



Agency Information Guide

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act) provides members of the public with a right of access to government information.

Under the GIPA Act, each NSW government department and agency is required to publish an Agency Information Guide to provide an overview of:

- the agency's structure and functions;
- the way in which our functions affect members of the public;
- how members of the public can participate in policy formulation and provide feedback;
- the kinds of information we hold; and
- information we make publicly available.

1.2 About the NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES)

1.2.1 *The NSW SES*

NSW SES is an emergency and rescue service dedicated to assisting the community. We are a volunteer-based organisation that provides emergency assistance to the people of NSW 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It is the approximately 9,000 volunteers across the state that make this possible. NSW SES Volunteers come from all walks of life, bringing with them many different skills, interests and backgrounds. They are united by the purpose of supporting their communities in times of need.

While our major responsibilities are for flood and storm emergencies, NSW SES also provides the majority of general rescue effort in the rural parts of the state.

This includes:

- road accident rescue;
- vertical rescue;
- bush search and rescue;
- evidence of searches (both metropolitan and rural) and other forms of specialist rescue that may be required due to local threats.

Volunteers in a number of isolated communities have been trained as Community First Responders by the Ambulance Service of NSW. The organisations trained rescuers also support the full-time emergency services during major disasters.

NSW SES also assists other emergency services when they are performing major operations. These services include the NSW Police Force, the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and the Ambulance Service of NSW.

1.2.2 *NSW SES Functions*

NSW SES is established under the *State Emergency Services Act 1989* (NSW) (SES Act). The core functions are set out in section 8 of the SES Act. Generally, the functions are to:

- protect persons from dangers to their safety and health and protect property from destruction or damage, arising from floods, storms and tsunamis;
- act as the combat agency for dealing with floods, storms and tsunamis and to co-ordinate the evacuation and welfare of affected communities;
- assist other NSW emergency service agencies in dealing with any incident or emergency;
- carry out rescue operations allocated by the State Rescue Board; and
- carry out such other functions as may be assigned to it under any other Act, or by the State Emergency Operations Controller or the Minister.

The functions of the NSW SES are also to be exercised in accordance with the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 (NSW)*.

1.2.3 Organisational structure

The NSW SES has a salaried workforce of more than 300 people across the state. Staff are involved in such work as emergency management, governance and business improvement, logistics, human services and corporate communications and are led by a Commissioner. The Commissioner is supported by two Deputy Commissioners and the Strategic Leadership Team.

Operationally, NSW SES divides NSW into 5 Zones, which consist of the Metro Zone, Northern Zone, South Eastern Zone, Southern Zone and Western Zone with a Zone headquarters in each zone. There are approximately 268 local Units across the Zones. The State Headquarters provide administrative support to the Zone headquarters and Units.

1.2.4 How our functions affect members of the public

NSW SES is primarily responsible for the responses to flood and storm emergencies. NSW SES also provides the majority of general rescue efforts in the rural parts of the state.

To support these functions, NSW SES may undertake the following activities, which affects members of the public:

- use of emergency powers under Part 5 of the SES Act. For example, in the event of a flood or storm emergency, the NSW SES Commissioner has overall control of the emergency and may exercise a power to evacuate persons affected by an emergency or to enter premises;
- contributing to the development of the EMPLAN and the flood, storm and tsunami sub plans;
- engaging with the community in relation to flood, storm and tsunami and raising community awareness;
- engaging with NSW SES volunteers who are members of the community;
- engaging with the community when they contact NSW SES for assistance.

2 How we engage with the public and our stakeholders

2.1 Public Participation

The NSW SES recognises the importance of public involvement in the development of policy and service delivery.

This is achieved through the following channels:

- **NSW SES website:** the website is used to provide the public with resources and information about the functions, activities, safety campaigns, submissions, events, policies, news and developments of the NSW SES. Members of the public can use the “[Contact us](#)” section to provide feedback. The website can be accessed at www.ses.nsw.gov.au.
- **Social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram):** the NSW SES Facebook page is titled “NSW SES”, the twitter account is “@NSWSES” and the Instagram handle is “nswses”. Social media is used to provide the public with instantaneous information about latest news, publications, consultations, campaigns and other areas of interest relating to the NSW SES. Accounts are monitored during office hours. Members of the public can comment and join in the conversation through social media.
- **Surveys:** the NSW SES conducts surveys to examine various aspects related to its functions. This includes surveys on community resilience and flood awareness and preparedness.
- **Community Engagement Capability Development Group (CDG):** The CDG acts as a central place for members to interact, workshop and design and develop key Community Engagement programs and projects.
- **Workshops:** the NSW SES engages with the community through various workshops to allow the community to participate in emergency planning.

