Inshore Water Rescue
A review of procedures

Philip Koperberg AO AFSM BEM Hon DLitt (UWS)
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30 November 2012

Dear Ministers

On 19 November 2012, I was commissioned to oversee the implementation of new emergency response protocols for inshore water rescues. In accordance with the Terms of Reference, I was asked to oversight the strengthening of response procedures between different emergency service organisations where an inshore rescue of people in distress is involved.

To assist with this process a series of stakeholder meetings was held from 19 to 27 November 2012. Stakeholder views were sought on the adequacy of the existing response arrangements, areas in need of improvement, and how these may be achieved.

My thanks go to all those who were consulted in the preparation of this report. Their contribution was very informative.

This report has identified a number of shortcomings in the existing arrangements for inshore water rescue protocols. I have made a series of recommendations to address these shortcomings, which I believe will assist in the establishment of a more robust protocol framework for inshore water rescues. In this way, any potential system failures can be mitigated.

I would particularly like to thank Ms Natalie Marsic, Ms Debbie Andreatta and Superintendent Ben Millington for the invaluable support provided in the preparation of this report.

I commend this report for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Philip Koperberg AO AFSM BEM Hon DLitt (UWS)
Inshore Water Rescue: A review of procedures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, this report is to oversee the strengthening of notification protocols between emergency service organisations when people in water require rescue. In examining these protocols it is acknowledged that NSW has some of the most robust emergency response protocols in the country.

While a number of agencies are charged with the rescue of persons from a variety of situations and threats, it is the NSW Police Force which is responsible for overall co-ordination. Accordingly, requirements exist that the NSW Police Force be notified of rescue operations to initiate a response, facilitate additional resource deployment, where necessary, and to provide rescue site co-ordination.

There are also well established operating procedures developed under the auspices of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 and the NSW State Emergency Management Plan. The State Rescue Board, established under the Act, is charged with the responsibility of setting rescue policy. It also has an audit function to ensure compliance with all associated policies.

In recent times the Ambulance Service of NSW has introduced new operating procedures that deal with rescue notifications. However, an opportunity exists to enhance existing policy/protocol arrangements and technologies as they relate to inshore water rescue protocols.

Agencies consulted during the preparation of this report include the Chair of the State Rescue Board, NSW Police Force, Ambulance Service of NSW, Surf Life Saving NSW, Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association, Marine Rescue NSW and Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service (Southern Region).

The recommendations contained within this report supplement existing water safety initiatives designed to prevent coastal drowning. While outside the purview of this review, these preventative programs, such as those under consideration by the Water Safety Advisory Council, are crucial to raising awareness of the dangers of water based activities. Such initiatives should continue to be fully supported.

There is clearly a need to legislatively define the agency responsible, primarily, for the co-ordination of rescue in NSW. Policy arising from the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act defines the NSW Police Force as that agency. The Act however does not, and accordingly Recommendation 1 satisfies this requirement.

Equally, while policy dictates notification arrangements, the principal Act is silent on this issue and could lead to the policy being challenged in a court of competent jurisdiction. Accordingly, Recommendation 2 serves to address this anomaly.

The NSW State Rescue Policy does not include specific reference to the rescue of persons from water where that person has fallen into the water from land. This irregularity is addressed in Recommendation 3. Similarly, Recommendations 4 and 5 are germane to this issue.

The State Rescue Board’s Marine Standing Operating Procedures, in particular SOP 07 focuses solely on vessels in distress to the exclusion of people in the water in need of rescue. Recommendation 6 seeks to address this issue.

Another observation made during the course of the review was the extent to which Surf Life Saving NSW and the Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguards Association can provide a range of emergency resources, but by and large these capabilities are not specifically referenced in the NSW State Rescue Policy and/or associated procedures. Recommendation 7 goes to this matter.
During the site visit to the Ambulance Communications Centre it was observed that staff dealt with a high volume of Triple Zero calls. Call takers were professional and should be commended. **Recommendation 8** seeks to enhance supervision arrangements within Communications Centres.

