Volunteer Marine Rescue

Review of the structure, adequacy and long term viability of New South Wales Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations.

A report for the

Hon Joseph Tripodi MP
Minister for Ports and Waterways

Facilitator - Hon John C Price - July 2008
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Abbreviations

AVCGA Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Inc.
BIA Boating Industry Association
BOA Boat Owners Association
CBT Competency Based Training
MAC Marine Area Command
MRB Marine Radio Base
MRU Marine Rescue Unit
OTS Offshore Tracking System
RTO Register Training Organisation
RVCP Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol Inc
SAR Search and Rescue
SARCC Search and Rescue Co-ordination Centre
SRB State Rescue Board
VMR Volunteer Marine Rescue
VMRC Volunteer Marine Rescue Council
VRA Volunteer Rescue Association
Executive Summary

In August 2007 the Minister for Ports, the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP announced the Government intention to review the adequacy and long term viability of the service currently being provided by the New South Wales Volunteer Marine Rescue organisations.

Terms of Reference

1. Examine the adequacy of the existing disposition of volunteer marine units to address the State’s marine search and rescue requirements.

2. Identify any areas where resources may be duplicated and how these facilities could be rationalised.

3. Examine the adequacy of the current volunteer marine rescue organisational structure and make recommendations on how this could be improved.

Findings

The review highlighted the various strengths and weaknesses of the three Voluntary Marine Rescue (VMR) organisations: the Volunteer Rescue Association, Marine Branch (VRA Marine Branch); the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard (AVCGA) and the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP).

Clearly there is effective co-operation in sea rescue operations although duplication of some bases and overlapping of radio services does cause friction between the three organisations.

The review identified the fact that whilst the service currently available is adequate, the factors of membership cost, operation and training as well as vessel and communication equipment replacement is overtaking the ability of each organisation to recruit and adequately fund raise.

Current fundraising activities in locations where there are multiple VMR flotillas / squadrons effectively reduces the opportunity to raise much needed funds for each organisation involved. This public competition is counter-productive in both attracting support and general public relations. The entrenched competition and occasional poaching of personnel is also counter-productive and seems to disrupt rational administrative dialogue and positive decision making to the ultimate detriment of boating public safety.

Rationalisation is necessary in line with NSW Police Force Marine Area Command (MAC) recommendations of 2006 in order to improve operational efficiency. Without a co-operative restructuring both government funding and commercial sponsorship will be difficult to maintain in the present regime of competing interests.
Bases that have been inspected indicate a high level of efficiency but the present Volunteer Marine Rescue Committee is considered to be too parochial and ineffective with regard to accreditation matters and is seen as just a further impediment in the process as far as some flotillas / squadrons are concerned. A recommended action later in this document suggests a way forward.

There is little support for amalgamation or unification by each of the three VMR organisations. The VRA Marine Branch is not prepared to sacrifice its connections with its land based operations although there is limited co-operation between them and the AVCGA, mostly in relation to training. The AVCGA gives great credence to its interstate connections and its Australian structure and sees no need to change this view in spite of the clear requirement that marine rescue is a state responsibility. As an association it reflects the desire of the executive which may or may not be the representative view of their members.

Of the three VMR organisations, the RVCP is the largest in membership and the longest established. It is the only VMR organisation that has its own full time administrative unit and as a corporation has a board of directors.

The RVCP is the only organisation willing to sacrifice its name, personnel, equipment, property and infrastructure (including its secretariat) into a new VMR organisation inviting the other groups to join, but it is not prepared to join another existing body.

As the AVCGA did not provide a formal submission, a submission made in 2006 to the government is included in the appendices. The submissions of the RVCP and VRA are also included in the appendices.

It is evident that the greatest benefit to NSW Volunteer Marine Rescue would be the establishment of a new organisation by integrating the existing volunteer organisations, leading to better targeted funding, and seeking direct representation on the NSW Rescue Board.

Nine recommendations are proposed for consideration, covering the establishment of a new single VMR entity, a suggested name and various establishment and funding objectives.

