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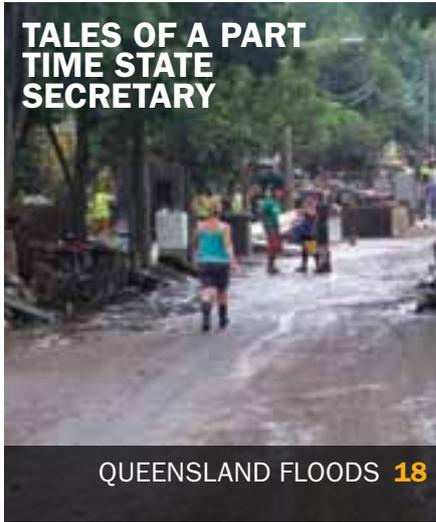
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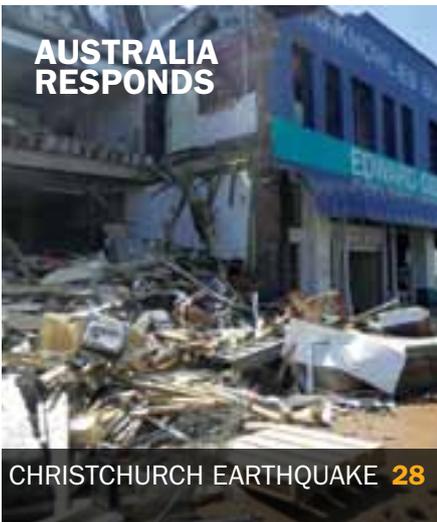
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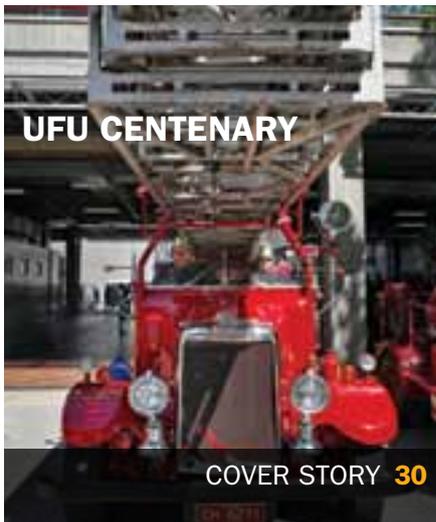
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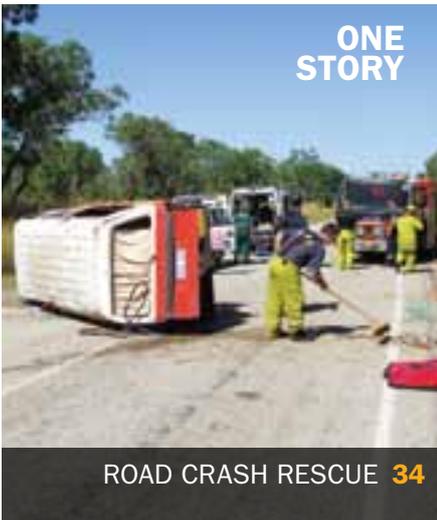
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We welcome your contributions to The Australian Firefighter Magazine. Make it a letter, story, column, feature or even just an idea. Send us your photographs too, but make them a minimum of 120mm x 80mm at 300dpi. We like travel and workplace stories, as well as personal profiles. Email all to editor@ufunat.asn.au

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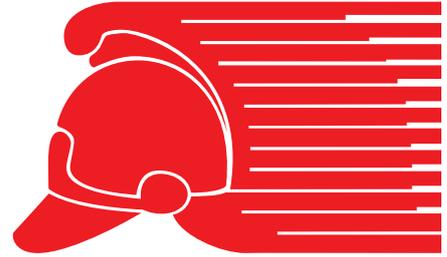
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**PRINT POST APPROVED PP 543 451/00009**

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**National President**  
Mick Farrell



**National Secretary**  
Peter Marshall

## From the National Secretary

### A time for unity

In March 2011 the UFUA appointed Ms. Joanne Watson to the position of UFUA National Industrial Officer. 'Wattie', as she prefers to be known, is a lawyer and ex-university law lecturer with a particular expertise in industrial relations. We expect Wattie to bring considerable passion, knowledge and insight to the task of helping the UFUA tackle issues and disputes of national significance. The role that Wattie will perform will in part be as a legal resource that will allow the UFUA to achieve some of its more strategic and long-term goals to benefit all UFUA branches.

The challenges before our new team member Wattie and before the UFUA as a national union have grown exponentially in the last 12 months. The Victorian and NSW Labor governments have fallen, and potentially the Queensland Labor government will follow. We are moving to a situation where state governments across the board may be held by the party that has traditionally been less progressive in their policies towards workers and towards unions. It is such an important time for the UFUA to display its strength and unity. Our annual National Committee of Management conference is approaching. This will be a time for us to collectively draw breath and re-energise, and to set out a time line for strategic campaigns of national consequence in light of this new political environment.

Presently we are facing a regressive attack on the national Awards for firefighters, an attempt to strip minimum conditions and entitlements that impact upon the national safety net. The next round of Award modernisation under the Fair Work scheme will be a critical battle ground despite the fact that Branches across Australia have had the foresight to protect many of the vulnerable Award conditions in their collective agreements. The UFUA has won many entitlements for firefighters that other industries have not achieved, and FWA are going through a process of 'simplifying' the Award structure including an attempt to remove some of those achievements.

The UFUA are presently in the Commission arguing that this process is unlawful. What is most disappointing about this attack on the safety net is that it is being led by firefighting agencies themselves and it is an attempt to weaken the firefighting industry. You would think that firefighting agencies would want to be doing the exact opposite, and build up a well-resourced industry.

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## From the National President

### Proud times for firefighters

These have been extraordinary times – across Australia, across the Tasman, and further afield.

The flooding in Queensland followed by cyclone Yasi brought an immediate national response from firefighters across the country. This edition of *Australian Firefighter* carries a number of stories on this disaster, but still they only scratch the surface.

At the same time, to the south, large parts of Victoria became an inland sea, and the community rallied to help stricken townships. In Queensland and Victoria, the repair work will continue for months and beyond.

But before there was time to reflect on local dramas, we were called to Christchurch, to the tragedy of an earthquake that will go down as one of New Zealand's greatest disasters. When the earthquake and tsunami hit Japan a few weeks later, Australian firefighters were again part of the international response.

Two things stand out from the reports of those who were involved in these incidents.

Firstly, there is a high level of professionalism of our firefighters in all States and Territories. No matter the challenge, the conditions or long hours, they worked hard and employed their skills to the utmost. And still we can improve and take lessons from these experiences that will be of benefit in the future.

Secondly, there was the camaraderie between the firefighters. As Station Officer Ian Joseph from WA USAR writes of the Queensland experience: "Over the week that the teams were deployed the camaraderie shown by USAR technicians from all the States was incredible. Firm friendships were formed and quite a few laughs were had."

Regardless of their home State, or country, they worked together constructively and socialised out of hours. Arbitrary divisions like State borders are irrelevant in times of crisis. At heart we are all firefighters and the similarities we share far outweigh any parochial differences.

And maybe that is the greatest lesson of all from the experience of recent months: that we achieve more, and harmoniously, when we work together.



National Secretary Peter Marshall



National President Mick Farrell

MICK FARRELL ■



# FIRE TRAINING

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## Repairing the damage

**The national UFU is midway through a process of rebuilding the national body after the regrettable and ill-informed decisions of 1997 that cut the budget in half – and slashed services to State branches.**

From a full-time staff of 2.5 (a full-time secretary, full-time accounts manager and part-time office manager) the union has struggled until recently with a .4 secretary.

As a result of the Bandt report, changes are already underway that will make the UFU a much stronger national body.

First up are the appointment of a full-time national industrial officer and the development of an electronic resource for Branches to access and share knowledge.

## New National Industrial – Research Officer



**The UFUA has appointed its first National Industrial-Research Officer.** Joanne Watson, who prefers to be known as Wattie, is based in the Melbourne office. Her role is to provide specialist advice to the Union, develop submissions and briefings on hot industrial and fire industry issues as well as provide support and co-ordination of industrial matters nationwide.

The national industrial-research officer position was created as part of the strategy to strengthen the national office and a result of the national review of the union. It is responsible to the National Executive and is managed by the National Secretary.

