding and committees referred to were developed in consultation with the Union through the FSJSC.</p> <p>If the Berejiklian Government proceeds to jettison the consultative and cooperative FSJSC mechanism in favour of unilateral dictates from above, then it risks introducing the sort of the sectarian hostility into NSW that has been plaguing Victoria's fire services for several years now.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b></p> <p><b>No appropriate offers of assistance to be rejected</b></p> <p>The Commissioners of FRNSW and RFS issue an instruction to FRNSW ComCen that while Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) capability is being made available to the RFS NSW vehicle fleet, no offers of assistance by one agency to the other in combatting a fire</p>	<p><b>Government response</b></p> <p><b>Implemented</b></p> <p>As noted above in response to recommendation no 2, the Commissioners of FRNSW and the RFS have committed to an over-riding principle that the fastest and most appropriate resource is responded so that the community can have confidence in the delivery of emergency services.</p>	<p><b>Union position and comment</b></p> <p><b>Good in theory, but ineffective and potentially counter-productive in practice</b></p> <p>This recommendation seems fair and sensible on a first reading, but the addition of <i>"if what is being offered is appropriate"</i> robs it of practical meaning and effect.</p> <p>Ironically, rather than addressing the problem this recommendation actually permits and encourages more</p>

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<p>is rejected or delayed if what is being offered is appropriate.</p>	<p>The NSW RFS has placed an officer at the FRNSW Alexandria Communications Centre to improve communications and the flow of information between the agencies relating to incidents and available agency resources.</p>	<p>rejections of offers assistance like occurred at Tathra, where the RFS declined FRNSW’s offers of assistance on the spurious basis that FRNSW appliances were inappropriate for the incident.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5</b></p>		
<p><b>Ambulance NSW to be benchmark for call, dispatch and situational awareness</b></p> <p>Use the model and system in place at the Ambulance Service of NSW as a benchmark for call taking, dispatch and the provision of situational awareness to deploy resources overcoming the lack of a feedback loop in current bushfire operations.</p>	<p><b>Government response</b></p> <p><b>Supported in principle</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners for consideration.</p> <p>The Ambulance Service of NSW have participated as a stakeholder with the review, and has indicated its further commitment to support additional work on this recommendation.</p>	<p><b>Union position and comment</b></p> <p><b>Reserved pending further information</b></p> <p>The Union is unaware of the model and system in place at the Ambulance Service of NSW, and therefore reserves comment pending further investigation and information on same.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p>		
<p><b>Roll out of automated vehicle location (AVL) to RFS fleet</b></p> <p>As a matter of priority commence the roll out of AVL capability for the RFS fleet, completing as much work as possible before the 2018/19 bush fire season, capitalising where necessary on current and future work undertaken with the NSW Government Radio Network to ensure both officer safety and situational awareness.</p>	<p><b>Government response</b></p> <p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>The RFS will commence a trial of automatic vehicle location on the Government Radio Network within the next three months in three locations including Queanbeyan, the Central Coast and the North West of NSW. The timing of further roll outs will be subject to the assessment of the trials.</p>	<p><b>Union position and comment</b></p> <p><b>Recommendation supported, RFS and/or Government delays opposed</b></p> <p>The 2018/19 bushfire season officially starts within three months, by which time the RFS’ very limited AVL trial will in all likelihood have not even commenced.</p> <p>Keelty recommends “as a matter of a priority” the roll out of AVL for the entire RFS fleet “<i>completing as much work as possible before the 2018/19 bush fire season.</i>” To avoid doubt, the Review also recommends on Page 13 that “<i>the RFS should move to install AVL to its vehicles immediately.</i>”</p> <p>This is a farce. The Government’s limited and evasive response does not support Keelty’s recommendation at all.</p>