It was also evident during the course of the review that there exists a variety of interpretations as to what constitutes a rescue as opposed to a medical or other emergency. This is largely due to the absence of a set of guiding principles, and **Recommendation 9** outlines for adoption by all agencies, those guiding principles.

Equally, **Recommendations 10, 11 and 12** seek to offer a solution to bringing about a more cohesive understanding of the prevailing policies and procedures.

It was suggested during the course of the review, that the substantial resources of Surf Life Saving NSW and the Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguards Association could be put to better use for in water rescues, and for that matter, minor medical emergencies in close proximity to lifesaving resources.

The Surf Rescue Emergency Response System is said to be both effective and efficient, and accordingly **Recommendation 13** recognises this initiative.

While the Ambulance Service of NSW Communications Centres has state of the art computerised triaging systems, there is no category for “person in-water” rescue in the Computer Aided Dispatch System.

**Recommendations 14 and 15** are considered paramount as first steps in minimising the possibility of unnecessary delays in the future.

Much has been said of technology’s capacity to expedite the delivery of critical data and minimise the possibility of human error. InterCAD Emergency Messaging Systems are widely used around the world, to ensure that data is efficiently transmitted simultaneously to key stakeholders during emergency operations.

The Ambulance Service of NSW Computer Aided Dispatch system does not incorporate InterCAD Emergency Messaging Systems and thus creates a level of incompatibility with agencies such as Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force and Roads and Maritime Service’s Transport Management Centre.

In 2009, the NSW Deputy State Coroner, in determining the circumstances of the death of a young bushwalker in the Blue Mountains, recommended the adoption of InterCAD Emergency Messaging Systems by the Ambulance Service of NSW. The review concluded that this was not a simple issue, and that the Ambulance Service faced a number of challenges in adapting the system to their own particular needs. It is, however, evident that these difficulties are capable of being overcome, and **Recommendations 16 and 17** are considered to be of high importance in resolving the issue of strengthened protocols in the area of marine rescue.

Another matter brought to attention during the review was that of radio incompatibility, especially as it applied to lifesaving resources, and aircraft operated by the Ambulance Service of NSW. Compatibility would enable a responding lifesaving resource to better direct an incoming aircraft to where it is needed. **Recommendation 18** recommends a review of radio communications capabilities.

It is important to stress that NSW public safety agencies have a well deserved reputation for engagement with the community, and the employment of Standing Operating Procedures and technologies designed to optimise their response capabilities.

There is every evidence of continuous improvement across all fields of management within emergency service organisations and others.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* be amended to clearly provide that the NSW Police Force has primary responsibility for the co-ordination of rescue operations in NSW.

2. That the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* be amended to require all emergency service organisations to notify the NSW Police Force of rescue incidents.

3. That the definition of “marine rescue” in the NSW State Rescue Policy be amended to include the rescue of persons in water, regardless of whether they originated from a vessel or land.

4. That the State Rescue Board direct all agencies that the NSW Police Force Rescue Coordinator must be notified immediately when a call necessitating a rescue (including an “in-water” rescue) is received.

5. That consequential amendments be made to the NSW State Rescue Policy to ensure the rescue of persons in water, regardless of whether they originated from a vessel or land, is addressed in all relevant parts of the policy.

6. That the Marine Standing Operating Procedures for Accredited Search and Rescue Coordination Centres, Marine Rescue Units and Marine Radio Bases be amended to include the rescue of persons in water, regardless of whether they originated from a vessel or land.

7. That the NSW State Rescue Policy notes the entities of Surf Life Saving NSW and the Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association and their potential role for “in-water” rescue.

8. That a review be undertaken of the command and control arrangements within all Ambulance Communication Centres to enhance adherence to established notifications and dispatch protocols.