Wattie is an experienced employment law specialist who hails from New Zealand. Her union background includes working as in-house counsel for the Public Service Association, the largest public sector union in New Zealand. As part of a legal team she was involved in developing the union's national industrial strategy, was an advisory resource for organising staff and litigated cases on behalf of the union at all levels of jurisdiction.

Wattie represented the PSA on the NZ Council of Trade Unions consultative group which developed the employment legislation and was appointed by the NZ Government to the Holidays Act Advisory Group which developed the principles on what became NZ's holiday entitlement legislation.

"I then went into private practice and established an employment law specialist law firm that primarily represented workers and unions in the full gambit of personal and industrial employment matters, including work-related injury compensation claims."

Last year, in addition to her private practice, she was the employment law lecturer at the University of Waikato.

Wattie has been a member of the New Zealand Law Society Employment Law committee for a number of years and has often been asked to present papers at the Law Society's bi-annual employment law conferences.

Prior to becoming a lawyer, Wattie was a journalist on a range of NZ daily newspapers.

"I am thrilled to be here working for the firefighters union. The UFUA and the Australian union movement are facing challenging times with the current political landscape. The UFUA has already shown to be progressive and dynamic in its approach. I am looking forward to being part of its future and its commitment to be a strong and effective voice for firefighters. The union has a wealth of experienced and highly competent office holders and staff. I relish working with you all and hope my union, political and legal background can complement those invaluable skills the union already enjoys.

"I would also like to take this opportunity

to personally thank the Australian firefighters who gallantly assisted with the rescue and recovery operation after the recent fatal Christchurch earthquake. Kiwis nationwide were very aware the Australian rescue and recovery team were at extreme risk as they successfully rescued workers trapped in the most severely damaged buildings. They then had the grim task of recovery. As a nation we were overwhelmed with the speed and capability of the international response. We were very conscious that Australia was coping with the impact of its own natural disasters yet had no hesitation in immediately responding to help us out – both physically and with financial support. New Zealanders will genuinely be forever grateful."

## Electronic research centre up and running

**The UFU electronic Research Centre is up and running so log in and participate!**

The UFU Research Centre is a dedicated online intranet which has been purposely built for authorised UFU representatives to share information/documents and collaborate in a private space. Essentially the UFU Research Centre will be a dedicated resource for Branches to undertake research, access industrial instruments and discussion/feedback of the latest developments and achievements within our sector.

New National Industrial-Research Officer Wattie Watson has a watching brief over the Research Centre and will be regularly posting relevant documents, events and discussion documents.

"This is a useful tool to centralise information and discussion. One of the more dynamic aspects of the intranet is the "forum" where users can post items of interest for discussion. However, this tool will only be a valuable resource if it is used and the authorised representatives regularly participate. I realise to start with it may be

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### UFUA NATIONAL

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## Vincent J. Bollon

1934-2011

**FAREWELL**  
to a Legendary Leader



## VALE Comrade Vincent Bollon

**Thousands gathered for the funeral procession of former IAFF Secretary-Treasurer Vincent Bollon in New York in early April.**

In his eulogy, IAFF General President Harold Schaitberger said that Bollon's contributions were plentiful and profound. "How do you describe the 50 years of service that Vinnie gave in just a few phrases? How do you define this man in the short time we have this morning?" Schaitberger asked. "You just can't because of the profound mark he made in so many, many ways far exceeds the ability to give fair reflection and appreciation."

Of Bollon's career as a New York City firefighter, Schaitberger said he had a "brave, commanding and yet calming presence fighting thousands of fires in the South Bronx and Harlem" which "earned him continued respect and recognition from his peers. Bollon joined the FDNY in 1959, fulfilling his ambition to be a New York City fire fighter. During his firefighting career he served in the busiest fire station in the Bronx and as a fire officer in the busiest fire station in Harlem. He was later promoted to Lieutenant. On nine separate occasions, he was awarded meritorious service citations from his department.

But he was destined to be a union leader. "His union journey was just as – and by most accounts – even more successful than his fire service career, becoming nothing less than a legendary labor leader in the city of New York," said Schaitberger. "Our entire International union was blessed by his extraordinary leadership as our General Secretary-Treasurer for 21 years, the second longest serving principal officer in our union's 93-year history. His impact on our lives, his influence on our profession and on our union will never be forgotten."

Bollon died at the age of 77 at his home in Virginia.

## Japan

**Forty five young firefighters have died when the Japanese tsunami struck the coastal town of Rikuzentakata.** When the tsunami gates that protected the town failed to close, they rushed to manually close the gates but were swept to their death, the BBC reported.

## Irish council may face inquiry, charges, over deaths

**Community and political groups have rallied outside the Bray fire station in County Wicklow, Ireland, after a spate of deaths in a housing estate 200 metres from the fire station, and the deaths of two firefighters in a disused factory fire.**

The OHS policies of the council have been criticised for many years.

The families of Mark O'Shaughnessy, 26, and father of 15 Brian Murray, 46, who died in the September 2007 factory fire, have been told by police that the Director of Public Prosecutions says there is sufficient evidence to bring charges against the council, but not individuals.

A family spokesperson says it is 'shocking' that no charges may be brought against individuals, after repeated warnings about the underfunding of the fire service in Bray for many years.

The Irish Fire and Emergency Services Association is calling for a parliamentary inquiry into the management of the fire service by the Wicklow County Council.

## Irish fires form ES union with ambos, nurses

**The Irish Fire and Emergency Services Association is a new body established to represent fire and emergency personnel**

**in Ireland, set up within the existing Psychiatric Nurses Association, a body with 40 years' experience representing specialist professionals.**

The psychiatric nurses have changed their rules to allow members of different frontline professions to form sections dedicated to their own profession.

The move follows the resignation of hundreds of Irish emergency service workers from the public sector union, SIPTU, because of its refusal to defend members from drastic cuts due to the Irish financial crisis.

Firefighters recently suffered a 6.5 per cent reduction in their wages, as did the rest of the public sector, through the government's imposition of a hike in workers' pension contributions.

SIPTU and another large public sector union have accepted an agreement which includes a pay freeze, a four-year strike ban and major rationalisations in all areas of public services as the government tries to cut 15 billion from social spending over the next four years.

## Chicago deaths

**Two Chicago firefighters have died and 17 others were injured when a wall in an abandoned commercial building on Chicago's south side collapsed during a blaze on December 22.**

Firefighter Edward Stringer, 47, and firefighter/EMT Corey Ankum, 34, were crushed by falling debris as they searched the burning building for possible victims.

The tragedy occurred on the 100th anniversary of a major fire at Chicago's Union Stockyards that claimed the lives of 21 Chicago firefighters.

## UK budget cuts hit fire services

**Thousands of UK firefighters joined half a million workers and their families to**

**rally on March 26 as the British government begins unprecedented budget cuts.**

Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union says the government has launched a war on working people.

“Today’s demonstration is the start of the fightback. They expect us to suffer tax increases, pay cuts, unemployment and devastation of our pensions to pay for the crisis their friends in the city caused. They should expect the fight of their lives.

“David Cameron pledged no cuts to frontline firefighter jobs when he visited Carlisle fire station on the eve of the general election.

“It was, of course, just empty, cynical electioneering. Nineteen job cuts were soon announced in the area – a snapshot of the 1,200 frontline firefighter jobs that will have disappeared across the country by the beginning of April.

“Another 500 jobs are being axed across the fire and rescue service, increasing the risk of fire deaths and injuries.

“The fire service is facing the most sustained attack in living memory.”

## Earthquake highlights need to change funding

**The New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union has hit out at the funding of the Fire Service in the wake of the Christchurch earthquake.**

The Union says the recent earthquake and USAR response again highlights how wrong the present system is – a view it has long held and advocated at every opportunity.

The majority of the work of the Fire Service – very clearly demonstrated again with the response to the Christchurch earthquake



in both USAR and general support sent to Christchurch – shows once again that funding the Fire Service solely by levy on fire insurance is wrong and inadequate.

Essentially the Fire Service provided this service and many others to the community for free.

It is ridiculous says the Union that the cost of the response to Christchurch and subsequently the USAR response to Japan – estimated at \$NZ8.5 million and \$NZ500,000 respectively – will result in cutting back spending on new fire stations and appliances.

The Union suspects the costs will eventually be much higher and more cuts to new fire stations and appliances will be proposed.

The outcome of this funding style in an increasingly less effective fire service to the detriment of those affected by the next major emergency.

An irony of the current funding system is that the government is the biggest offender or avoider. Many schools and hospitals, as well as many other government agencies, do not pay the levy.