VMR in New South Wales is vital and necessary to the safety of life at sea and in certain cases marine property. Without a co-operative restructuring both government funding and commercial sponsorship will be difficult to maintain in the present regime of competing interests. It is earnestly hoped that this document clears the air and gives a direction to a sensible and wholly beneficial way forward. Good support is available, and it is also hoped that prejudice of the past can be put aside for the common good and saving of life at sea.
Volunteer Marine Rescue - Report

Introduction

In August 2007 the Minister for Ports, the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP announced the Government intention to enquire into the adequacy and long term viability of the current service being provided by the New South Wales Volunteer Marine Rescue organisations.

Terms of Reference

1. Examine the adequacy of the existing disposition of volunteer marine units to address the State’s marine search and rescue requirements.

2. Identify any areas where resources may be duplicated and how these facilities could be rationalised.

3. Examine the adequacy of the current volunteer marine rescue organisational structure and make recommendations on how this could be improved.

Background

For some years now successive Ministers, in their various capacities, have expressed concern in relation to the challenges surrounding the effective co-ordination and equitable funding of the three primary volunteer organisations operating along the coast of New South Wales, namely the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP), the Australian Volunteer Coastguard Association (AVCGA); and the Volunteer Rescue Association – Marine Branch (VRA).

Given the perceived need for an all-encompassing investigation of the current structure the Minister wrote to the senior officer of each of these organisations seeking their input and co-operation. The Hon John C Price was nominated as facilitator of the enquiry in November 2007.

Preliminary sessions were held and a Forum Group comprising officers from NSW Maritime Authority, the State Rescue Board Secretariat and NSW Police Force Marine Area Command was formed with meetings commencing in November 2007 at NSW Maritime, Rozelle.

Records of agendas, meeting minutes and various submissions from participants in NSW and interstate, will be archived with the Recreational Boating Division of NSW Maritime at Rozelle for future reference.
Review Process

Once the draft terms of reference were adopted the Forum Group was brought together to assist with agenda formation and agreed to a provisional timetable and dialogue development.

At the request of the executives of both the RVCP and the AVCGA, preliminary meetings with the executives of all three organisations (including the VRA) were planned and executed. Likewise the executive of both the Boating Industry Association Inc (BIA) and the Boat Owners Association Inc (BOA) were also interviewed.

A forum attended by the executive of all three VMR organisations was held at NSW Maritime Rozelle which enabled a free and frank exchange of views and established a few minor areas of common agreement.

Two District Marine Rescue Advisory Sub-Committee meetings, a Hunter District Meeting at Newcastle and a Metropolitan District meeting at the Police Marine Area Command Headquarters, were attended by the review facilitator (Hon John C Price).

Submissions were received from a number of key stakeholder organisations. (Refer Page 10 - Review of Submissions).

Interviews were conducted in Queensland with the Principal Advisor, Marine Rescue and the Acting Superintendent Specialist Services Branch, State Water Police Co-ordinator, and in Victoria with the Victorian Senior Emergency Management Officer. These interviews were aimed at gaining an interstate perspective.

Stakeholders

Focus Group

New South Wales Maritime
- Brett Moore - General Manager Recreational Boating

Office for Emergency Services
- Heinz Mueller - Executive Officer NSW State Rescue Board
- Neil Pfister - Planning Officer NSW State Rescue Board

New South Wales Police Force
- Inspector Glenn Finness – NSW Police Force MAC
- Sergeant Anthony Hill – NSW Police Force MAC
Forum Representatives

Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol
Mike Stringer – Government Liaison Officer RVCP
Peter Philipson - OC – RVCP
Sharon Gillings – Chief of Staff RVCP

Australian Volunteer Coastal Patrol Association
Chris Gillett – National Commodore AVCGA
Frank Robards – Chair AVCGA NSW State Council
Bruce Mitchell – Illawarra Squadron AVCGAA

Volunteer Rescue Association
Bill Carter – Chairman VRA Marine Committee
Wal Lingen – Secretary VRA

Boating Industry Association
Doug Olding – President
Alan Steber – Director
Roy Privett – General Manager

Boat Owners Association
Michael Chapman – President
Frank Talbot – Committee Member

