



23 October 2011

Nicole Badani  
Health, Safety, Welfare Project Officer  
Fire & Emergency Services Authority  
PO Box 1174  
PERTH WA 6644

Dear Ms Badani

### **VMRWA Response - Community Development and Justice Standing Committee**

Thank you for your correspondence of October 7, 2011 and the opportunity to respond to your request for information regarding the adequacy of Government Agency response to experience of trauma arising from disasters.

With regards to the terms of reference of the Standing Committee, Volunteer Marine Rescue WA and its member groups have not had much involvement in 'declared' large scale natural disasters since 2001, but would like to make the following general comments:

- While it is believed that FESA, as the government agency supporting Volunteer Marine Rescue in WA, has the policies and processes in place to deal with trauma experienced by volunteers after a natural disaster, whether they adequately address the needs of our volunteer members is as yet untried on any large scale disaster.
- From feedback received from our member groups, the biggest barrier to those suffering from trauma or stress is the lack of knowledge (disseminated information) on what is available and how to access assistance.
- Those volunteers who have access to and are comfortable using the Volunteer Portal on the FESA website will find detailed information on what support mechanisms are in place and available, however this information is not adequately disseminated in other forms to groups and individuals.

The association would also like to provide feedback in relation to the additional points outlined in your correspondence. In so doing feedback has been sought from its member groups across the state in providing the responses to the five additional points.

**i. What pre-planning and training activities do you undertake with your staff and volunteers to deal with trauma before a disaster?**

FESA VMRS have developed an Induction training package that has a section dedicated to Occupational, health and safety issues. As part of this module the concepts associated with dealing with stress and trauma are dealt with, from initial identification of a need through to the processes available to assist individuals. This training package is in the early stages of

deployment and this is certainly evidenced by the varied responses to this question from the individual VMR Groups.

In addition the FESA EAP program information has been distributed to groups on a number of occasions over the years which outline other support mechanisms that can be called upon to assist volunteers that may be experiencing stress and trauma as a result of the incidents they have been involved in.

Most VMR groups indicated that they had no formal planning and training activities in place that they undertake with volunteers to deal with trauma. Most groups also indicated that they were aware of the chaplaincy and peer support programs offered by FESA but not necessarily how to access them. Also most groups indicated that they were aware that WA Police (as the HMA) also offered such services.

From the feedback received, there is still a lot that needs to be done to adequately address the lack of knowledge that groups have on how to identify when individuals are in need of support, what support options are available, and how to access them in a timely manner.

**ii. What annual budget you spend on these pre-event activities.**

Training programs and budgeting are dealt with at a FESA VMRS level. At this point individual groups are not required to present budgets for these programs. Information is sought from the groups as to what their training needs are likely to be for the coming year. The financial budgeting and scheduling of these training programs is then done at a state wide level through the FESA VMRS team.

**iii. What programs do you undertake during a disaster to assist your staff and volunteers deal with trauma.**

During incidents, the vessel skippers and other incident management personnel generally assess the volunteers working at the incident for any indications that support may be needed.

Some groups indicated that as part of their incident checklists, they ensured that peer support personnel would be available to talk with volunteers and provide support and counselling on scene during the incident if/when required.

**iv. What post-event activities do you undertake with your staff and volunteers to deal with trauma arising from a disaster; and**

As part of the incident debrief process, volunteers are reminded that assistance is available should any individual need to talk to anyone or seek any counselling. In addition, most groups also do a follow up with the individual volunteers involved in the incident after a few days/week to check that everyone was ok.

Where individuals may need additional counselling and support, most groups knew that they could call upon FESA VMRS to provide access to the FESA counselling and support programs available to the volunteers.

While most groups would not necessarily have these as formal programs, they are pretty standard practice and generally would involve both FESA personnel and WA Police (as the HMA) in the debrief exercises.

**v. What annual budget you spend on these post-event activities.**

Again, at this point individual groups are not required to present budgets for this kind of activity. FESA VMRS would have an overall budget allowance for dealing with group needs. This budget allocation would be based on past years of incident reporting and management across the state.

The Association thanks FESA for the opportunity to provide feedback on what is an important aspect of incident management and post-incident review. It has certainly highlighted to us as an Association that there is still much work that we can do to assist both FESA and our member groups in disseminating this information on a regular basis.

If we can be of any further assistance, or you need any further clarification on the items discussed above, please don't hesitate to get in contact. I can be contacted on (08) 9840 1310 or email at [commander@vmrwa.org.au](mailto:commander@vmrwa.org.au).

Yours sincerely



**Louise Pickett**  
**Commander**  
**Volunteer Marine Rescue WA**