## Firefighter goes headfirst to rescue cat

**The NZ Bay of Plenty Times reports that a firefighter was lowered headfirst into a stormwater drain to rescue a “terrified” cat that had been stuck there for at least two days.**

Residents had earlier climbed down a ladder but the cat retreated further into the drain.

Once out of the drain, the malnourished cat quickly demolished a can of Fancy Feast cat food. Residents say they may call it Dwayne or Lorraine.

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## Floods and cyclones

**Many Queensland towns have been inundated with problems from the floods and more recently Cyclone Yasi.**

Queensland firefighters were deployed to numerous areas over the festive season for the floods and have sacrificed time usually spent with their families, all for the common cause of helping others in need.

Just recently many firefighters were sent again to the Far Northern and Northern Regions to help many families in need. To those firefighters and Communication Centre workers both part time and career, who live in the flooded and cyclone-affected areas, I pray for a speedy recovery of your losses and for the safety of your loved ones.

The United Firefighters Union has been working hard in the background making sure that your conditions of employment are being met and, in some cases, advanced, and we will continue this fight.

## Forming alliances

**In 2010, the Queensland Branch of the United Firefighters Union (UFUQ) has formed strong relationships with other Unions that have a similar membership profile.** The UFUQ has shaped a strong working relationship with the LHMU (Ambulance Employees Union) and the Rural Fire Brigade Association. I am yet to meet with the Queensland Police Union but will be organising this meeting shortly. These alliances will strengthen our Union especially when we are faced with the broader issues. We can then respond to those who oppose us as a united front, especially when we have a common goal.

For far too long the UFUQ has worked in isolation of these other kindred organisations.

## Steady the ship

**On July 7 this year I will see the completion of my first 12 months in office for the Queensland Branch.** The UFUQ has had many changes with the departures of Branch Secretary Mark Walker through election and the resignation of his successor Jamie Hawkins for personal reasons some months later.

Then the floods came, which saw the Office having to close for approximately two



A recent rally against Government budget cuts.

weeks and the Union office being run out of my home.

We are now back in full swing and the UFU is well placed and on firm ground once again. I know the devastation and problems that many firefighters have had to face this year and time does get away from me in such a busy role, but I will be taking the time to get around the State throughout the year to talk to the members about any concerns they have.

## Thanks

**I wish to thank those who have gone above and beyond for the UFUQ in 2010.** There are too many people to mention in this article who devote their valuable time to the UFUQ. Our members do appreciate the effort that our representatives put in, both local and at State level. We all play a vital part in keeping our Union strong and we should be proud of our efforts.

Yours in Unity,

**JOHN OLIVER  
BRANCH SECRETARY  
UFU QUEENSLAND**

### UFUA QUEENSLAND BRANCH

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## SA Branch

**Enterprise bargaining negotiations have kicked off with the Union having lodged its Log of Claims.** This is a tough climate to be negotiating in with severe budget cuts already hanging over our heads, and the fight to reclaim of stripped long service leave still continuing. There is also a major Government reshuffle on foot and as we go to print South Australia has a new Deputy Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Industrial Relations.

The Union is as always fighting for the best community outcomes in our negotiations. We are negotiating for staffing increases in such areas as marine, communications and outer metropolitan stations and looking for improvements in the rank structure, allowances, parental leave and of course, take home pay.

The SA Branch also wishes to send our thoughts to our friends and colleagues in Queensland and Victoria who have been so severely affected by recent weather and hope for a speedy recovery, and respite from Mother Nature.

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**The UFU Tasmania Branch is pleased to inform you that we have successfully negotiated our new EBA.** We have achieved 9.4% cumulative increase over three years with no off sets. In the current economic climate this is a very good outcome. It is also encouraging to note that the negotiations were conducted in a spirit of goodwill and professionalism by both parties.

We were also able to negotiate a very good outcome for our members in the installation and servicing area (TasFire Equipment Division). Over recent years these members have missed out on the large pay rises achieved by firefighters and other public servants. So it is pleasing to be able to negotiate a catch up rise.

It is also pleasing to be able to inform you of the success we have had in encouraging

change within our communications and dispatch centre (FireComm). Regular readers would be aware of the deep seated and entrenched issues that our members have faced in this area. Finally, TFS management have conceded there were a numbers of issues that it needed to resolve and appears to have put in place a robust program for addressing them.

There are a number of outstanding issues from our EB process which have been referred to the State Consultative Committee to address. These matters will have separate working parties formed to work through the issues. Interstate and International Deployment issues were not resolved during the EB process. However, a timeline of June has been agreed upon for both parties to negotiate a deal which is more consistent with

the way other states are deployed.

Finally the BCOM would like to announce the resignation of our Branch Secretary Richard Warwick. Richard had been the UFU Tasmania Branch Secretary for the past 14 years. During his time he was instrumental in securing generous pay rises and improving conditions for all UFU members. He also worked tirelessly behind the scenes giving support and advice to members whether it was a work or personal issue. We wish Richard well with his future endeavours.

#### **UFUA TASMANIA BRANCH**

Branch President: Vincent Males  
Branch Secretary: Richard Warwick  
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## **National news continued**

continued from page 5

a bit daunting but if you log on regularly it will become second nature and will be a central resource for the union."

There will be a range of categories that can be viewed under the "documents" section. Examples are the agenda and minutes of the National Executive and National Committee of Management, reports of the sub committees including OHS and Industrial Officers, industrial agreements, the UFU wages tool and relevant information from organisations external to the union such as the National Asbestos Management Review committee.

Wattie has posted a discussion document on the forum page regarding a proposed UFU strategy to have occupational diseases recognised at a federal level. There is international research that has linked various cancers with the tasks and environment of firefighting. The Union's goal is to have Federal Government recognise those diseases as occupational diseases for firefighters so that they can access assistance and compensation without lengthy and costly legal battles.

"Some states in the USA and Canada have presumptive legislation which means that if a firefighter is diagnosed with a disease that is on their occupational disease list, then it is automatically accepted it was work-related. Australia is a long way from achieving that but the UFU is developing a strategy to lobby Federal Government to recognise these occupational diseases and to streamline claim processes. Firefighters should not have to prove a particular incident that caused the disease or illness, or have to undergo stressful and costly litigation to be compensated for an illness they contracted through their firefighting duties and working environment.

"Branch secretaries and industrial officers can get involved in the development of this strategy by visiting the Research Centre intranet, reading the discussion document and making comments on the forum page. The more feedback the better the position the UFU will be in to develop an effective and sustainable strategy," said Wattie.

If you have not received your logon and password, or can't remember it, then request one from Wattie at [ufunational@ufunat.asn.au](mailto:ufunational@ufunat.asn.au).

## **Legislative conference**

**Representatives of the UFU will travel to Canberra in May while Federal Parliament is sitting for a series of meetings with MPs.**

Issues to be discussed include recognition of occupational diseases related to firefighting so that future workers compensation claims for these conditions will be speedily accepted.

## **National meetings**

**The National Committee of Management will meet in Melbourne for three days from June 15.**

The joint meeting will also feature meetings of industrial officers from all Branches, and the various OHS coordinators. This is the major UFUA meeting of 2011, and its timing will allow members to attend the UFU Victoria centenary ball on Saturday June 18.

## **UFU iPhone app**

**There is a UFU iPhone app in development.** Watch this space. ■

# VIC BRANCH

**Following the end of the Victoria Branch's round of Enterprise Bargaining Negotiations in September last year, the Branch is now working towards the implementation of a number of matters within both the CFA and MFB agreements.**

## MFB update

**Unfortunately, following a short period of cooperation following the negotiations, the MFB senior management are now attempting to unilaterally implement major matters in relation to Organisational Realignment, arising from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.** Whilst the Vic Branch supports a meaningful response to the Royal Commission outcomes, the MFB are at the time of writing, attempting to implement matters without proper consultation as per the new Agreement. A particular example is a recent proposed matter which would result in a 30% increase in work load for some Zone staff without any consideration by the MFB about how staff would manage such additional work.

The UFU is more generally concerned that the MFB are using their project to in effect totally restructure the MFB into two fire services. It is unclear whether this is the same agenda of establishing competitive business units which the UFU has previously opposed.

Also in the MFB, the MFB and UFU have formed a high level committee to deal with ongoing concerns from members in relation to rostering. The committee is attempting to fix excessive movement of personnel which occurs under the current rostering system. A major focus for this committee is a

serious current shortage of Officer numbers in the MFB.