9. That all emergency services amend existing procedures and protocols to incorporate the following common guiding principles:
   - A definition of rescue, as outlined in the NSW State Rescue Policy, be provided
   - The NSW Police Force be recognised as the tasking authority for rescue co-ordination
   - Upon receipt of a “person in-water” rescue notification, the NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator be immediately notified through established systems to enable a timely and appropriate response.

10. That the Ambulance Service of NSW provide greater clarity to its staff regarding the definition of “rescue” and “medical retrieval” operations.

11. That multi-agency rescue notification protocols be disseminated to all staff (in particular Communications Centres staff) to reinforce agency responsibilities and enhance awareness of and familiarity with, those responsibilities.

12. That multi-agency rescue notification protocols be exercised on a regular basis.

13. That the Surf Rescue Emergency Response System continue to be utilised as the single point of contact for surf rescue resources.

14. That the Ambulance Service of NSW amend its Computer Aided Dispatch System to include a category of “person in-water” rescue.
15 That the additional category of “person in-water” rescue immediately prompt telephone contact with the NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator.

16 That the InterCAD Emergency Messaging System be incorporated into the Ambulance Service of NSW Computer Aided Dispatch System, as soon as possible.

17 That pending the installation of the InterCAD Emergency Messaging System within the Ambulance Service of NSW Computer Aided Dispatch System, remote data terminals be installed at each NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator work station in each of the NSW Police Force Communications Centres, and that such terminals be facilitated.

18 That this review be extended to examine options to improve the interoperability of emergency services radio communications during “in-water” rescue incidents.
INTRODUCTION

On Sunday 11 November 2012 at approximately 9.00am, a man was swept off rocks at Little Bay, Sydney. It is reported that the man had been rock fishing at the time with friends when a wave swept them into the surf. Once the man was back onshore, attempts to revive him were unsuccessful.

Despite established protocols, the Little Bay incident has highlighted a number of procedural shortcomings. The details of the incident have since been referred to the Coroner by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

The State Coroner, Magistrate Jerram, has referred for consideration the findings of His Honour Magistrate Buscombe, Deputy State Coroner, in relation to the death of six persons who drowned while rock fishing near Newcastle in 2010. While outside the scope of this review, there is value in referring Magistrate Buscombe’s recommendations to the Water Safety Advisory Council for consideration.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Health/Minister for Medical Research have jointly commissioned a report. The Terms of Reference are to oversight the strengthening of response procedures between different emergency service organisations where an inshore rescue of people in distress is involved.

Governance Arrangements

Until the late 1980s, no one agency had responsibility for the co-ordination of rescue, and there were no standards in place for practices or equipment.

The NSW Government subsequently commissioned a report into rescue services for NSW by Major General Gray in 1988. As a result of this review Major Gray made a number of significant recommendations that reformed rescue management within the State.

As a consequence of the Gray report, the NSW Government introduced the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (the SERM Act) which, amongst other things, established clear responsibilities for rescue management and established the NSW State Rescue Board (SRB). The NSW Police Force was made responsible for co-ordinating and determining priorities at a rescue, and the SRB was made responsible for recommending to the then Minister for Emergency Services which rescue units should be accredited to perform this function.

These arrangements have remained largely unchanged and have served the community of NSW well since that time.

State Rescue Board

The SRB is a statutory body constituted under section 42 of the SERM Act.

The principal function of the Board is to ensure the maintenance of efficient and effective rescue services throughout the State. The Board carries out its responsibilities through the Departmental Heads of those agencies which provide accredited rescue units and the NSW Police Force, which is responsible for the co-ordination of rescues within NSW.

The SRB is generally responsible for the development and implementation of rescue policy, standards of training and for providing advice on equipment levels for all rescue units in the...
State. The NSW State Rescue Policy is the principal policy document developed by the SRB to meet this responsibility.

It is also the responsibility of the Board to recommend to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services the accreditation of rescue units.

The Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service is the Chair of the Board, which is responsible to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The Board’s membership currently consists of the:

- State Emergency Operations Controller
- Member of the NSW Police Force Senior Executive Service
- Chief Executive Officer, Ambulance Service of NSW
- Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW
- Commissioner, NSW State Emergency Service
- Commissioner, NSW Volunteer Rescue Association Incorporated
- Commissioner, Marine Rescue NSW
- Departmental Heads of other volunteer rescue agencies approved by the Minister, and may vary depending on agency priorities.

**Marine Advisory Sub Committees**

Where Local/Regional Rescue Committees have multiple marine rescue units, the relevant Local Emergency Operations Controller, NSW Police Force, is encouraged to establish a Marine Advisory Sub Committee.

These sub committees are subordinate to other rescue committees and are chaired by a senior member of the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) Marine Area Command (MAC), if present in the area, or another appropriate person with access to secretarial functions, and comprises of representatives of the marine organisations/units operating within the jurisdiction.

Where this is not appropriate at the local level, representatives of locally based Marine Rescue Units should be invited to become members of the Local Rescue Committee.

The functions of a Local/Regional Marine Advisory Sub Committee are:

1. provide advice and recommendations to Rescue Committees on all marine matters
2. assist Rescue Committees in the exercise of their functions
3. provide a forum for discussion and resolution of marine rescue matters and
4. carry out functions and tasks allocated to it by the Rescue Committee.

The NSW State Rescue Policy requires one Regional level Marine Advisory Sub Committee within the Sydney Metropolitan Area. The Chair of the Sydney Metropolitan Area Marine Advisory Sub Committee is to be appointed by the Commander, NSWPF MAC.
CONSULTATION

Between 19 to 27 November 2012 a series of stakeholder meetings were held and site visits undertaken at the Ambulance Communications Centre located at Eveleigh, and the Police Communications Centre which is located at Surry Hills.

Consultative meetings were held with:

**Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association**
- Bruce Hopkins (President)
- John Andrews (Secretary)

**Ambulance Service of NSW**
- Mr Ken Pritchard ASM (Acting Chief Executive Officer)
- Dr Ron Manning ASM (Medical Retrieval Unit)
- Chief Superintendent Peter Elliott and Superintendent Sharmaine Cohen (Ambulance Communications)

**Marine Rescue NSW**
- Commissioner Stacey Tannos ESM

**NSW Police Force**
- Assistant Commissioner Alan Clarke APM (Deputy State Emergency Operations Controller)
- Acting Assistant Commissioner Mark Hutchings APM (Marine Area Command)
- Acting Superintendent Andrew McCullough APM, Inspector Patrick Stafford, Inspector Leanne Douglas and Mr Chris Beatson (Police Communications)

**State Rescue Board**
- Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM (Chair)

**Surf Life Saving NSW**
- Mr Phil Vanny AM (Chief Executive Officer)
- Mr Dean Storey (Lifesaving Services)

**Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service (Southern Region)**
- Mr Stephen Leahy (Chief Executive Officer)
DISCUSSION

General

A number of agencies play a pivotal role in marine safety in NSW.

The NSWPF Marine Area Command (MAC) has responsibility for all coastal areas of NSW to 200 nautical miles out to sea. Water Police stations are located at Broken Bay, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour, Botany Bay, Port Kembla and Eden.

Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW) has 129 Surf Life Saving Clubs and more than 75,000 members making it one of the largest volunteer movements in Australia. The Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association (APOLA) is the peak association for Australian professional beach inspectors/ocean lifeguards and coastal councils employing their own lifeguards. It was established in 1984.

Marine Rescue NSW (MRNSW) was formed in 2009. It has 38 bases which are staffed by more than 3,000 volunteers.