Interviewees

Minister for Emergency Services
The Hon Nathan Rees MP

Minister for Police
The Hon David Campbell MLC

New South Wales Treasurer
The Hon Michael Costa MLC

Director General NSW State Emergency Service and Chair State Rescue Board of NSW
Brigadier Philip McNamara

Queensland Department of Emergency Services
Ron Melton – Principal Advisor Marine Rescue

Queensland State Water Police
Acting Superintendent Shane Chelepy
Specialist Services Branch State Water Police Co-ordinator

Victorian Department of Justice
Peter Marczuk – Senior Emergency Management Officer
Volunteer Marine Rescue - Brief History

In 1937 the Royal Australian Navy trialled a Volunteer Coastal Patrol as a support unit which, subsequent to World War 2, developed into a Water Police reserve known as the Volunteer Coastal Patrol (VCP). This VCP assisted, and was supported by, the Water Police and the former Maritime Services Board.

During 1961 the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association (AVCGA) was formed as a result of a falling out between members of the VCP. Both groups grew into independent organisations picking up other boating associations who had radio support for their members.

The VCP was granted a royal charter in 1974 hence their current recognition as the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol.

With the implementation of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 elements of the existing organisations affiliated with the land based Voluntary Rescue Association (VRA) and created the third element of the current Volunteer Marine Rescue Group.

Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations – Current Structure

The three VMR organisations raise the majority of their finance through a combination of voluntary not-for-profit fundraising activities, a number of commercial arrangements and in some cases local benefactors. Additional funding is at times made available through Federal Government grants, local councils in cash or kind and an annual payment made by NSW Maritime. This payment is processed through the NSW State Rescue Board (SRB).

The Volunteer Marine Rescue Council is an advisory committee established by the State Rescue Board. In co-ordinating activities that impact directly on each of the organisations the Volunteer Marine Rescue Council (VMRC) is interposed between the SRB and their command structures and the six marine rescue advisory committees along the coast.

Unfortunately, as the VMRC and its decisions are not always universally accepted or implemented by the constituent organisations, its effectiveness is compromised.

Local level co-operation during rescue missions is effective and the participation of two or three of the organisations at any one event is supportive and harmonious.

It should be noted that of all the maritime rescues tasked through the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command, some 68% are undertaken by VMR
units. This figure is considered to understate the VMR input as “police tasked only” statistics are officially recorded.

The Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol Inc (RVCP)

This organisation is a structured company registered in NSW. (www.coastalpatrol.com.au)

The RVCP has a board of directors and a full time secretariat of four persons, fully equipped and funded from internal fund raising and responsible for the patrols assets.

The following indicates the extent of RVCP involvement in NSW in terms of surveillance and rescue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active membership</th>
<th>1064</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marine Rescue Units</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search &amp; Rescue Coordination Centres</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Radio Bases</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset valuation (estimate)</td>
<td>$31.8 million (excluding real estate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training administration</td>
<td>RVCP uses an external Registered Training Organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Australian Volunteer Coastguard (AVCGA)

The organisation is an incorporated body registered in the ACT (www.coastguard.com.au).

The corporation operates in several states under a range of accreditations / licence agreements with various emergency service administrators.

Administration is through a command structure at national level with limited autonomy devolved to the state commands.

The following indicates the extent of AVCGA involvement in NSW in terms of surveillance and rescue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active membership</th>
<th>670</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marine Rescue Units</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search &amp; Rescue Coordination Centres</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Radio Bases</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset valuation (estimate)</td>
<td>[information not available]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training administration</td>
<td>AVCGA is a Registered Training Organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NSW Volunteer Rescue Association Inc. (VRA)

The organisation is an incorporated body registered in NSW. (www.rescue.org.au).

The corporation operates in NSW and undertakes a multitude of land based rescue operations as well as inland still water and wild water rescues. It also undertakes a limited amount of maritime rescue work in coastal locations.

Administration is through a State based executive committee with elected office holders with a marine co-ordinator directing marine activities. (It should be noted that an affiliation of sorts does exist between the AVCGA and VRA principally in the area of training).