## CFA Update

**With the signing of the CFA Operational Staff Agreement, the UFU and CFA are currently working towards the implementation of a number of matters.**

These include the introduction of Emergency Medical Response (EMR) into the CFA. Whilst EMR has been undertaken in the MFB for approximately 10 years, the role is only currently being introduced into the CFA. The CFA and UFU (with assistance from the MFB) have been working towards implementation of a program of equal standing (and equal payments to CFA and MFB firefighters), so that all Victorians can benefit from the same level of assistance in their time of need.

## Corporate, Technical and Administrative Members

**Whilst the Operational Staff Agreements are now live and being implemented, both the CFA Professional Technical and Administrative Staff Agreement 2007 and the MFESB Administrative and Operational Support Staff Agreement 2005 are up for negotiation.** Negotiation for the CFA Agreement has now been underway for some time, whilst the MFB Agreement negotiations are expected to commence shortly. Obviously a major concern for MFB employees is the MFB Realignment project mentioned above.

## Volunteer charter

**The UFU is now operating with a new government in Victoria.** The Coalition Government's Emergency Services Minister,

Peter Ryan, has announced an inquiry to ensure that 'the voices of CFA Volunteers are heard in accordance with CFA's commitment under the Volunteer Charter'. The inquiry has the power to make non-binding recommendations to the authority on a limited range of matters, mainly concerning consultation with volunteers. The UFU is very interested in see how this inquiry will play out.

The UFU has in the past played an important role in inquiries into the CFA. The UFU on behalf of career firefighters will often educate the inquiry on the reality of CFA operations, and the skills and qualifications necessary to keep the Victorian community safe. For example, as a result of our participation in past inquiries we now have a current commitment from the government to create positions for 342 new career firefighters. This is a commitment that Minister Peter Ryan has reconfirmed as recently as March 2011. It is also a commitment that the UFU has made binding in the recent collective agreement. The UFU has welcomed the news from the Minister that the agreement to fund 342 positions will be honoured and that the commitment has the force of a lawful federal agreement between the UFU and the CFA.

We are very aware of the need to educate the government on the role played by career firefighters and non-operational staff. The role of career staff in the CFA has never been more important.

### UFU VIC BRANCH

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## National Secretary report continued

continued from page 3

The fact remains that UFUA has won such entitlements for firefighters because we possess a particular industrial strength. The UFUA will continue to distinguish itself as a leader in achieving worker entitlements because our members stand by each other in the workplace. If we could

only convince senior management in the firefighting agencies to meet us halfway and at least not stand against us, as they are doing in their current attack on our Awards.

The last few months have sent us many reminders that we are entering a time in our union's history when the unity that we show in the workplace can and needs to be translated into unity across all Branches.

We need to think nationally, share resources and together plan strategically. The appointment of Wattie as a national industrial officer is an appointment made by all Branches in recognition of that fact – the fact that the interests of firefighters across Australia are indivisible.

PETER MARSHALL ■

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Photo: The West Australian

## **The year 2011 will be remembered for all the wrong reasons.**

Every State and Territory has been hit with some form of disaster – floods, cyclones, fires and storms – and in some places all of the above.

It goes without saying that our thoughts and support are with all who have experienced loss, tragedy and destruction, especially the Queenslanders who have experienced catastrophic floods and the strongest cyclone in recorded history. Our hope is that you can rebuild and reestablish the things that are easiest to replace and that you understand that all of our members offer their support to you in the most troubled of times and while you mourn your losses. Nothing can replace loved ones and memories.

In WA we have had the experience of flooding in Carnarvon – with a second set of devastation anticipated soon for that region and there have been floods in the Wheatbelt and Central WA regions as well. Wild fires have ripped through Lake Clifton

just south of Mandurah and we have had the most devastating fire in the Perth metropolitan area in the foothills suburbs of Kelmscott and Roleystone. On Sunday February 6 there were two significant fires in the foothills – one in the north east fringe of the metropolitan area near Brigadoon and the Swan Valley and the other in Kelmscott and Roleystone in the south east metropolitan area.

The two fires stretched the resources of our Fire and Rescue services, air attack wing and Bush Fire Brigades beyond capacity. The Kelmscott Roleystone fires destroyed 73 homes and many more were damaged. Some of these homes were not in leafy bush block areas but were in normal urban subdivisions. In addition, a traffic bridge on the Brookton Highway was lost which causes significant dislocation to the local communities, people and freight travelling to the city from some Wheatbelt towns and emergency services.

The Union has called for a major independent inquiry into the most recent

catastrophic fires over the last two years because in the 95 years of the Union's history we have not seen the loss of structures (close to 120 in total from Toodyay, Brigadoon, Lake Clifton and Kelmscott -Roleystone) since the 1961 fires in the south west where 160 structures were lost over a four-week period and four towns were destroyed (the Dwellingup fires).

The reason the Union has called for an independent inquiry is that we have no faith in FESA to objectively analyse a broad range of matters, including their response the catastrophic fires in the last two years. The suggestion that an outside consultant – no matter who they are – paid by FESA to report back to FESA is wholly independent is nonsense. The Union has seen FESA – the administrative monster that replaced our Brigade structure – commission consultants to conduct reviews, audits and inquiries and then make significant changes to the final draft reports for the so-called protection of FESA.

The people of WA and our firefighters deserve better. WA needs an inquiry that protects witnesses from defamation and any threat of charges for bringing the service into disrepute, especially where that may be a consequence of telling the truth.

The Union has called for a Royal Commission or judicial enquiry into the four significant fires in WA over the last two years that have resulted in the loss on approximately 120 structures (mainly houses).

Ironically, the WA Branch President Kevin Jolly recently faced the threat of disciplinary charges for being photographed in uniform talking to local candidates in the seat of Armadale about the fire risk and chronic under resourcing of the fire districts that include Kelmscott and Roleystone. Kevin Jolly told the truth in a non-controversial way and of course there will be no apology from the employer to him for his honesty and foresight.

Kevin Jolly identified that much of the urban interface of Perth backs on to the Darling Ranges, stretching over 100 kms. There is not one permanent career fire station in these hills – an unbelievable example of resourcing given the population and infrastructure growth in these areas.

The WA Branch have challenged FESA about the way they plan and resource the Fire and Rescue Services for WA. FESA will not release the detail of their risk and resource policy. FESA often comment that the number of Volunteer Brigade turnouts do not warrant the development of career stations. This is not good enough and it denies the preventative work value that permanent stations would deliver. It further exacerbates the issues of too few appliances being available for catastrophic incidents like the Kelmscott Roleystone fires.

Sooner or later the insurers as well as members of the community will be asking what investment and protections do they receive. FESA and the Government have to be accountable for the catastrophic losses in WA over the last two-year period.

FESA administrators need to change their thinking, volunteers are a good secondary resource but they should not be expected to deliver the primary resource and service that permanent career brigades deliver to the community. FESA appear to have no duty of care for volunteers. They exploit them, pay them off with lip service but are not prepared to treat them equally when developing mechanisms for fatigue management and occupational health and safety. It is not uncommon for crews to remain on the fire ground for periods of over 10 hours without suitable rotations, meals and respite. It happened at the recent fires and without appropriate safe guards it will happen again.

FESA administrators – in particular the Chief Executive Officer, who has no operational experience or expertise but who tries to exercise control over all aspects of the Fire and Rescue Service – need to be held accountable for the loss of properties in the last two years. Approximately 120 structures have been lost in four significant incidents in two years. Between 1990 and 2007 we lost less than 20 structures.

Interestingly for members from other States and Territories, under the FESA structure we no longer have a Commissioned Chief Officer. Our Chief Officer is neutralised within an administration that has grown from the days of the Brigade from 40 to over 400. In the same time frame operational fire defence numbers have remained fairly static – 850 operational fire fighters and

officers in the days of the Brigade and just over 900 in 2011 under FESA.

Work has begun on a \$50 million headquarters in the southern suburbs of Perth to accommodate the growth of the administrators and there has been no commensurate development of career fire stations. The CEO's response to the criticisms the Union has levelled about the explosion of bureaucrats is that FESA has to administer volunteer agencies. The Union says that Volunteer Brigades were always serviced under the traditional management structures.

The Police and Emergency Services Minister is on the record as saying the United Firefighters Union is scare mongering and not being truthful and that Secretary Graeme Geer is a liar. Well, hasn't he got egg all over his face now! Not only did we say FESA were mismanaging the Fire services but we said if a major incident was to occur because of the lack of resourcing it would turn into a catastrophic event.

