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Contact: Inspector Murray Mackne

Robert Aposhian
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW
PO Box K35
Haymarket Post Shop NSW 1240

16 August 2023

Dear Robert

Re: FRNSW comments on Sydney Water's Performance against its operating licence

Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) received correspondence from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal NSW (IPART) dated 26 June 2023 seeking comment on the performance of Sydney Water Corporation (Sydney Water) against its operating licence (2019-2023) for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. Under the provisions of Clause 7.2 of this licence, Sydney Water must use its best endeavours to comply with a Memorandum of Understanding with FRNSW. FRNSW consider that Sydney Water has not met its licence obligations in relation to compliance with an MOU with FRNSW.

Specifically, Sydney Water have only provided pressure and flow performance data for 25% of hydrants within their network in the last 12 months. FRNSW have been requesting network performance data from Sydney Water since 2015. Without network performance data, areas of low firefighting water flow are only identified where informed community members (typically hydraulic consultants or firefighters) raise concerns with FRNSW or alternatively these are identified during an incident. This ad-hoc approach has hampered any attempt to develop strategic solutions for the provision of water for firefighting. Furthermore, the extent of the problem is difficult to determine.

Where FRNSW have been made aware of areas of low firefighting water flow, Sydney Water and FRNSW have discussed local solutions. However, Sydney Water have been reluctant to commit resources to projects involving upgrading of infrastructure and FRNSW are unaware of any works by Sydney Water to upgrade their network to improve flows for firefighting water. FRNSW acknowledge that a network upgrade may not be the most economic solution in some scenarios and that in these instances other solutions, such as FRNSW responding more resources or the provision of onsite water storage, are the most economic strategy, however there are instances where a network upgrade is the most efficient and effective means of providing firefighting water.

There have been some positive outcomes over the last year. For example, a smart standpipe project has been initiated to allow Sydney Water to better track water usage. Progress had also been made on an application allowing FRNSW to identify and prioritise the repair of broken fire hydrants.

Sydney's rapid development has put strain on the water supply network. Through ongoing collaboration with Sydney Water, FRNSW will be able to continue utilising the reticulated water supply infrastructure to effectively meet the needs of Sydney's developing community.

With regards,

Steven Hayes

Steven Hayes
Chief Superintendent Fire Safety
Community Safety Directorate