The following indicates the extent of VRA involvement in NSW in terms of surveillance and rescue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity/Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active membership</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Rescue Units</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search &amp; Rescue Coordination Centres</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Radio Bases</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset valuation (estimate)</td>
<td>$4.79 million (excluding real estate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training administration</td>
<td>Agreement with AVCGA to train under their RTO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review of Submissions

It was advised that lists of individual members of the VMR organisations could not be released due to privacy considerations. Confidential rank and file submissions were therefore invited through the administration of each of the three key VMR organisations. The closing date for these submissions was 31 March 2008.

The RVCP members responded enthusiastically, with a range of opinions being presented. Unfortunately the confidentially issue was lost with the AVCGA requiring copies to be sent to their State Chairman on “democratic” grounds and the VRA felt that submissions should only be sent back to their executive to enable the compiling of a corporate point of view.

A joint submission was lodged by the BIA and BOA

Subsequent to review of the submissions several telephone conversations were held with respondents to clarify points raised. Visits to a local (Hunter Region) RVCP base and AVCGA base were also made for further clarification of issues.
The numbers of responses received were as follows:

- RVCP  63
- AVCGA  5
- VRA    2

Included as appendices are the following documents:

- NSW Police Force MAC - Précis entitled Amalgamation of the three Volunteer Marine Rescue Organisations in NSW (2006) Refer Appendix A
- AVCGA – Submission for one NSW VMR Organisation (June 2007) Refer Appendix B
- RVCP - Volunteer Marine Rescue in NSW Past, Present and the Course Ahead (February 2008) Refer Appendix C
- NSW Volunteer Rescue Association – Marine Rescue Review Submission (March 2008) Refer Appendix D
- NSW State Rescue Board Secretariat – Briefing Note (2008) Refer Appendix E
- Boating Industry Association and Boat Owners Association – Joint submission (March 2008) Refer Appendix F

After reviewing all the submissions it is evident that the vast majority of stakeholders want to be members of one organisation for marine rescue.

Issues relating to Individual costs for uniform, training and transport and the difficulty of recruiting younger members as a result figured prominently.

Radio overlap was raised frequently as was the location and disposition of bases.

Vessel maintenance cost and fuel costs were raised in over half of the submissions.

There were a significant number of respondents who wanted some independence by way of continuing unit by unit fundraising, although several submissions expressed a desire to be supplied and funded in a style similar to the Rural Fire Service and the State Emergence Service.

A review of the duplication of services in the one location as well as the need for vessels and crews were seen as sensible and logical. Non availability of spares at short notice was also listed as an issue.

Accreditation and paperwork issues were also mentioned, along with the need for vessel life assessment, regular replacement and improved interaction with
the police. Better financial auditing was also considered necessary in order to track the expenditure of Government funding.

No mention of overall “risk assessment” was made.
Findings

The three VMR organisations currently cover their rescue role under the direction of the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command. Historic differences impact negatively on harmonious administrative operation although “on water” co-operation at rank and file level is good. During offshore tracking of vessels, despite the requirement that messages are to be transferred to the next geographic base in line, base to base leap frogging continues to be a problem.

Issues associated with training costs, fund raising obligations, time demands, advancing age of members, low recruitment levels, equipment costs, vessel costs and the need for electronic radio replacements is causing a contraction of the VMR services.

The disposition of vessels, the number of bases in various locations and the over supply of part time radio contact points cause confusion to the boating public and concern to the police in their various capacities required in marine rescue. Action will need to be taken in these areas to reduce duplication, consolidate resources to the best advantage and reduce cost to the volunteer fundraisers and active members.

Resulting from the individual executive meeting and later the combined executives meeting with the Focus Group, a number of positive suggestions emerged:

- The RVCP indicated that it would be prepared to abandon their current organisation including the secretariat and be part of a new State sponsored marine rescue service. The Executive emphasised that their Royal Charter status would be surrendered but they would not be prepared to join another existing organisation.