We don't like to use the old cliché "We told you so" but something must be done. Minister, you cannot keep ignoring your obligation to ensure the Fire Service of Western Australia is equipped and managed properly. The people of Western Australia deserve better. "Minister, when are you going to listen?"

This chronic mal-administration of Fire and Rescue Services has to stop before we lose any lives or there is more loss of houses and infrastructure in WA. Firefighters and the community deserve better.

#### **UFJWA WA BRANCH**

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QUEENSLAND FLOODS



**Queensland**

# FLOODS



# Different perspectives on the devastating floods

# Tales of a Part Time State Secretary

On Tuesday January 11, I travelled to work at Karana Downs Fire Station. I knew that there were warnings of high tides and possible floods to Ipswich and Brisbane but no alerts had officially gone out for these areas.

As a firefighter still on shift, you prepare yourself for what is yet to develop. Not only was I thinking in terms of my role as a firefighter, but I also had the UFU office to consider. The fact that the Lockyer Valley was already declared a disaster zone and most of our crews had been deployed, I knew this would be a busy time.

I made an early call to the Union office staff and told them to stay at home and that I would be in contact throughout the day to advise them of our immediate plan. By mid morning, the rain was torrential and the warnings were getting quite serious. I then received a message that West End (the UFU Head Office location) was to evacuate within the hour, which confirmed my earlier decision for staff to stay at home.

I knew everyone was safe and carried on dealing with a game plan with the boys from Karana. Things developed slowly that first day, but we were asked to stay and see the night out as there were no other firefighting resources that could be spared to look after this suburb. Resources were being directed and rightly so, to carry out life rescues. Three hours later we were flooded in and isolated. We then set out to gather food and supplies for the days ahead. This is when the power went out and shop owners started shutting their doors because the registers stopped working. The local garage then closed as the pumps needed power, so we then had to source diesel from another government agency.

The volume of phone calls that were diverted to myself and the Karana Downs Station (temporary Union office) became more frequent and in the end it nearly drove the crew insane. A comparison after the event was that "it was like the Suncorp

Flood Insurers hotline and Firefighters were manning the phones".

It was a very uneasy night as no one knew if what happened in Toowoomba could happen here and discussion centred around the strength of the dam wall. Our station, including Karana Downs, would be devastated if the wall collapsed and this topic made everyone a little edgy, until someone mentioned that we had no gas left in the BBQ to cook dinner on. No further comments were made regarding the dam or anything else except food from then on!

During the microwave-cooked meal we then decided to call the other agencies and see what emergency plans they had put into place. It was then we found out that we were the only response agency and the Ambulance Service had not sent in paramedics before we were isolated. Within a few hours and conversations determining who will be delivering a baby that night, we sourced two paramedics, two GPs, a surgeon and a paediatrician.

Reports were then coming in describing situations where people were missing; homes were floating down the river, people trapped in vehicles and currents too strong to carry out rescues in some cases. We were listening to the disaster unfold!

We spent our nights checking on the generator, getting snakes out of houses, minor medical assists, watching the rising water and filling sand bags.

Fortunately, Karana Downs fared well with minor damage to the area. Roads were still cut but no homes were lost.

On Thursday the C Shift crew at Karana Downs was airlifted out and released home to our families.

I was exhausted, but I now had to deal with the Union office and getting it up

and running again. With all the madness, Paula and Glenys managed to get some of our equipment to higher ground in case of the worst outcome. We organised for telephones to be redirected to the phone of Office Manager Angela Jones and emails were up and running to one destination. The Union office was being run out of my home and it was enough to get us through the period.

On Saturday January 15 enough roads were open to allow us back into the office. We took shovels, hoses, brooms and gumboots and set out for a day of cleaning. The basement of our building had flooded to around 1.4 metres. This included our storage area that holds some of our archive records. We managed to save the important files and our beloved UFU banner.

Thank you to Joe Ryan, Bryan Taylor, Steve Bunney, Angela Jones and Glenys Thompson for the cleaning.

The next week saw the phones and emails still not working as the West End area had been hit hard. Cleaning was still unfinished but on Wednesday life was starting to look a little brighter with the office reopened. The cleaning began again with the additional help of Peter Chalmers who also put up the banner with me in the meeting room to show that the office survived the floods. I would also like to thank Mark Dearlove in securing the equipment for the clean up and to the members who have been very understanding through this time.

The Union office is extremely busy and we are still catching up on the work, but we are getting there. ■

**JOHN OLIVER**

**JOHN OLIVER IS SECRETARY OF THE QUEENSLAND BRANCH OF THE UFU.**

# The Toowoomba perspective

Just a couple of observations out of the Victorian Black Saturday Fires and a couple of sobering comments that I have found: “Conformity to rules was the enemy of judgment, commonsense and moral responsibility.” “There was a failure by media to distinguish between the fire-fighter on the front-line, who were rightly lauded, and the competence of those who were controlling the fight.”

**T**he above observation was sent to a senior manager on April 27 2009 and was a comment asking whether the same would occur in Queensland.

Well, it has. As with every disaster response, management will bring out the old chestnut of “It was a 1 in 100, or 500 year event.” Not so in Toowoomba, if you look at the historical record.

Now a bit of background: Toowoomba is on the eastern edge of the Dividing Range and has one of the steepest range crossings for a major highway in Australia of 10%.

We had been experiencing a steady build of wet weather events for approximately six weeks but, for reasons unknown, the Technical Rescue response levels had been decreasing to the point where only one Tech Rescuer was being responded to complex swift-water incidents. This resulted in operators being stranded on a capsized rescue boat for almost two hours with the patient, before another swift-water team responded.

The day before the January 10 flash flood event in Toowoomba there had been more heavy rain to the point the soil was completely saturated and was unable to absorb any more rain.

On the day of the incident management stood three auxiliary stations up, increased the staffing in the Regional Operations Coordination Centre, called an extra Fire Communications operator and two Senior Officers into the Fire Communications

Centre as well the Fire Communications Supervisor, but didn't deem it necessary to call in extra operational firefighters.

The on duty crew anticipated some kind of swift-water rescue response, due to extensive operations down the Range in the Grantham area the night before and ensured the available on duty Swiftwater Techs were spread across the duty appliances.

The crews watched the BOM radar and then were responded to a job down the Range at Murphy's Creek. They split the turn out to hopefully get trained rescuers each side of the creek, however, due to multiple landslides, were unable to get to Murphy's Creek. The second part of this response was via the Toowoomba Range crossing with crews describing going down the Range being “passed by waves of water and cars in trouble everywhere.” On reaching the bottom and learning that all hell had broken loose in Toowoomba, they were redirected to return to Toowoomba.

The returning crew who headed up the Range described how the vehicle, a 4x4 F350, struggled for traction as it fought its way to the top over torrents of water, waterfalls, mud and rock slides and trees and branches everywhere. The crew described it “It was as though the Range was trying to eat us!”

The rain saw 100 mm fall in about one hour. TV footage of cars being swept away down East and West Creek was a result of an upstream catchment of only about 3 kilometres.

The crews that were on duty and those that were called back were stretched well beyond normal capacity. Many gutsy rescues were carried out by both firefighters and civvies. By our estimation approximately 90 people were saved by firefighters – no-one had time to count – involving some extraordinary in-water rescues. Unfortunately two lives were lost. These people were recovered later in the day.

That day I believe we realised that there are now three types of swiftwater rescue: broad expanse, rapid swiftwater that is confined within a channel/river system, and then there's suicide water, where if you fall into the main body of water you will die.

The water in Toowoomba went up and down within approx 1.5 hours and it was surreal to stand and look at what was a deadly only minutes before was now completely drained away.

Did the on duty crews respond well? Absolutely!

Did management anticipate an event? Yes!

Could we have had a better outcome if we had more firefighters/rescuers?

Could things have been managed differently?

Well, we'll have to see what a UFU submission to the Commission of Inquiry brings out. ■

## JOHN BURROWS

JOHN BURROWS IS A STATION OFFICER WITH QUEENSLAND FIRE AND RESCUE AND UFU TOOWOOMBA BRANCH PRESIDENT.

Many members around Australia were involved in the recent floods in varying degrees of operational capacity. Here are two stories written by members from Brisbane ARFF outlining situations attended in Brisbane.

## Runaway Bullet



**D**uring the recent catastrophic floods in Brisbane, a variety of objects were washed into the Brisbane River from all parts of Brisbane and Ipswich. ARFF Brisbane were called on to respond to an emergency

that threatened to shut down Brisbane Airport, potentially costing thousands of dollars and disrupting flight schedules.