The Ambulance Service of NSW (ASNSW) has a number of Communications Centres which receive Triple Zero and non-emergency telephone requests for ambulance services. These are located at Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong and Dubbo. The ASNSW also has a Medical Retrieval Unit which co-ordinates urgent and routine fixed wing and helicopter transfers within NSW. These aircraft are principally used for medical retrievals.

Ambulance Communications Centre operators use VisiCAD software to prioritise every call based on questions which are answered by the caller. This information is transferred in real time to Ambulance dispatch, which then assigns the closest appropriate ambulance through GPS tracking technology.

Details of emergency and non-emergency calls are transmitted to mobile data terminals which are located in the front cabin of every Ambulance. This provides paramedics with relevant patient information before they reach their destination.

Similarly, the NSWPF has five Communications Centres located at Sydney, Penrith, Newcastle, Wollongong and Tamworth.

Police use InterCAD Emergency Messaging System (ICEMS) to respond to requests for assistance and through it can request the assistance of other agencies on the ICEMs mainframe (Fire and Rescue NSW, Transport Management Centre) if required.

In the event of a major incident, Telstra will refer all calls to Police to triage and task.

If a Triple Zero call is received by the ASNSW and that call requires a Police response, then their assistance is sought via the tie-line system. If contact is unable to be made via the tie-line, then calls can be placed through a computer generated telephone (a "soft phone").

However, in most cases the tie-line is the primary source of communication. The NSWPF and ASNSW regard the tie-line system as a reliable form of communication, notwithstanding any faults that may occur with its use.

Generally, if an in-water rescue incident occurs and the ASNSW is notified, the receiving Communications Centre will contact Police Communications.

The NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator (Police RCO) will do the initial tasking of the response agencies and then inform the MAC, who will assume control and facilitate additional resources as required. This process is illustrated in the diagram overpage:
Person(s) in water in distress and requiring rescue

Caller telephones Triple Zero requesting assistance

Caller connected to Police, Fire or Ambulance

Police RCO notified immediately by receiving agency and tasks nearest & appropriate resources
Surf Lifesaving, Rescue Helicopters, Marine Rescue, Police, Paramedics

Police RCO informs Marine Area Command who assumes control and co-ordinates additional resources (as required)

Person(s) rescued and provided appropriate medical attention
Legislation
The *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (SERM Act) is the overarching legislation governing rescue arrangements in NSW. For the effective implementation of rescue arrangements through policy and procedures, it is essential that the Act provides clear guidance on which agency has overall control of the co-ordination of rescue operations.

Part 3, Division 3 of the SERM Act is entitled "Police control of rescue operations etc". Specifically, section 50 provides that the senior police officer present at the scene of a rescue operation is responsible for co-ordinating and determining priorities of action of the agencies engaged in the operation. The Act is silent on situations where Police are not already present.

Additionally, pursuant to section 51 the agency that manages or controls an accredited rescue unit must notify Police of incidents which require the rescue of a person. There is no general requirement in the Act for emergency service organisations to notify Police of rescue incidents, however the State Rescue Policy does contain such a requirement.

**Recommendation 1**
That the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* be amended to clearly provide that the NSW Police Force has primary responsibility for the co-ordination of rescue operations in NSW.

**Recommendation 2**
That the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* be amended to require all emergency service organisations to notify the NSW Police Force of rescue incidents.

**Policies and Procedures**

**NSW State Rescue Policy**

The NSW State Rescue Policy is prepared by the SRB and is approved by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. It sets the policy framework for rescue arrangements in NSW including marine rescue.

Paragraph 3.02 of the policy states that the NSWPF is responsible for the overall control of marine search and rescue operations in NSW, including rescues related to persons missing in a coastal environment. This responsibility is designated to the MAC.

Marine rescue is defined in paragraph 3.04 of the policy as "the locating of vessels in distress at sea or in sheltered waters and bringing the vessels and their occupants to safety. If that is not feasible, rescuing the occupants and bringing them to safety".