- All three organisations agreed that uniforms were an issue if a new organisation was formed. However it was agreed by all that a common shirt and trouser work rig was essential. Stakeholder discussions led to accepting a polo type long sleeve shirt, yellow in colour with a common large identifying name such as “NSW Volunteer Marine Rescue” inscribed front and back in large print.

- Vessel identification was very important and a common livery was proposed. It was agreed that a white hull and super structure with a red stripe similar in design to the current RVCP livery was the most favoured.

- If a common marine rescue service was formed the current organisations logo should be replaced by a State emblem and the word “RESCUE” in large characters should be painted on the hull.
Also resulting from the individual executive meeting and later the combined executives meeting with the Focus Group, a number of negative reactions were noted:

- The AVCGA at this point cannot see any advantage in folding into a new marine rescue organisation due principally to its national structure and the view that their organisation dominates interstate. The fact that marine rescue has been a State responsibility resulting from the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), updated and endorsed by the Australian Police Commissioners Conference in 2004, does not seem to be clearly understood.

- Enquiries interstate indicated that there is no clear domination by the AVCGA and friction between competing bodies remains.

- The VRA sees itself primarily as a land based organisation with a very independent view of how the current marine rescue functions should be administered and its subsequent relationship with the NSW Police Force. The statement that “volunteers may resign” if any forced amalgamation/unification was to be proposed seemed to ignore the basic reason for the existence of voluntary marine rescue.

- The matter of insurance could not be agreed upon between the organisations. Each organisation has their own scheme and both RVCP and AVCGA advised that theirs was less complicated than the other, with both claiming cost effectiveness.

- Training was also an area of disagreement, although both the RVCP and the AVCGA schemes meet the requirements for accreditation.

**Boat Owners Association and Boating Industry Association**

The views of the BOA and BIA two organisations are an important guide to how the marine rescue function in NSW is perceived. A joint submission was made as a result of their meeting with the Focus Group and the following selected comments are relevant to the final recommendations of this review: (Refer Appendix F)

- One maritime rescue organisation is essential. The new organisation should be funded to a more appropriate level and all three existing organisations be invited to join and participate.

- Their suggestion that funding to the existing organisations be halted once a new scheme is in place does not necessarily reflect the view of the writer.

- Confusion with the various radio networks is of great concern and is an issue that must be resolved.
• Of significant interest is the withdrawal of sponsorship by the BIA because of the competing interest of the present three providers in the marine rescue structure. This fact, plus the difficulty in providing additional government funds due in part to similar circumstances, makes the case for one maritime rescue body more compelling.

• The BOA indicated that their members would entertain an increase in fees if the licence/registration renewals included a pie chart of NSW Maritime expenditure indicating the “marine rescue” allocation.
Implications of Maintaining the Status Quo

If amalgamation is not achieved the duration of the present service is unpredictable given the age of existing members (mid 50’s to mid 80’s) the inability to recruit and retain new members (due to the personal cost in terms of both cash and time) and the rising cost of vessels.

While the present State contribution in both cash and in kind is useful, in percentage terms its value will continue to decline. Similarly without regular sponsorship and rationalised purchasing strategies, assistance from suppliers will not return to an effective level.

A more appropriate level of government assistance would still be necessary to help with the rising costs of vessels, maintenance and other equipment. Similarly some contribution to fuel and oil costs for Police tasked rescues needs to be considered due to the rising price of fuel.

Current recruitment in most cases equates the rate of resignation and does little to improve the average age. Membership would still continue to deteriorate due to age, and the recruitment of younger members and their retention will not improve as a result of the rising costs of membership and the competition between the existing providers which remains a damaging factor.

Maintaining the status quo would then impact squarely on the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command which would require an increase in personnel and rescue craft at even more strategic locations and require a significant increase in expenditure.

Forced amalgamation is impractical and unattainable given the structure and assets that have been provided by the volunteers with relatively nominal government assistance and should not be considered at this time.

Federal enquiries indicate that no stand alone professional coast guard service will be formed and therefore the expectation that a national voluntary body would receive any fixed federal financial support is ill founded.