A large LPG storage bullet had been washed away from its mainland site at

Goodna, 40 kilometres up the Brisbane River. With its concrete foundations still attached, it had come to rest in the mud at the threshold of Brisbane Airport's main runway. Air Traffic Control was concerned at its position in relation to approaching aircraft and asked ARFF to respond.

Fire Commander Peter Thompson, firefighters John Hancox and Jim Sparks, and new recruit Jeff Leech responded in the ARFF water rescue craft from nearby Nudgee Beach boat ramp.

They travelled at slow speed to the site due to the countless debris that was littering the bay area. Once they had located the LPG bullet they secured a towline and towed the bullet to a safe position away from the runway flight path. The bullet was then tethered to a section of the floating river walk which had also been washed away into the bay and returned to the boat ramp to pick up a gas expert from Origin Energy to inspect the bullet.

Once the bullet was declared safe by the gas inspector, it was towed back to the boat ramp and lifted onto a waiting truck for transport back to the Goodna Gas Works. ARFF crew then returned to the station, having safely removed a possible hazard to the airport and in turn had an unusual flood story to tell. ■

### Footnote

Out of all the good work that was undertaken and completed by UFU members during the floods comes a story of some concern.

One of our Townsville members was unfortunately stranded with his family in Brisbane during this period. He was due back on duty soon however, the roads were cut and he was reluctant to make the journey. He called the Station Commander and informed him of his plight whereby the Station Commander advised him of his obligations and responsibilities to be

present at work on time when he was rostered on.

Our member said he could not afford the flight costs as they were extremely expensive at short notice and as the roads were cut it would be too dangerous to attempt to drive back to Townsville. Our member was then advised by the SC to organise shift changes for the block he was rostered on duty.

The member being new to the job (quite rightly) then inquired if there was any type of leave available to him which would cover this particular situation.

The answer came back over the telephone that yes, there was, he could take recreation leave.

Of course there is provision within our industrial arrangements for special leave during times such as these nevertheless the SC continued to pressure our member to seek shift changes, use his recreation leave or get back to work on time no matter how.

This put our member under extreme pressure. He was stressed because he didn't have enough recreation leave, and he could not afford to lose any wages. There was no

# Brisbane ARFF response

**B**risbane ARFF staff was united as one when the opportunity arose to assist Brisbane residents and businesses during the recent floods. Each team was asked for volunteers; as it happened, there was an overwhelming response from staff who wanted to help in any way that they could. Members from Coolangatta and Sunshine Coast also volunteered and assisted.

After receiving approval for vehicles and equipment to be utilised to assist the cleanup, the next step was to co-ordinate ARFF staff with the Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. Acting Fire Station Manager Peter Corey was in contact with various representatives from both Brisbane City Council and the QFRS and it was decided to align us with the QFRS.

The first two days saw D Team members assisting residents in various suburbs, with the greatest issue being water pressure from the hydrant system to allow for quick replenishment of the Austral MK5 vehicle. Duties carried out included hosing roadways and drains, using high-pressure cleaners to wash mud from houses, and general assistance with whatever needed to be done. Working in 30 degree plus heat with humidity levels reaching 80% made the job that much harder, but everyone stuck to their task without wilting! And this is not taking into consideration the putrid smell of the mud that coated everything and everyone and took quite a bit of work to remove.

Rocklea Fruit and Vegetable markets are the major distribution point for 65% of Queensland's produce and the markets also service northern New South Wales. Supermarkets were running out of fresh produce due to the markets being closed and re-opening them became a major priority for the Council and the State Government. In conjunction with the QFRS, ARFF was assigned to clean up the markets. The markets cover an area over 100 hectares, so there was a mammoth job waiting! ARFF members spent the next six days cleaning up the market area, working with Market Management and individual operators.

The priority was to wash down all of the parking areas and roads because the objective from a hygiene point of view was to prevent mud and debris being continuously carried around the markets. Until this had been achieved, the markets could not be re-opened. Individual operators were obliged to wash out their own warehouses and cool rooms, although ARFF assisted several wholesalers in this task.

As is always the case with a job as big as this was going to be, the initial co-ordination and planning was a little light on, however once all responding agencies acknowledged each other's strengths, the task was attacked. ARFF had on various days the use of an Austral MK5, Austral MK 6 and a Mills Tui MK7, as well as hoses, branches, brooms, shovels, etc.

Although monitors were sometimes used, the most effective way of removing the mud was to use handlines. QFRS boosted the hydrant system which allowed the vehicles to be continuously be replenished, while running 2 or 3 handlines. Again, the weather was hot and humid, but as we have come to expect from ARFF members, everyone put in 100% until the job was done.

As the cleaning process continued, sections of the market could re-open, allowing growers to deliver produce and have it distributed to anxious supermarket operators! Rocklea management was very impressed with ARFF's attention to detail and ensuring that each area was cleaned properly before moving onto the next section. Finally, after plenty of sweat had been spilt and many thousands of litres of water and mud had been washed down drains, the task was complete.

It was a credit to all staff involved for completing a job which, on the first day, had us shaking our heads with the magnitude of the task ahead of us. But stick to it we did, and we can look back with pride on the what we achieved and the increased camaraderie that it produced. Special thanks must go to FSM Rodney Reith and A/FSM Peter Corey for their co-ordination and support for all staff involved.

Although no staff from Brisbane had any serious damage to their homes, two staff members had to evacuate their residences. ■

way he would ever jeopardise his family's safety by driving back to Townsville.

He made a decision to drive back to Townsville on his own. Luckily he was talked out of taking that drastic step because a time line shows that had he attempted to drive back to Townsville when he planned he would have been hit by the inland tsunami with possible deadly consequences.

This member was continually pressured by receiving constant telephone calls from the SC telling him to do whatever was possible to make it in for duty.

Even though by this time someone with a modicum of industrial knowledge had advised the member that special leave was available to him for just this purpose, nevertheless the SC had continued the pressure by informing him that there was no guarantee that his special leave would be approved.

The result was that the member flew back to Townsville and worked his rostered duty leaving a stressed family stranded in Brisbane. He, of course, is now out of pocket due to the flight costs which adds to the stressful situation and which has been compounded

by an SC that showed no compassion and a complete lack of comprehension of the industrial arrangements.

This matter could have ended tragically because of the continual pressure that was applied to our member in what was a dire situation.

The member is naturally seeking reimbursement of all costs associated with this situation. To date, no resolution has been reached. The good news is that our member and his family are all safe and well back home.

# South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service assistance to the community of Queensland



South Australian contingent at airport prior to departure.

On Tuesday January 11 2011, the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) received a formal request from the Queensland Government to provide support for the response to the widespread flooding incidents that were occurring in that State. The initial request was for two Category II USAR qualified staff members from South Australia to form part of a multi agency USAR Task Force to be deployed in response to the multiple flood events. The Task Force comprised of:

- 34 persons from NSW
- 2 persons from SA
- 2 persons from ACT
- 2 persons from VIC
- 2 persons from TAS

Station Officers, Lawry Williams and Hardy Kosiol arrived in Brisbane on Wednesday 12 January 2011 on a 7-day deployment operating primarily in the Lockyer Valley Region and returned to Adelaide on Tuesday January 18 2011.

A further request for assistance was received on January 12 2011 for an additional 10 personnel from South Australia to be deployed. The request was for a USAR team of 10 to be deployed comprising of a mix of Australian Fire Service personnel to form a Medium USAR Task force, consisting of:

- 10 persons from SA (MFS)
- 10 persons from VIC (MFB)
- 4 persons from NT
- 4 persons from WA (FESA)
- 6 persons from TAS

The South Australian contingent led by District Officer Colin Lindsay arrived in Brisbane on Thursday January 13. The duration of deployment was 7 days with crews operating in the south western suburbs of Brisbane, arriving back in Adelaide on Wednesday January 19.

Personnel were deployed into affected areas to conduct structural and damage assessment activities on behalf of the lead

recovery agency in order for them to establish the extent of the damage and to prioritise the required remediation work.

In many instances crews were the first point of contact for many of the affected members of the public and so were called upon to provide immediate assistance and advice for people who were directly impacted by the disaster.

The deployment provided a unique opportunity and was a clear demonstration and endorsement of the work done by the National USAR Working Groups in providing alignment in the approach to training and competency standards required by all USAR Technicians.

