



Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

## Submission



State Emergency Service  
Association of NSW



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State Emergency Service Association of NSW Incorporated  
ABN: 64 549 841 564 | PO Box 553 Parramatta NSW 2124

**Cover Image:**

NSW SES vehicles and members onsite at Bondi Beach staging point.

*Photo: George Chan / Getty Images*

**State Emergency Service Association of NSW Incorporated**

Incorporated in NSW under the *Associations Incorporation Act 2009*

Incorporation registration number: INC2501178

ABN: 64 549 841 564

association@ses.asn.au

PO Box 553 Parramatta NSW 2124

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## Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. About the SES Association of NSW</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Observations Regarding the Bondi Terror Attack</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 NSW SES Operational Involvement	5
3.2 Broader Operational Readiness	5
<b>4. Emergency Service Interoperability</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 Interoperable Communications	6
4.2 Inclusion of Supporting Agencies	6
4.3 Mass Casualty Preparedness and Early Activation	6
<b>5. The Role of Volunteer Emergency Service Organisations</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Preparedness and Major Incident Exercises</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7. Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>8. Conclusion</b>	<b>9</b>

## 1. Executive Summary

The State Emergency Service Association of NSW Incorporated welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

The Association represents members of the NSW State Emergency Service, including both volunteers and staff, and advocates for matters affecting the capability, welfare, safety and effective functioning of the Service.

This submission focuses on observations arising from Chapter 3 of the Commission's report concerning the emergency response to the Bondi terror attack, together with broader observations regarding the integration of volunteer emergency service organisations into major incident planning, exercising and operational response arrangements.

The Association submits that volunteer emergency service organisations provide significant surge capability during major incidents and should be more consistently recognised, exercised and integrated with multi-agency emergency management arrangements.

## 2. About the SES Association of NSW

The State Emergency Service Association of NSW Incorporated is an independent member association established to represent, support and advocate for members of the NSW State Emergency Service.

The Association provides a forum for members to raise matters affecting the Service and its members, promotes professional development and supports initiatives that enhance operational capability and public safety.

The Association's membership includes both volunteer and staff members from across metropolitan and regional New South Wales.



*Photo: Anadolu / Getty Images*

## 3. Observations Regarding the Bondi Terror Attack

### 3.1 NSW SES Operational Involvement

The Association notes that Chapter 3 identifies a number of agencies involved in the response to the Bondi terror attack. However, the involvement of NSW SES personnel does not appear to be specifically recognised.

NSW SES support was offered at approximately 1917 hours and formally requested by the NSW Police Force Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON) at approximately 1926 hours.

More than fifty NSW SES volunteers and staff were deployed during the evening of the incident.

NSW SES personnel undertook a range of support functions including:

- Crime scene support activities
- Deployment of emergency lighting
- Establishment of temporary shelters and marquees
- Traffic and crowd management
- General operational support to NSW Police Force personnel

In addition, an NSW SES Jewish Chaplain in uniform was present at the location at the time of the attack was directly involved in the immediate response, assisting members of the public to seek shelter and providing first aid.

### 3.2 Broader Operational Readiness

The Association further notes that additional NSW SES resources were placed on heightened readiness during the incident.

Units from neighbouring areas within the greater Sydney area were prepared to either provide additional support to operations at Bondi or maintain response capability for severe weather incidents across Sydney.

This preparedness was particularly relevant given a Severe Weather Warning was affecting parts of Sydney on the evening of the attack.

The ability of NSW SES to maintain concurrent emergency response capability while supporting a major incident demonstrates the significant surge capacity available through volunteer emergency service organisations.



## 4. Emergency Service Interoperability

### 4.1 Interoperable Communications

The Association notes the Commission's discussion regarding the use of the Inter-CAD Electronic Messaging System (ICEMS).

While an ICEMS connection was established between NSW Police Force and NSW SES during the incident, operational tasking and direction to NSW SES resources was primarily provided via telephone and direct liaison between commanders rather than through ICEMS.

This highlights both the value of interoperable communication systems and the continuing need to improve the practical integration of those systems during major incidents.