This comment does not impact on the ability of all three organisations continuing to benefit from the various Federal Government Grant Schemes that are available from time to time.
Conclusions

This enquiry has identified the fact that while the service currently available is adequate the factors of cost of membership, operation and training as well as vessel and communication equipment replacement is overtaking the ability of each organisation to recruit and adequately fund raise.

Rationalisation is necessary in line with the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command recommendations of 2006 in order to improve operational efficiency.

The entrenched competition and occasional poaching of personnel is counter productive and seems to disrupt rational administrative dialogue and positive decision making to the ultimate detriment of the boating public safety.

It is clear that the greatest benefit to NSW Volunteer Marine Rescue would be the establishment of a new organisation absorbing the existing volunteer organisation, better targeted funding and seeking direct representation on the NSW Rescue Board.

More detail is required but this can be achieved with the good will of the existing three organisations, close interaction with the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command and Ministerial support by the three portfolio ministers concerned.
Recommendations

The enquiries leading up to this report included officers of the NSW Maritime, the NSW State Rescue Board, NSW Police Force Marine Area Command, executive officers of the RVCP, AVCGA and VRA as well as over 70 submissions from both individuals and groups. The resulting recommendations have been developed from these meetings, conversations and readings and are developed later in this document.

The review revealed that at present the three organisations are suffering internal administrative stress with little chance of compromise in terms of one or other of the organisations being prepared to be absorbed. None of the three will accept the administration of the other two.

Expecting the State to continue to operate on present accreditation by some form of licence or contract is considered unworkable and would only perpetuate or exacerbate the current problems, inter alia, cost to individuals, rising average age and escalating resignations. This would in turn result in a reduction of voluntary rescue services in some locations and adversely impact on the NSW Police Force and its resources.

Recommendation 1

That a new Volunteer Rescue Organisation be established with membership invited from the existing three organisations.

Recommendation 2

The official name of the new body be the “NSW Volunteer Marine Rescue Service” short titled for the purpose of dress recognition “NSW Marine Rescue”.

An administrative unit would need to be established with personnel drawn from those existing marine rescue volunteers to form the transition group to co-ordinate the orderly transfer of personnel and assets of existing units to the new formation. Given the RVCP have already stated that they would be prepared to hand over their identity and assets there is a prospect that others may be happy to join with them to provide a single marine rescue organisation.

Recognition of the service of members drawn from the existing organisations who transfer to the new VMR structure is also important. A new VMR medal should be designed for award based on length of service or exceptional contribution on the initial recommendation of individual base administrations. Similarly a new flag or pennant needs to be designed to aid on shore and off shore recognition.
Recommendation 3

Once recommendation 1 is agreed an administrative committee of 8 to 12 persons drawn from the existing participating organisations under the chairmanship of the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command be established to facilitate the transfer of personnel and assets as determined by the new organisation within a period of two budget years (2009 / 2010 or sooner).

Recommendation 4

That the existing funding formulas remain in place until the administrative committee determines that the new formation is on operational footing and at that time all state funding will be transferred to support the new entity. (See Recommendation 7).

It will be essential during this process that the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command who have operational responsibility undertake a review of the entire marine rescue service and its needs into the future. This should include the disposition of radio bases and vessels as well as comments on the effective life of other assets and the need for obvious areas of additional support in areas of limited local fundraising. Risk assessment of all bases should also be undertaken.

Recommendation 5

In line with their 2006 review the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command will undertake a rationalisation review of the current services for consideration by the committee of the new organisation. Implementation in whole or part should follow this review.

The forgoing recommendations will not be easily accepted universally but it is believed that a significant majority of units will want to be involved. After all, the main reason for volunteers to join any marine rescue unit is to undertake rescue training and participate in rescue operations, not to necessarily climb the promotion ladder and become embroiled in the administration.

Recommendation 6

If a shortfall of bases to be operated by the new organisation eventuates and existing units still wish to be involved then a system of accreditation and or licensing will need to be devised to maintain the service but only in the name of the new entity and with their livery. (In these circumstances a badge designating the external unit may be worn on the sleeve).

