



# OVER - CLEAR - CLEAR TO YOU

BY DAVID HANZL - SENIOR DEPUTY  
CAPTAIN CARWOOLA BRIGADE

We're always trying to do a bit better on the fireground, aren't we?  
Trying to be just a little bit more informed, more effective, safer?  
Trying to learn something new each time we're out with the NSW RFS

So here are a few tips that might help you understand what you hear on the Service's GRN and PMR radio networks.

You've probably heard people saying "CLEAR". "OVER" or even sometimes "CLEAR TO YOU" interchangeably. But they're not meant to be interchangeable terms. Actually, they each have specific meanings and it's important we understand the difference.

## PRO-WORDS

For professional radio operators these are known as 'prowords'. Prowords are words that have a specific meaning on a controlled radio network.

Why are prowords important? Because on a busy network, such as our dispatch network, we need to keep the radio traffic as brief and as clear as possible to hear and understand the intent of the message. Therefore we have a small number of words that are intended to help us by having known meanings and that are easily heard over a radio.

In the military, which is where many of these practices and conventions come from, there are hundreds of prowords - a thick manual full of them. For NSW RFS purposes we're getting off lightly; there are only a couple of dozen prowords that are commonly used. Here's three of them:

- **OVER** have finished speaking -  
I AM expecting a response from you
- **CLEAR** have finished speaking -  
I AM NOT expecting a response from you
- **CLEAR TO YOU** I have finished speaking to you - I AM NOT expecting a reply - I am now going to call another callsign immediately

If you use the pro-word "CLEAR", you are essentially indicating that the channel is now clear for others to speak. But, when we are speaking on the dispatch network, the only other callsign we are speaking to is the Communications Centre (FIRECOM) and we need to confirm they've heard what we said - the conversation isn't over just because you've said what you wanted to say.

Therefore, when we finish speaking we should normally say "OVER", not "CLEAR".

Generally, the only callsign that declares the channel "CLEAR" for others to speak is FIRECOM,

If you stop reading now. that's ok; you've learned something useful. If you want to dig just a little deeper and discover why you don't say "CLEAR TO YOU" on the dispatch network, let's have a look at another basic concept

## CONTROLLED NETWORKS

Earlier in this article, you may have noticed I used the term 'controlled network'. This is a really important concept. For most of us. our introduction to having anything to do with radios was with Citizen Band (CB) radios. This is an 'uncontrolled network', meaning that when you pick up a CB. you can turn it on. choose a channel and just start talking to whomever you want, whenever you want.

As long as they are within range, you're in business. There is nobody on the network who decides who has priority to speak. As you can imagine, a network like this could sometimes get quite chaotic.

A controlled network however, is very different. There are rules. On a controlled network there is a Network Control Station (NCS). In a NSW RFS context, the NCS is FIRECOM. All calls go through the NCS and you are not free to talk to whomever you want. If you want a message passed to another callsign, you ask the NCS to do that for you.

Let's think back to what the "CLEAR TO YOU" pro-word refers to;

- I have finished speaking to you
- I AM NOT expecting a reply
- I am now going to call another callsign immediately

That last bit is really important and. if we remember the rules of a controlled network, it should be obvious that "CLEAR TO YOU" would normally only be used by FIRECOM. That's why you will hear FIRECOM say things like: " *ROGER Carwoola 1. CLEAR TO YOU. Lake George Duty, did you COPY that last transmission?*"



Photos: All photos by Sharon Quandt

If you aren't calling someone else immediately, you don't use this pro-word.

## CLEAR VS OUT

As an aside, you may also occasionally hear people using the pro-word "OUT". This is the military equivalent of "CLEAR" and means the same thing.

If you hear it on the radio, it usually indicates an ex-military member who has slipped into their old ways. It took me years to both let it go and to get out of the habit! In the NSW RFS. we use "CLEAR".

So now. when you hear someone in a movie saying "OVER and OUT!", you know they're a bit confused. What they are effectively saying is: 'I'm finished speaking. I DO expect a response and I do NOT expect a response from you".

## CONCLUSION

If we're using these words incorrectly on the radio, why don't the FIRECOM operators correct us? Well, that's because they're professional and experienced radio operators.

They know that we're all volunteers, we're not professional operators, we don't all know the correct procedures, we don't practice this all the time and we make mistakes. They are professional enough to help us with our calls and. as long as the intent of your message is clear, that's probably the main thing.

So. while they don't get hung up over technically correct procedure, maybe we volunteers can do a bit better ourselves. B