2.2 Feedback and complaints about us

The NSW SES welcomes input and feedback from the public. The NSW SES receives a range of correspondence and complaints through a variety of channels including the website, emails, letters, phone calls and social media.

Members of the public are encouraged to provide feedback on NSW SES services and publications. This feedback is important as it assists to inform NSW SES policies and publications and to improve services.

All feedback and complaints are dealt with confidentially and personal information is managed in accordance with the privacy protection principles in the *Privacy and Personal Information Protections Act 1998*. Further information about how the NSW SES handles personal information is contained in the [Privacy Management Plan](#).

Feedback can be provided at <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/>.

3 Information we hold

3.1 Types of information we hold

The NSW SES holds a range of information including:

- requests for assistance;
- policy and planning documents;
- documents on the internal administration of the agency;
- storm, flood and tsunami safety information;
- educational resources;
- correspondence with the public; and
- correspondence with other government agencies.

3.2 Information made publicly available

The NSW SES provides a range of information publicly:

- information about NSW river basins;
- community advice on local areas;
- flood, storm and tsunami safety information;
- information about events (e.g. Northern Rivers Floods March 2017);
- Privacy Management Plan;
- Strategic Plan (2016-2021);
- Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2016-2019).

3.3 Open access information

Information classified as open access information is information the NSW SES is required to make available. This information is made available unless it is not in the public interest to do so.

Open access information that the NSW SES makes available is generally via the website and is free of charge. This freely available information includes:

- Code of Conduct and Ethics;
- External Complaints Policy and Procedures;
- NSW SES Fraud and Corruption Control Policy; and
- Agency Information Guide.

4 How to access our information

4.1 Informal requests for information

Some documents published or held by the NSW SES can be requested through an informal request, without the need to make a formal access application. These include:

- summaries of requests for assistance completed by the NSW SES when attending incidents;
- copies of correspondence, where the person requesting the correspondence was the person who sent the document;
- documents that have already been made public in some way.

4.2 Formal requests for information

4.2.1 Formal Application

You can also request to access information through a formal access application process.

A formal access application must:

- be in writing and sent to or lodged at NSW SES;
- clearly indicate that it is a formal access application made under the GIPA Act;
- include a payment of the \$30 application fee;
- provide a postal address for correspondence; and
- include such information as is reasonably necessary to enable the government information applied for to be identified.

If your application does not meet the above requirements, it will be invalid and will not be processed. However, in order to help you make a valid application, you will be contacted and provided advice and assistance.

If you would like to make a formal application, please contact (02) 4251 6111 or email us at: gipa@ses.nsw.gov.au

Please click [here](#) for a copy of a formal application form. For more information about access to information and privacy at NSW SES, please visit our website at: www.ses.nsw.gov.au/about-us/access-to-information-and-privacy/

4.2.2 Fees and charges

Apart from the \$30 application fee, the GIPA Act allows the NSW SES to impose a charge of \$30 per hour in order to process an application. The application fee counts towards the first hour of processing.

In processing a formal access application, the NSW SES is required to ensure that it is dealt with efficiently and provide access to information requested at the lowest reasonable cost.

A discount (50%) in processing charges (excluding the \$30 application fee) will apply if:

- the applicant is a member of the public suffering financial hardship;
- the information applied for is of special benefit to the public;
- the applicant holds a current Pensioner Concession Card;
- the applicant is a full time student; or
- the applicant is a non-profit organisation.

If applying for your own personal information, the NSW SES cannot charge for the first 20 hours of processing.

Requests for personal information can be made under the *Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998* (NSW) and the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW). Please refer to the [Privacy Management Plan](#) for more information on how to access your personal information.

4.3 Review rights

You have the right to request a review of certain decision made by the NSW SES about the release of information under the GIPA Act. For further information, please refer to the NSW Information and Privacy Commission's publication, '[Your review rights under the GIPA Act](#)'.

4.4 Contact us

4.4.1 NSW SES

You can contact the NSW SES at:

- **Mail:** NSW SES, PO Box 6126, Wollongong, NSW 2500
- **Email:** gipa@ses.nsw.gov.au
- **Phone:** (02) 4251 6111

4.4.2 Information and Privacy Commission

You can contact the Information and Privacy Commission at:

- **Mail:** GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001
- **Email:** ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au
- **Phone:** 1800 472 679