### 4.2 Inclusion of Supporting Agencies

Like NSW Ambulance, NSW SES does not currently maintain a direct ICEMS connection with Surf Life Saving NSW despite frequent operational cooperation across a range of emergencies including flood rescues and tsunamis.

The Association considers there is merit in further expanding interoperable communications arrangements to improve situational awareness and coordination between agencies that routinely work together during emergencies.

### 4.3 Mass Casualty Preparedness and Early Activation

NSW SES and NSW Ambulance have undertaken a number of joint exercises relating to mass casualty incidents, including exercises conducted at Sydney Airport.

As part of these arrangements, NSW Ambulance maintains a major incident and mass casualty equipment at selected NSW SES facilities, including a dedicated trailer based at the NSW SES City of Sydney Unit. These arrangements recognise the NSW SES ability to rapidly mobilise personnel and logistical support to assist NSW Ambulance during large-scale incidents.

The Association notes that NSW Ambulance did not request NSW SES support during the initial response to the Bondi terror attack. NSW SES resources were subsequently activated following a formal request from NSW Police Force.

The Association does not suggest that the outcome of the incident would have been altered by earlier NSW SES involvement. However, the incident provides an opportunity to consider how supporting agencies with established mass casualty capabilities are identified and activated during the early stages of a rapidly evolving event.

Where credible information indicates that an incident may involve multiple casualties, consideration should be given to the early notification or activation of supporting agencies capable of providing additional personnel, logistics, equipment and operational support. Such an approach allows resources to be mobilised and staged while the full extent of the incident is being determined.

The Association considers that, particularly in the greater Sydney area, NSW SES represents a significant and rapidly available surge workforce that can support NSW Ambulance during mass casualty incidents.

The Association acknowledges that there are currently ongoing discussions between NSW SES and NSW Ambulance to update the Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies. We hope this work will reflect the points raised above.

## 5. The Role of Volunteer Emergency Service Organisations

NSW SES volunteers are highly trained emergency service personnel who routinely operate in complex and high-risk environment.

Members undertake training and operational duties across a broad range of disciplines including:

- Incident Management Team (IMT) functions
- Urban Search and Rescue
- Flood Rescue
- Storm Operations
- Community Liaison
- Intelligence and Planning
- Logistics and Operational Support
- Public Information and Warnings
- Protection and Preservation of Crime Scenes
- Land Search Operations
- Mass Casualty Support / Provide First Aid
- Participate in a Rescue Operation

Within greater Sydney alone, NSW SES maintains a volunteer workforce numbering several thousand members capable of rapid mobilisation in support of emergency operations.

The value of this capability has been demonstrated during a range of major incidents, including the 2014 Lindt Café siege, 2024 Bondi Junction stabbing attack and numerous severe weather and natural disaster events.



*Photo: EPA / Mick Tsikas*

## 6. Preparedness and Major Incident Exercises

The Association observes that volunteer emergency service organisations are not always fully incorporated into major incident exercises and preparedness activities.

Where volunteer organisations are involved, participation is sometimes limited to liaison, casualty role players or coordination functions rather than then deployment of operational field capabilities that would be utilised during an actual incident.

This can result in a disconnect between exercised arrangements and real-world operational responses.

The Association considers that major exercise should reflect the agencies and capabilities that would realistically be deployed during a significant incident, including volunteer emergency service organisations.

## 7. Recommendations

The Association recommends that:

1. Major incident exercises conducted by emergency management agencies routinely include volunteer emergency service organisations, including NSW SES, Rural Fire Service, Surf Life Saving NSW, Marine Rescue and Volunteer Rescue Association NSW, in operationally meaningful role.
2. Further enhancements be made to the ICEMS platform to improve direct information sharing and operational coordination between all emergency service organisations. This includes ensuring all agencies are connected with Surf Life Saving NSW via ICEMS and improving the system's capacity to deal with large scale events with multiple incidents or high communication load.
3. Emergency management planning should formally recognise the surge capacity provided by volunteer emergency service organisations and incorporate that capability into major incident response arrangements.
4. NSW SES continues to develop and maintain specialist capabilities relevant to mass casualty incidents and complex multi-agency emergencies, including associated training and exercising opportunities.
5. Lessons identified from the Bondi terror attack be used to strengthen multi-agency coordination arrangements and ensure all responding agencies are appropriately recognised within operational reviews and future planning activities.
6. Emergency service agencies should continue to develop and exercise arrangements that support the early activation of surge resources during suspected mass casualty incidents, including the activation of NSW SES personnel and capabilities in support of NSW Ambulance and other combat agencies where appropriate.