The NSW State Rescue Policy does not include specific reference to the rescue of persons from water where the person has fallen into the water from land rather than from a vessel. This omission implies that marine rescue is limited to rescuing vessels in distress and their occupants.

It appears that this is an unintended oversight in the policy, given marine rescue clearly encompasses the rescue of persons in the water, regardless of whether they originated from a vessel or land. There are no sound policy reasons to exclude this category of person in need of rescue from the definition of marine rescue.
Concerning the definitions of "marine rescue," Recommendations 3, 4, and 5 advocate for amendments to the NSW State Rescue Policy. Recommendation 3 suggests amending the definition of "marine rescue" to encompass rescues in water, regardless of origin. Recommendation 4 directs that the NSW Police Fire and Rescue Co-ordinator be notified immediately on receipt of a rescue call, including "in-water" rescues. Recommendation 5 calls for consequential amendments to the policy to ensure water rescues are addressed.

The Marine Standing Operating Procedures (Marine SOPs) for Accredited Search and Rescue Co-ordination Centres (SARCC), Marine Rescue Units (MRU) and Marine Radio Bases (MRB) are annexes to the NSW State Rescue Policy. The SOPs serve as guidelines for rescue committees and marine units. The two most relevant SOPs for water rescues are SOP 06 for Incidents that must be reported to Police and SOP 07 for Procedure for person or vessel in distress. SOP 06 mandates SARCC and MRB to notify the MAC when a person is in a life-threatening situation.

While SOP 07 outlines steps for persons or vessels in distress, its focus is solely on vessels. The NSW State Rescue Policy does not specifically reference Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW) or the Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association (APOLA) for in-water rescues. However, SLSNSW possesses significant and well-trained resources that could be utilized for "in-water" rescues beyond their traditional surf rescue role.

Recommendation 6 suggests amending the Marine SOPs to include in-water rescues. Recommendation 7 recommends that the NSW State Rescue Policy recognize SLSNSW and APOLA's potential role in in-water rescues.

In summary, the recommendations focus on refining the rescue policy to ensure more comprehensive and effective in-water rescues.
**Agency Standing Operating Procedures**

During the course of consultation, emergency service agencies provided copies of individual response procedures for review and consideration.

**Ambulance Service of NSW**

Procedure 4.04 "Dispatching – Rescue Responses“ provides direction to dispatchers regarding the procedure for deploying rescue responses in a number of circumstances, including water rescue. This document was last released on 13 January 2012.

Procedure 4.05 "Dispatching – Activation of Helicopter Resources“ provides direction to dispatchers in managing requests for activation of a helicopter response or considering a helicopter response based on the original call. This document, originally released on 9 August 2012, was last amended on 14 November 2012 to incorporate a number of changes.

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<td>That a review be undertaken of the command and control arrangements within all Ambulance Communication Centres to enhance adherence to established notifications and dispatch protocols.</td>
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**NSW Police Force**

The Incident and Emergency Standing Operating Procedures are designed to assist police in the discharge of their legislative responsibilities, including emergency management and rescue co-ordination. These revised procedures were released in May 2012 in the format of a detailed document and associated checklists.

Specifically, Part 2 provides information about marine incidents and emergencies, including search and rescue.

Individual SOPs have been developed by Police Communications Group and MAC to provide detailed guidance to operators “persons in-water” rescues. This includes the “Water Based Rescue” last revised on the 18 October 2012 which addresses Beach/Rock rescue notifications.

**Surf Life Saving NSW**

LS10 “Emergency Response System” last released on 22 September 2012, provides guidance to ensure the effectiveness of the Surf Rescue Emergency Response System as the notification/tasking process for emergency services to contact and activate lifesaving services in NSW.