The feedback received from QFRS Incident Command team was positive and confirmed the success of the standardised approach by allowing for the seamless integration of personnel from each participating Jurisdiction into the QFRS USAR operational structure. ■

# Western Australia Urban Search & Rescue deployment

On Wednesday January 12 2011 Queensland Fire & Rescue Services requested, through Emergency Management Australia, additional Urban Search & Rescue personnel, from throughout Australia to assist with operations during the Queensland flood emergency. A team of four USAR personnel was sent from Western Australia along with personnel from New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory. This deployment was the first National deployment of USAR teams within Australia and showed the willingness of all the States to assist in times of need.

The NSW USAR team, along with two Tasmanian and two South Australian members, had already been dispatched to the Gatton/Grantham areas to assist in search and rescue efforts on Tuesday January 11. When all USAR teams had arrived and been transported to the base of operations at Cannon Hills Special Operations unit on Wednesday, a briefing was held to provide an overview of operations and allocate the areas and divisions that the teams would be working in. Personnel then travelled to Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera, which was to be our accommodation for the duration of our deployment.

An early start on Thursday January 13 saw us back at Cannon Hills receiving a detailed briefing on the scope of our task and some intensive training on the data collection device that we would be using over the next several days to gather information on the extent of water damage to structures and other vital information. This GPS data unit captured information that was essential to the Local Disaster Management Groups and other authorities. This data allowed them to prioritise those private residences and commercial operations that required the minimal amount of work to allow people

and businesses to return to “normalcy” as quickly as possible and highlighted those that would require more extensive help to achieve this result.

Over the next several days USAR technicians covered many areas and were faced with scenes of devastation and hazards. Many industrial areas contained hazardous

## QUEENSLAND FACES AN INCREDIBLY LARGE CLEAN UP WHICH WILL TAKE SEVERAL MONTHS IF NOT LONGER TO DO AND WHICH WILL REQUIRE THE ASSISTANCE OF ALL TO ACHIEVE.

Interstate personnel were teamed up with Queensland USAR technicians who provided local knowledge and this proved to be a great help over the coming days (you can only handle getting lost so many times). Teams were then directed to their sectors of operations, for most of us, in the southern suburbs of Brisbane around the Oxley area. Flood damage in this area ranged from low level water inundation, to two storey houses that had been flooded to the ceilings on the 2nd storey, and commercial businesses that had been flooded to over two metres in height and had total stock loss.

During this time the Queensland government had asked the people of Brisbane to come forward and assist in the clean up in those worst affected area. As we continued to work through our sectors gathering data, it was incredible to see the amount of volunteers helping those that had been devastated by the floods. Complete strangers were assisting in the removal of damaged goods, hosing out houses or loading trucks for debris removal, whilst others walked the streets with water and food for those that had either lost everything or for those working.

materials which required reporting, mitigation and clean up, drains contained large oil spills and some teams were confronted with 5000 tonnes of rotting food stuff at one cold store which was rapidly decaying in the tropical heat.

Queensland faces an incredibly large clean up which will take several months if not longer to do and which will require the assistance of all to achieve.

Over the week that the teams were deployed the camaraderie shown by USAR technicians from all the States was incredible. Firm friendships were formed and quite a few laughs were had. It certainly demonstrated that there are no overwhelming differences between the States in the way we operate in emergencies and when required, we can rapidly deploy and assist each other. The Western Australian team that deployed wishes our Queensland colleagues well for the future and were glad to be of assistance. ■

**IAN JOSEPH**  
IAN JOSEPH IS A STATION OFFICER WITH WA USAR.

# A Victorian USAR Technician perspective

As a member of the MFB Urban Search and Rescue team (USAR), I was notified that the MFB, CFA and VICSES were finalising a request for a task-force to be mobilised and sent to Queensland. The complete Victorian team consisted of 12 USAR technicians taken from MFB, CFA, VICSES and an MFB Commander as Victorian task force leader.

PHOTOS: Brad Dalglish, a unit controller from VICSES.



On arrival at Brisbane airport we were promptly met and transported to the QFRS Special Ops unit at Cannon Hill Fire Station to receive a briefing from the Operations Co-ordinator to provide us with an overview of the flood impact on the people and properties in the affected Communities. It was also at this briefing where I met with other fire and emergency service personnel from Queensland and other locations such as Tasmania, SA, NSW, WA and NT. I believe ACT personnel were also in attendance around the Toowoomba area. This large group then grabbed transport and personal gear

and travelled out to Enoggera Army Barracks which would be our home for the next five days of USAR deployment, I might add that this accommodation was very good.

Day 1 of deployment, up at 06.00 and back to the Special Ops Unit for a 07.30 briefing on our roles, responsibilities and some skills maintenance training on handheld GPS data recording devices. Over the next five days these GPS units would be used extensively to record the damage assessments in flood affected areas on housing, business, infrastructure and also record basic demographic info, this was downloaded/collected several times a day by mobile liaison

officers and then used to prioritise damage/assistance for LGAs and other authorities. The objectives included one of 'normalisation' and by identifying the least damaged properties, people could re-occupy their home once minor repair work had been safely completed.

From my perspective, the QFRS special operations unit was operating in a way that was both very efficient and extremely well organised. Logistically they had it well covered with others willing to step in and assist when required. I was allocated into a team with Tony (QFRS) and Russell (Tasmania) and our first operations task was to the Oxley area which, like many other



areas, had suffered terrible floodwater inundation and many people displaced. The sense of community spirit and volunteer assistance was overwhelming to say the least.

The deployment orders covered provisions for three main criteria:

- Community assistance/information
- Rapid damage assessments
- Emergency assistance to community members and to make safe any services/environment we found impacted or damaged which could cause further harm or injury.

This included isolation of many LPG bottles and electrical hazards, providing personal safety/hygiene information, and dealing with many other varied requests for assistance and support for people affected either directly or indirectly by the floods.

The following four days saw my team member and I conducting rapid damage assessments in many different flood affected areas around Brisbane and as QFRS Special Ops obtained more transport vehicles, I found myself in a 2-person team with Conrad (QFRS) and we spent day 5 in Sierra sector – quadrant 1 (Fig Tree Pocket area). Again, homes in this area had sustained terrible floodwater



inundation and many people displaced. It was here that the community spirit was again evident by a lady in Mandalay St setting up a volunteer tent in a holidaying neighbour's front yard (on an elevated position) and allocating tasks/food to the many volunteers that continually arrived to assist.

During the entire time I spent on this deployment with the QFRS USAR techs, other QRFS firies and the many other local and interstate emergency service personnel I did not hear a cross word or issue between teams or others. As tired as we were at the end of the days, we would still mix and mingle across

agencies and go out for dinner and relax. It was a great team work environment, given the level of stress and trauma that surrounded us as we went from home to home conducting damage assessments and providing people with a sense of support and understanding.

It is evident the QFRS personnel are well respected by the people they serve and they form part of the important fabric that has been woven into the Queensland community. ■

**STEVE WATTS**

**STEVE WATTS IS A MEMBER OF VICTORIA'S MFB USAR.**

## Australia responds to the Christchurch earthquake

On February 22 2011 an earthquake measuring 6.3 struck New Zealand with a catastrophic affect on Christchurch and surrounding towns. This was followed by numerous aftershocks which are still occurring.



There was significant damage to and collapse of buildings in the Christchurch CBD with many fatalities and people missing.

In response to this disaster and at the request of the New Zealand Government, NSW Fire Brigade deployed a heavy task force (72 persons) in two waves from Richmond RAAF base on Wednesday February 23, one at 2300 hours and the remainder at 0730 hours the following day. A Queensland heavy task force departed from Amberley RAAF base at 1030 hours Wednesday February 23.

These teams were part of an international deployment of USAR assets to the disaster site, on top of three New Zealand USAR teams on site.

The task that the Australian fire fighters were to undertake was to locate and rescue trapped persons, undertaking structural integrity assessments and identifying potential buildings that may have trapped



persons inside. All these activities were being undertaken while aftershocks were continuing and operating 24/7.

These two task forces operated in New Zealand for 10 days working long hours and trying to rest with ongoing aftershocks. At the end of this period the NSWFB task force was to demobilise and return to Sydney followed a little later by the Queensland

task force. It was decided by the assets on ground and supported by the New Zealand government that a third task force was required.

This task force (task force 3) was to be a multi jurisdictional team made up from the following:

- New South Wales: 15 persons and supplying the Task force leader along with other leadership positions and rescuers



- QFRS: 16 persons consisting of the Deputy Task force leader and other specialists
- Victoria: 11 persons – Operations Officer, rescuers, paramedics and an engineer
- South Australia: 9 persons – rescuers, paramedics and an engineer
- Tasmania: 7 persons – rescuers, paramedics
- West Australia: 6 persons – rescuers
- Australian Capital Territory: 4 persons – rescuer, paramedics, hazmat
- Northern Territory: 4 persons – rescuers.