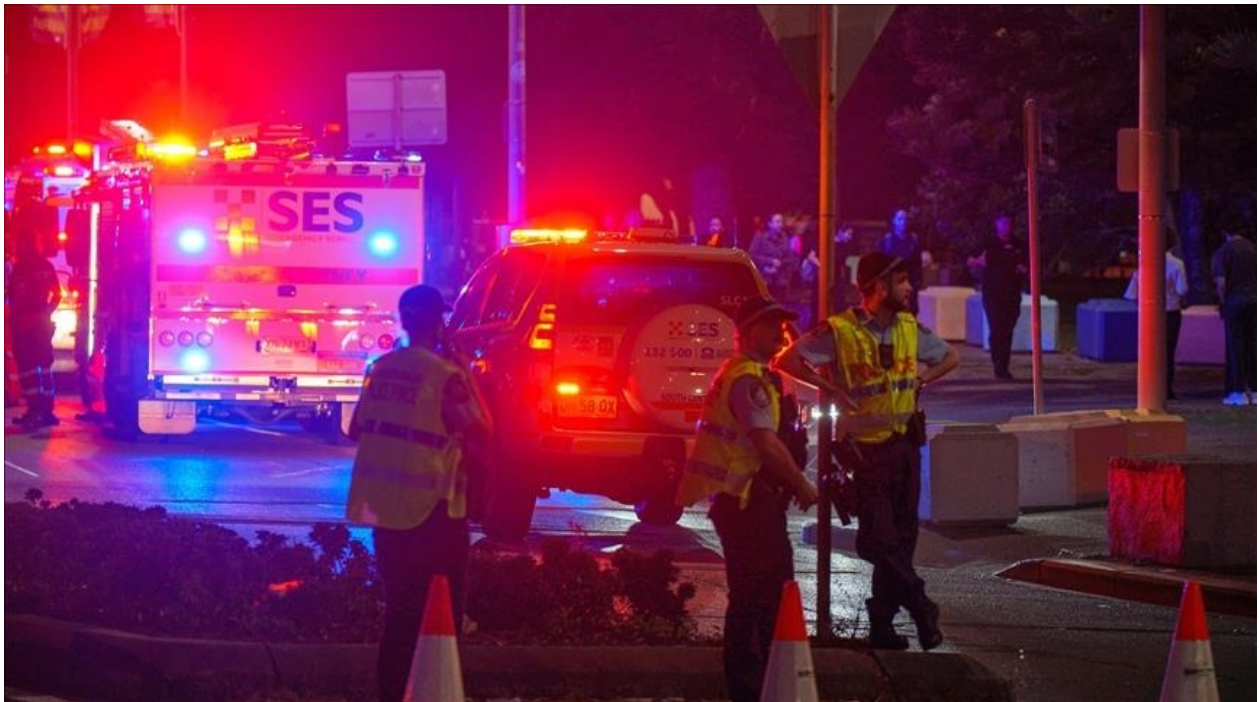
## 8. Conclusion

The Bondi terror attack demonstrated the professionalism, adaptability and commitment of emergency service personnel from across NSW during an unprecedented and rapidly evolving incident.

It also highlighted the important contribution that volunteer emergency service organisations make in supporting NSW Police Force and NSW Ambulance in major incidents, providing additional capability, specialist skills and surge capacity when communities need it most.

The Association submits that continued focus on interoperability, multi-agency exercising and the integration of volunteer emergency services organisations into major incident planning will further strengthen NSW preparedness for future complex and major incident emergencies.

The Association thanks the Royal Commission for the opportunity to provide this submission.



*Photo: Anadolu Ajansi*



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association@ses.asn.au | www.ses.asn.au