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Recommendation 7	Government response	Union position and comment
<p><b>Integrated call and dispatch centre</b></p> <p>Implement a fully integrated civilianised single call and dispatch centre, that includes a redundancy option outside the Sydney CBD, which will adopt an agnostic approach to deploy the quickest most suitable resource to an emergency. Such a centre should be managed by a non uniformed public servant organisation like the Office for Emergency Management or the NSW Police Force.</p>	<p><b>Supported in principle</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners for development of a detailed implementation plan that will canvas a range of options.</p> <p>The analysis of operational management systems to explore interoperability opportunities will commence in July 2018.</p>	<p><b>Supported in part, but otherwise opposed</b></p> <p>The Union supports the recommendation for a fully integrated single call and dispatch centre with a redundancy option outside the Sydney CBD, and which will adopt an agnostic approach to deploy the quickest most suitable resource to an emergency. This already exists with the FRNSW ComCens at Alexandria and Newcastle, which can extend their operations to also handle RFS dispatch.</p> <p>The Union opposes the remainder of the recommendation for civilianisation and transfer of the ComCens to an external agency, which is clearly being proposed for cultural rather than operational reasons. There is little if anything in the Review's 24 Findings to support this aspect of the recommendation.</p> <p>Professional firefighters are prepared to accommodate the perceptions and sensitivities of our volunteer colleagues to a point, but only to a point - and that point stops well short of job losses. That said, the Union does not consider the views attributed to volunteers by the Review to be representative of most volunteers, who would in truth be horrified at the recommendation that FRNSW firefighters should lose their jobs in order to satisfy extremist minority RFS cliques.</p>
Recommendation 8	Government response	Union position and comment
<p><b>Continue deployment of RFS officer to FRNSW ComCen</b></p> <p>Until a single call centre is developed, continue deployments of a senior RFS officer to FRNSW ComCen on a 24/7 day basis. This arrangement should determine the quickest most suitable resource and who is 'in charge' of an incident.</p>	<p><b>Implemented</b></p> <p>As noted above, the RFS has located an officer within FRNSW's Communications Centre to improve communication sharing between the agencies. The Commissioners have committed to the current arrangements continuing.</p>	<p><b>Supported, but still not implemented</b></p> <p>The Review does not acknowledge this, but the Union actually pressed the FSJSC to attach a 24/7 RFS liaison officer to Alexandria ComCen as far back as 2004 in order to address RFS complaints of alleged ComCen bias. An RFS Inspector was subsequently attached in 2005, but on Monday to Friday and during business hours only, before the position was quietly</p>

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		<p>withdrawn sometime later without notice or explanation.</p> <p>Ironically, Keelty's Review has given the two services a pat on the back for placing an RFS officer at Alexandria ComCen following Tathra when in fact they should have been slammed for removing this position years before. The Review also appears to have been misled by the services about the nature of that re-deployment since March this year, which again is not 24/7, but only from Monday to Friday, and only then within business hours. It follows that the Government's claim to have already implemented this recommendation is simply not true.</p> <p>The Union continues to support and call for the attachment to the FRNSW ComCen at Alexandria of four RFS liaison officers (ie, one per shift) to ensure that an RFS officer is available 24/7 and which, if implemented properly will remove the grounds for the opposed aspects of Recommendation 7.</p>
<b>Recommendation 9</b>	<b>Government response</b>	<b>Union position and comment</b>
<p><b>Uniformed supervision of civilianised call centre</b></p> <p>While the proposal to establish an integrated call and dispatch centre is being implemented, FRNSW should take steps to civilianise ComCen and maintain experienced senior officers from both agencies as supervisors similar to how the NSW Police Force and Ambulance Service of NSW operate.</p>	<p><b>Supported in principle</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners for development of a detailed implementation plan.</p>	<p><b>Opposed</b></p> <p>More evidence of the Berejiklian Government's contempt for workers and their unions. This is plainly an industrial question and the IRC will be notified of a dispute following the Minister's failure to negotiate or even flag this with the Union prior to the Review's public release.</p>
<b>Recommendation 10</b>	<b>Government response</b>	<b>Union position and comment</b>
<p><b>Information sharing capability</b></p> <p>Explore better options for call and dispatch, telecommunications and information sharing</p>	<p><b>Supported in principle</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Emergency Services Board of Commissioners for further</p>	<p><b>Reserved pending further information</b></p> <p>This is a vague recommendation that is not helped by its reference to a Finding 25, which does not exist.</p>