At this point the State Government’s contribution to the new entity should be reviewed such that the new body would supply one dress uniform with replacement if necessary every four years.
Likewise the training, vessel rig overalls, necessary footwear and life jackets should be supplied and replaced according to the condition resulting from damage, fabric improvement or whatever time frame is determined by the new body.

This should be accompanied by all necessary basic training courses being provided free of charge with a commitment to membership by participants for at least three years.

A significant increase in contribution towards the purchase cost of vessels and other equipment as well as maintenance is required. The escalating cost of new vessels can be reduced by standardisation and bulk ordering as outlined in the BOA and BIA joint submission (Refer Appendix F).

Recommendation 7

Consideration to be given to provide seed funding through NSW Maritime revenue sources.

*Provide additional funding above the current annual contribution indexed from 2008/09 budget year to cover the cost of uniforms, safety gear and training in order to provide some incentive to recruiting new volunteers into the new entity – cost estimates to be confirmed (See recommendation 4).*

These budget estimates are based on advice given by members, written contributions and issues raised by the three executives during open forums. Vessel cost subsidisation is difficult to assess due to rising costs, individual unit contributions from fund raising, varying resale values and any affects of sensible rationalisation.

A contribution by government such as proposed and the reinstatement of sponsorship in various ways as offered by the BIA would significantly improve the future viability of the service by way of reducing individual membership cost, allowing fundraising to be more effective, streamlining the administration and presenting the boating public with one rescue service which would eliminate the existing confusion and overlap. Less confusion would also be of assistance to foreign vessels and should also be considered.

A further advantage would be the introduction of standard paperwork along the NSW Coast which would save time and improve efficiency in standardising computerised records linked to the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command.

Interchange ability of crews, base to base, depending on the vessel accreditation would also be more achievable and enhance flexibility. This should also encourage a greater opportunity for autonomy of base command levels in emergency situations.
The value of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Council (VMRC) was discussed and was clearly not universally appreciated. The Council has no power to enforce its decisions and directions. It is seen by some to be just another administrative delay in the approval process for new vessels and like issues. With the creation of one new volunteer marine rescue organisation the Council would automatically become redundant as the new body would have a seat on the NSW State Rescue Board.

There was some criticism of the operation of the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command and their marine assets. The views expressed were not universal and were centred principally around the cost of fuel and the difficulty for units located closest to the Queensland border where subsidies are available.

Vessels in the various Queensland services receive reimbursement for fuel and oil costs when involved in rescue work tasked by the Queensland Water Police. The financial administration of the Queensland Emergency Services is significantly different to NSW.

NSW raises its funding for volunteer rescue work through NSW Maritime and the existing three VMR bodies are administered through the NSW State Rescue Board. Rescue tasking is done through the NSW Police Force Marine Area Command who have legal responsibility for rescue operations.

Whilst the Queensland experience is recognition of how the volunteer units could be assisted any reimbursement of fuel and oil needs to be carefully considered as to where the necessary funds should be raised and which department should provide the additional funds.

VMR units in NSW continually compare the funding support received by the SES and RFS which is a good reason to seriously consider some form of reimbursement.

**Recommendation 8**

*That provision be made for reimbursement of fuel and oil costs for rescue operations tasked by the NSW Water Police.*

Other forms of financial support for the new entity should also be considered.

Another commercial organisation, Coastalwatch has indicated that they would be prepared to assist financially a new VMR Organisation. Coastalwatch is a major player in the support of the Surf Lifesaving Association and could materially assist in publicity and recruitment if there was only the new entity to deal with.

The benefit provided to marine insurers by VMR units is significant and like the fire services a levy to assist with rescue would be appropriate.
Other issues raised which need to be considered include assistance to the NSW Ambulance Service and the RFS. If this practice is to continue it should be formalised by way of a deed of agreement to ensure that levels of responsibility are clear and issues such as qualification and insurance are adequate in order to protect the individuals involved.

**Recommendation 9**

*Consideration should be given to encouraging, by agreement or legislation, a small percentage of marine insurance being directed to the New South Wales VMR. This may require COAG agreement but is worth pursuing given the enormous benefit VMR provides to insurers.*