**General**

While the documentation provided is thorough overall, there is a need to ensure common guiding principles are incorporated into individual agency procedures and protocols. This will ensure consistency and understanding of required actions.
Recommendation 9
That all emergency services amend existing procedures and protocols to incorporate the following common guiding principles:
- A definition of rescue, as outlined in the NSW State Rescue Policy, be provided
- The NSW Police Force be recognised as the tasking authority for rescue co-ordination
- Upon receipt of a “person in-water” rescue notification, the NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator be immediately notified through established systems to enable a timely and appropriate response.

Recommendation 10
That the Ambulance Service of NSW provide greater clarity to its staff regarding the definition of “rescue” and “medical retrieval” operations.

Recommendation 11
That multi-agency rescue notification protocols be disseminated to all staff (in particular Communications Centres staff) to reinforce agency responsibilities and enhance awareness of and familiarity with, those responsibilities.

Recommendation 12
That multi-agency rescue notification protocols be exercised on a regular basis.

Supporting Arrangements

1800 Marine Search and Rescue System
The 1800 Marine Search and Rescue System was established by the MAC in April 2012. It is a dedicated telephone number for the Police RCO, Marine Rescue NSW and other agencies to notify the MAC predominantly of boating incidents. However, persons in water incidents can also be notified to the MAC via this system.

Surf Rescue Emergency Response System
The “Surf Rescue” Emergency Response System (13SURF) was introduced by SLSNSW in January 2008 and since this time has been activated over 1,180 times by Police for “surf rescue” emergencies, resulting in 599 people being rescued. This system also has the ability to notify the resources of Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association (APOLA).

This system provides a 24 hour single point of contact for Police to notify and task surf rescue services to an incident. This initiative ensures an effective and co-ordinated response of surf rescue services along the State’s coastline, with a key focus on rapid response of appropriate surf rescue assets to preserve life.
Recommendation 13
That the Surf Rescue Emergency Response System continue to be utilised as the single point of contact for surf rescue resources.

Helicopter Rescue Services
The ASNSW currently operates five helicopters across the State, and these are located at Sydney, Wollongong and Orange. While the helicopters are used primarily for medical retrieval, they do have a secondary rescue function. The tasking of Ambulance helicopters is the responsibility of the Ambulance Medical Retrieval Unit (AMRU).

The NSWPF currently operates five helicopters which are based at Bankstown Airport. These helicopters are primarily used for law enforcement purposes.

There are a number of other helicopters which operate in support of surf rescue. These services are based within the Hunter (Newcastle) and North Coast (Lismore) and are contracted to the ASNSW while services based in Sydney and the South Coast are not.

The NSWPF has tasking arrangements in place for all helicopters. These are deployed by the Police RCO when he/she makes a determination that the assets are suitable to the task.

Emergency Dispatch Technologies

Tie-line technology
The current protocol to facilitate communication between Ambulance, Police and Fire Communications Centres primarily relies upon the use of a “tie-line” system.

A tie-line system is the equivalent of a dedicated line which enables direct communications between two or more users. The system currently has a number of limitations, however contemporary communications technology can be implemented to enhance its functionality.

Ambulance Service of NSW computerised triaging system (VisiCAD)
The VisiCAD system enables Ambulance Communications Centre operators to capture critical information through a system of graphic interfaces which allow incident data to be collated, mapped and dispatched to ensure effective resource management.

The system permits users to access multiple screens from a single workstation. These screens capture call information and facilitates conversations between the operator to the caller through a series of pop ups depending on the incident that has occurred and the type of injuries that have been sustained. For example, in cases where a person has fallen and that person is unconscious, VisiCAD provides the operator with step by step actions that can be undertaken and that are tailored to that particular scenario. This is then relayed to the caller who can perform those actions while they are waiting for an ambulance to arrive.

While VisiCAD contains comprehensive information about medical emergencies, it does not contain information on those emergencies which are rescue based such as persons experiencing difficulty in the water.
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Recommendation 14
That the Ambulance Service of NSW amend its Computer Aided Dispatch System to include a category of “person in-water” rescue.