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<p>capability across the emergency management portfolio including the adoption of a multi-agency emergency management operations complex.</p>	<p>consideration. The analysis of operational management systems to explore interoperability opportunities will commence in July 2018.</p>	<p>The Union reserves comment pending the provision of further information on this recommendation.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11</b></p>		
<p><b>Engender volunteer culture, ethos and experience</b> Take steps to ensure that both fire commissioners are seeking opportunities to engender a culture in their respective organisations that seeks to attract and foster the volunteer ethos and experience.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b> Several initiatives are currently in train to support greater inter agency collaboration. The NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW volunteer and paid employees fulfil a range of important functions for the state of NSW, including fire fighting, communications, operational logistical support and community education. There has been commitment from both NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire Rescue NSW to implement new programs of cross-agency fire fighter training and exercising. Arrangements for the mutual exchange of officers, within the respective Community Safety Directorates (looking at Built Environment Fire Safety Inspectors and bush fire development controls) are currently being explored. The agencies will continue to work together to develop strategies and implement recommendations to attract and maintain volunteer ethos and experience across their organisations.</p>	<p><b>Union position and comment</b></p> <p><b>Supported, with balance</b> The FBEU is incorrectly presumed by many volunteers and casual observers to be “anti-volunteer”, but this is not the case. The Union acknowledges and respects the valuable contribution made by volunteers in the RFS, SES, VRA and other organisations, and indeed within FRNSW which, as the Review notes, includes almost 6,000 Community Fire Unit members. The Review’s reference on Page 12 to “<i>the elephant in the room that members of both fire organisations are often critical of each other with the animosity at times, palpable</i>” ignores the equally obvious gorilla in that room, which is the two service system itself. Why are there two services? The answer is not because of their operational differences, or even cultural differences, but rather their industrial differences. Or put more bluntly, because one fire service pays its firefighters and the other fire service does not. A merged, single fire service could address most if not all of the issues raised by the Review, but the Union is not calling for a single service. Successive Governments have settled on a two service system and the Union shares the Review’s assessment that amalgamation is not a realistic proposition now, or in the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Volunteer firefighters have a guaranteed future role and will always be needed, however year on year growth in the RFS budget and consequent growth of RFS capability is making this</p>

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		<p>role increasingly unclear. The long overdue answer is a clear and broadly accepted policy that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) recognises and respects the roles of volunteer, retained and permanent firefighters alike; and</li> <li>b) provides an objective methodology for the orderly location and transition from one form of firefighter to the other (and potentially back again) across the state.</li> </ul> <p>Until this occurs, the conflict between professional and volunteer firefighters – essentially a demarcation dispute between paid and unpaid labour – will inevitably continue.</p>
<b>Recommendation 12</b>	<b>Government response</b>	<b>Union position and comment</b>
<p><b>Review public information arrangements</b></p> <p>Review the effectiveness of emergency public information arrangements, and give consideration to embedding an ABC Manager (not a journalist) into the RFS headquarters during emergencies to broadcast warnings to the community that can be pooled to commercial media outlets.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>This recommendation has been referred to the Public Information Functional Area Coordinator (appointed under the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989) for consideration as part of the current review of the Public Information Services Supporting Plan (a sub-plan of the NSW State Emergency Plan).</p> <p>The NSW RFS has assisted the ABC with its internal review into the delivery of warnings by the ABC during the Tathra fire. An outcome of this is that a seating position for an ABC Manager is being made available at the new RFS Operations centre. The operating procedures for this position are yet to be finalised.</p> <p>The NSW RFS is working with FRNSW to develop training resources for use by FRNSW to assist in outlining how public information and warnings will be issued. For bush fires this will continue to be done with the NSW RFS to ensure a single source of truth is available to the public.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>A sensible recommendation, albeit one that appears difficult to reconcile with Recommendation 1.</p>