

Summary of Fisheries meeting with management

The PSA and delegates from the FOVB recently met with Department of Industry and Fisheries management. Below is a summary of matters discussed.

GRN radio roll-out

The provision of radios and connection to the GRN network has been a major issue of interest for the PSA and members for a considerable time. We advised this should be a high priority to address the safety of officers. The PSA followed up on Fisheries' commitment to roll out this necessary resource.

The roll-out is a phased one with priorities where the GRN is strong but a commitment that all Fisheries Officers within GRN coverage will have a radio. As the network expands, radios will be deployed. We were advised that a substantial number of radios will be rolled out within a few months with more to follow in 2020.

Investigations of Fisheries Officers

The PSA raised concerns regarding investigation processes relating to complaints. In particular, we advised staff members had been made aware of complaints against them, with limited or no detail, and left to wait long periods of time before further contact and detail from an investigator. Fact findings were getting overly complicated and we were seriously concerned regarding whether procedural fairness was being achieved.

The PSA advised the employer should be clear regarding any complaints or allegations before presenting those issues to the employee. Processes should not be unreasonably prolonged.

The employee should be advised clearly of the process being followed and their rights. Most importantly employees should be ensured procedural fairness and their responses properly taken into consideration.

It was agreed a specific meeting should take place to discuss procedures in general.

The PSA will seek to ensure process are clear, meet procedural fairness and are dealt with in a reasonable timeframe.

We are also happy to take up individual issues or examples with the employer.

Batons and handcuffs

As you would be aware, management advised it would obtain legal advice on this matter a long time ago. Essentially what we are seeking is whether Fisheries Officers can carry or use these items under other jurisdictions or acts (such as the Biosecurity Act). Management has engaged Crown Solicitors to provide advice on this issue but has stated that it has significant complexities. It anticipates it will be some time before it comes back with advice.

In the meantime, management is not prepared to give advice that it can or cannot be used when performing non-core Fisheries Officer work. It has advised that it should only ever be used when no other option is available and that staff should use a risk assessment model and extricate themselves from situations rather than use baton or handcuffs.

The PSA is not satisfied with such a response and urges Fisheries Officers to carefully assess the



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risk of circumstances where a baton and/or handcuffs may be required when performing non-core Fisheries Officer duties, such as biosecurity, and to either avoid the situation or seek specific guidance from their line manager should such a circumstance arise. Where a staff member feels work is too unsafe they should not perform the work and advise their manager immediately.

Management advised that based on records provided, the use of batons and handcuffs has been very low over the years. We further urge our members to put in incident reports relating to the use of, or near use of, this equipment.

Undoubtedly this matter has gone on for too long. The PSA will meet with Delegates and determine if we should consider lodging a dispute with the Industrial Relations Commission.

Rock fishing safety duties

The PSA received correspondence back in response on to our concerns relating to rock fishing safety duties stating that Fisheries Officers have more of a training role in this matter rather than a hands-on compliance role.

In our meeting we advised management that we were aware that in the Randwick area, where the initial trial took place, the role is compliance. It has not rolled out elsewhere as yet but it appears clear that this is likely.

Management advised there is a clear gap in information and will seek clarification in what is expected of staff and where those expectations are determined by Fisheries management or outside Fisheries' control. The PSA said we

sought this information prior to any further implementation.

If you are made aware of any further rolling out of these duties, please contact your delegate or the PSA immediately.

Prosecutions of persons who threaten, abuse or assault FOs

Delegates provided a list of outstanding matters regarding the above. We advised that we understood the complexity of issues determining whether matters go to prosecution but we were concerned that matters not proceeding had the potential to lead to ongoing threatening and violent behaviour.

Management advised it took the safety of its employees seriously. It recognised the value of officers having information regarding decisions over these matters and said that they could contact Prosecution Review Panel (PRP) to find out about cases. We were further advised that the Legal page on the inFOsite is accessible to all Fisheries Officers.

The PSA welcomes the views of our members and Fisheries Officers can be proud of their strong and effective delegate structure. As advised in the previous bulletin your delegates are:

- » Matthew proctor (Chair)
- » John Staines (Secretary)
- » Jackie Corlass
- » Joe Wright
- » Matt Cartwright
- » Ian Stockton
- » Gavin McDonall

