



**Public Service Association of NSW**

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In reply please quote: AW.mb

10 June 2020

Commissioner Mick Fuller APM  
NSW Police Force  
Locked Bag 5102  
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

**Email:** [REDACTED]

Dear Commissioner Fuller,

**Re: Request for consultation with the PSA regarding ROG Staffing and Rostering**

The Police Radio Operations Group (ROG) response to the 2019-2020 bushfire season has recently been addressed in a submission by the PSA to the NSW Independent Bushfire Enquiry. The submission drew attention to inadequate staffing at critical periods of the bushfire emergency, which exposed weaknesses in the underlying staffing and rostering model. Subsequently and independently, responsibility for handling a large number of Triple Zero (TZ) calls has been shifted from PoliceLink to ROG, adding further stress to the system.

**Radio staffing levels**

The PSA has regularly been raising issues of staffing and rostering at meetings of the Radio Operations Group Joint Communications Consultative Committee (JCCC). For example, at the meeting on 27 November 2018, the PSA proposed a model of Baseline Service Delivery and Workload Management. The proposal was based on the following principles:

- Channels shouldn't be merged when the merge channel will be too busy
- Channels should only have a single operator as a last resort and for a short period of time
- There should be a maximum percentage of single operator channels in a centre

- There should be a minimum number of active channels per period state wide.

ROG management would not commit to such a model and would only agree to deal reactively with complaints made to Centre Managers relating to specific incidents. The PSA put out a Bulletin to members on 12 December 2018 and 17 December 2019 referring to our model and encouraging complaints to be lodged. Unfortunately, the local complaint process was unsuccessful in highlighting systemic issues.

So at the time of the bushfires, ROG management was still committed to a model which provided inadequate staffing, relying on regular merging of channels, channels run by single operators and moving channels between centres. This system placed too high an emphasis on controlling staff expenses and insufficient emphasis on ensuring adequate staffing for an emergency.

### **Staffing for bushfires and other predictable catastrophic events**

At the JCCC on 21 November 2019, the issue of staffing for predicted bushfires came up in the wake of 'catastrophic Tuesday' fires in northern NSW on 12 November 2019. The PSA raised staffing difficulties experienced at Tamworth on that day even though catastrophic conditions had been predicted two days earlier.

The Commander stated that ROG have Summer Contingency Plans in place. The day prior to the 'catastrophic Tuesday' event, the ROG head office made calls to all centres Supervisors to co-ordinate potential staffing issues, but no extra staff were put on. He said that it can be difficult to call people in the same day a shortfall is identified because there may be no takers for additional hours or overtime. In the absence of support from ROG management, the PSA issued a Bulletin again encouraging operators to make local complaints on 17 December 2019.

On 21 November 2019, ROG management was aware of the issue of low staffing on days of high predicted fire activity and remained of the view that the existing systems were adequate. Those systems did not include rostering additional staff and relied on calling staff in for overtime on the day. This system failed catastrophically on New Year's Eve.

This should be contrasted with the situation at PoliceLink during the Black Summer fires, where extra staff were rostered in anticipation of the predicted emergency. Feedback from PoliceLink delegates tells us that this strategy was effective in guaranteeing service to the public and protecting members from damage to their health.

### **Shifting of Triple Zero calls from PoliceLink to ROG**

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, PoliceLink was experiencing a spike in digital traffic and calls to CrimeStoppers, largely as a result of notifications from members of the public of breaches of the Public Health Direction requiring people to stay at home. As a result, it was decided to divert TZ calls to ROG to take the load

off PoliceLink. The PSA was properly consulted and supported this measure as an appropriate response to the emergency. Since then ROG has been taking over 40% of TZ calls made to NSW Police.

Communications Officers are trained to take TZ calls and they have a reasonable amount of down time while dispatching. The TZ work was handled by having COs working as Assistant Dispatchers logged into the primary TZ queue. This has caused some problems for the Dispatchers but has been managed more or less successfully.

It should be noted that the PSA has consistently supported ROG operators being placed in the primary TZ queue because it increases the amount of work which can be done by ROG operators during off-peak times, strengthening the case for minimum numbers.

The COVID spike at PoliceLink has now decreased dramatically. With this, the PSA wishes to discuss the matter of the 30% of TZ calls which have been shifted from one part to another part of the workforce. At the recent ROG JCCC, the PSA requested consultation on this but we have not yet received a favourable response. It is important to consider that, at the time of the problems on New Year's Eve, ROG was not taking many TZ calls. Next time there is a bushfire emergency, there are grounds for concern that PoliceLink will no longer have the capacity to handle the bulk of TZ calls, as they have up until now.

### **Rostering at ROG**

In 2018, as part of an agreement to provide a pathway from part-time to full-time for Communications Officers, the ROG Flexible Rostering Agreement was varied to allow new full-time staff to be able to be rostered for shifts of flexible lengths, replacing the previous 12 hour shift roster. Staff already on the 12 hour shifts remain on them. At the time of this agreement, the roster was made up of long term staff on 12 hour shifts, and part-timers and newer full-time staff on shorter variable shifts. The 12 hour shifts provide the 'backbone' of the roster and are essential to provide cover for periods of low historical demand.

As more of the older staff retire, not enough 12 hour shift staff remain to fill all the slots on the backbone, further deteriorating coverage in periods of historical low demand. The PSA has encouraged ROG management on numerous occasions to place variable full-time staff on 12 hour shifts to cover gaps in the backbone, but this has been consistently rejected by ROG management.

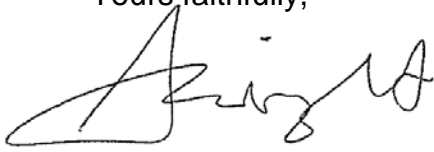
### **Summary**

In summary, we ask you to direct your managers in ROG and PoliceLink to engage in consultation with the PSA about:

- a. Baseline Service Delivery and Workload Management
- b. rostering for bushfires and other predictable catastrophic events
- c. shift lengths and roster management
- d. balancing Dispatching and TZ call duties for ROG operators

I thank you for your attention. We look forward to having constructive discussions with your managers regarding these vital issues.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Wright', written in a cursive style.

**Andrew Wright**  
*for* **STEWART LITTLE**  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**