Recommendation 15
That the additional category of “person in-water” rescue immediately prompt telephone contact with the NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator.

InterCAD Emergency Messaging System (ICEMS)
ICEMS is a system that allows essential information which has been provided by a Triple Zero call to be shared immediately between emergency service organisations. ICEMS currently facilitates communication between the NSWPF, Fire and Rescue NSW, and the Transport Management Centre operated by Roads and Maritime Services. The system has a number of advantages:
1. It records information in “real time” thereby enabling faster response times once an incident has been entered in the system
2. Inter-agency notification is automated and minimises the risk of human error
3. Functions are auditable
4. The need for further redundancy is diminished and
5. Operating costs are shared, minimising any impost on one particular agency.

Use of ICEMS by other jurisdictions
In July 2009, the New Zealand Government implemented ICEMS across its core emergency service agencies of Police, Fire and Ambulance. The three emergency service organisations operate under a Memorandum of Understanding which sets out protocols for information sharing and meet regularly to resolve any day to day operational issues which may arise.

By June 2011, ICEMS had been used to deal with more than 135,000 emergencies, with agencies describing it as a “no wrong door” solution. In addition to the public safety benefits of improved response times, and the more effective co-ordination and use of appropriate resources, agencies have reported extremely positive effects that ICEMS has had on inter-agency relationships and information flows.

It must be noted that in 2009 the NSW Deputy State Coroner, in respect of the death of David Iredale, a bushwalker who died in the Blue Mountains recommended, inter-alia:

"the limitations on immediate and expeditious transfer of primary information between relevant emergency services and the need for urgent progress to be achieved with respect to the implementation of the InterCAD Electronic Messaging System (ICEMS) protocol, particularly between the Ambulance Service and the NSW Police Force.”

Recommendation 16
That the InterCAD Emergency Messaging System be incorporated into the Ambulance Service of NSW Computer Aided Dispatch System, as soon as possible.
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Recommendation 17
That pending the installation of the InterCAD Emergency Messaging System within the Ambulance Service of NSW Computer Aided Dispatch System, remote data terminals be installed at each NSW Police Force Rescue Co-ordinator work station in each of the NSW Police Force Communications Centres, and that such terminals be facilitated.

Radio Communications Compatibility
During consultation a number of agencies raised the issue of radio communications during the conduct of rescue operations.

Emergency services operate individual radio systems which prevent direct liaison. This hinders situational awareness and can lead to further delay in the rescue co-ordination process.

While it is acknowledged agencies require individual radio systems for their day to day activities, there may be scope to establishing a common liaison channel for use during rescue operations, or the provision of radio equipment to partner agencies.

In particular, this could greatly assist lifesaving resources to communicate with the helicopters operated by the ASNSW.

Recommendation 18
That this review be extended to examine options to improve the interoperability of emergency services radio communications during "in-water" rescue incidents.
# ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMRU</td>
<td>Ambulance Medical Retrieval Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>APOLA</td>
<td>Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASNSW</td>
<td>Ambulance Service of NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAD</td>
<td>Computer Aided Dispatch</td>
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<td>ICEMS</td>
<td>InterCAD Emergency Messaging System</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>Marine Area Command</td>
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<td>MRB</td>
<td>Marine Radio Base</td>
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<td>MRNSW</td>
<td>Marine Rescue NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>MRU</td>
<td>Marine Rescue Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSWPF</td>
<td>NSW Police Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCO</td>
<td>Rescue Co-ordinator (Police)</td>
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<td>SARCC</td>
<td>Search and Rescue Co-ordination Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEMC</td>
<td>State Emergency Management Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>SERM Act</td>
<td><em>State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989</em></td>
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<td>SLSNSW</td>
<td>Surf Life Saving NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standing Operating Procedures</td>
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<td>SRB</td>
<td>State Rescue Board</td>
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<td>TMC</td>
<td>Transport Management Centre</td>
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