The task of this team was for the recovery phase of the operation. While hoping to find and rescue persons, it was assumed that the main task will be recovery of deceased persons.

This team was also engaged in structural assessments, making dwellings safe and helping in the deconstruction of buildings. This is where collapsed buildings are removed layer by layer. Teams were also been out in the suburbs inspecting residences and identifying those that could be rehabilitated. Firefighters have been assisting the community by providing information on recovery services that are available for those affected by the earthquake. ■

**BILL DRYSDALE**

**BILL DRYSDALE IS MANAGER TACTICAL RESPONSE, MFB, VICTORIA.**

Peter Marshall  
National & Branch Secretary  
United Firefighters Union  
26 March 2011



Dear Peter,

Fraternal greetings, I would like to thank our Brothers and Sisters from your member brigades around Australia who came to our assistance after the devastating earthquake in Christchurch.

As you know USAR teams from, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria attended to give huge support to our members both from the USAR teams and Christchurch firefighters. The commitment, expertise and straight up friendliness of your members were very much appreciated by all of us here in Christchurch.

As a firefighter in Christchurch and a resident I can report that our city and brigade is slowly returning to some resemblance of normality. The USAR deployment was wound down last weekend and those members will take some well-earned rest before re-joining their stations. Our central city and many of our suburbs will never be the same and our communities are still hurting. However the support given by our overseas brothers and sisters has helped enormously.

The commitment of your members is as excellent demonstration of the unity and camaraderie that has been promoted by the formation of the Global Alliance. Interestingly, and as an aside it is worthwhile to note that the countries of all of the founding Unions of the Global Alliance, UFU, IAFF and FBU, sent USAR teams to assist us.

Once again my grateful thanks,  
Kind regards

Steve Warner  
National President  
New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union



# Melbourne turns out for firefighters' centenary

On January 22 1901 a group of firefighters met under the stairs at Melbourne's Eastern Hill fire station to form the United Firefighters Union.





This was a landmark in the colourful and often dramatic history of fire fighting in Victoria.

The history of fire fighting in the State begins with major city fires such as the 1845 blaze that destroyed the Little Bourke Street brewery owned by then Lord Mayor of Melbourne.

That year Melbourne formed its first fire brigade, the volunteer Melbourne Fire Prevention Society.

Different insurance companies then formed rival fire brigades, but the conflict between these contributed to serious property losses and the deaths of a number of firefighters. In 1891 the 56 rival fire brigades of Melbourne were disbanded and the MFB was formed.

The Country Fire Brigade Board was also formed in 1891 and the Bush Fire Brigades Association in 1926.

After Victoria's disastrous bushfires of 1939 and 1944, it was decided to merge the two rural fire organisations into one – and in 1945 the CFA began.

In 1901 the UFU had 173 members; 100 years later it represents several thousand professional firefighters – in the MFB, CFA and private sector.

On Sunday January 30 2011 the UFU celebrated its Victorian centenary with a unique and colourful display of Victoria's fire fighting history in the streets of Melbourne.

At Eastern Hill fire station the UFU flag and a message from the Premier were

delivered by the MFB's new aerial firefighter, CyberQuad.

Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu offered his congratulations to the UFU in a message read to the crowd before the march began.

"The recent floods have evoked memories of previous natural disasters and again reminded all Victorians of the dedication and bravery of Victoria's emergency services workers," he said.

"I commend all firefighters for their spirit of service to communities across the State and beyond."

A historic parade of firefighting vehicles then led the parade from Eastern Hill fire station across the city and down Melbourne's central artery, Swanston Street.

# COVER STORY



## The vehicles included:

- 1891 horse-drawn Traralgon Fire Brigade Shand Mason Hand Pumper (1 horse)
- 1880 horse-drawn Shand Mason Steamer (2 horses)
- 1914 Hotchkiss Hose Carriage
- 1919 Pearce Arrow Pumper
- 1939 Leyland Metz Ladder
- 1946 Austin Tanker CFA (CFA was formed in 1946)
- 1957 Dennis Pump
- 1963 Magirus Ladder
- 1968 Acco C Series Pumper CFA
- MK3 International Pumper
- Scania Centenary Pumper
- MK4 Pumper (MFB)
- CFA Hazmat Vehicle
- MK5 Pumper (MFB)
- CFA Pumper
- Rosenbuer Panther Ultra Large Fire Vehicle MK 8 (Aviation)



The Victoria Police pipe band led marching firefighters including MFA and CFA crews, the latest recruits in both services, and retired firefighters. The Watsonia pipe band brought up the rear.

The parade paused at Melbourne Town Hall where Lord Mayor Robert Doyle praised the firefighters for their long service to the

city of Melbourne. Victorian UFU President Dave Hamilton and Secretary Peter Marshall then responded, presenting the Lord Mayor with a helmet.

The parade then continued to Federation Square before dispersing to regroup in the Alexander Gardens for a long hot afternoon of food, entertainment and fellowship. ■





NICK BELL



# Road crash rescue

## The Family

It was the week before Christmas. The minivan and its three passengers travelled at the speed limit on Tiger Brennan Drive on its way home. The grandparents of the little girl in the back glanced at each other and smiled as yet another squeal of delight came from the backseat. The six year old was playing ‘Tinkerbelle’ on her Nintendo and loved every minute of it. The elderly lady and her husband had taken their son’s daughter to the waterslide for the afternoon to give the parents a break. They went on an outing like this at least once a month. “Gives us time to

connect with our grandchild,” she would tell her son. Her son and daughter-in-law were so happy that the grandparents took the time and encouraged their precious daughter to go each time an outing was suggested. It was a close and loving family.

It had been a long, hot afternoon, perfect for a day at the waterslide but the heat had taken its toll on the driver. The grandfather was tired and shifted in his seat as he gripped the steering wheel. His face and arms were sunburned and the muscles in his shoulders ached. The little girl had insisted that he join in the fun in the water and inevitably he’d been

the one to have to throw her around as she shrieked with laughter. He was paying for that now he thought as he tried to roll his shoulders. He had also forgotten his sunglasses that day and he was paying for that too. He squinted his tired eyes against the bright sun that was directly in front of him fighting to concentrate on the road ahead. “Home soon,” he thought.

## The Crash

Jack, his wife Estelle and their grandchild never knew what hit them. A four-wheel drive vehicle travelling in the opposite direction ploughed into the front right side of the mini van.

As it went it tore the van open like a sardine can, crushing the front of the van against the two elderly passengers. The four-wheel drive vehicle had hit with such force that the van had concertinaed at the front pushing the front of the van against the driver and passenger, crushing them into their seats too, trapping them exactly where they had been the moment of impact. The sound was enormous, deafening and terrifying. Two vehicles, nearly two tonnes each, travelling at 100 kilometres per hour at each other in the opposite direction had met with devastating results. The sheer energy of the impact had produced a chilling sound of tearing metal, exploding glass and shattering plastic but they could be replaced. The torn and smashed limbs could not. Metal, glass and plastic can, to some extent, absorb impact but soft human flesh and fragile bone involved in violent smashes cannot. The sound of bodies being literally ripped apart was a sickening and unnatural one. Bones splintered and flesh was torn from its victims as the vehicles met, each trying to absorb the other's inertia but failing to do so. The four-wheel drive vehicle speared off and away from the mini van, out of control, coming to rest on its side 50 metres from where the horror had started. Its driver was dead. The mini van with the damaged family spun around twice with enormous violence and stopped, facing the direction from which it had come. Silence.

## The Horror

Estelle, barely conscious, tried to open her eyes. She didn't know it but one of her eyes would never open again. It had been penetrated by multiple shards of glass as her head had hit the windscreen, shattering it and spraying pieces of it everywhere. She couldn't move her body at all and she could scarcely breathe. The dashboard of the van was sitting on her chest, pushing hard and the firewall was crushed against everything on her body below that. She started to cry, her one good eye allowing her to see her beautiful husband of 42 years bleeding out all over the wrecked mini van's floor. The blood was a thick, deep, rich red colour of blood that told of a broken human body that could never be repaired. Jack, her wonderful man, was dying and he wasn't awake to say goodbye to her. Her one good eye filled with tears of desperate sadness. She was in terminal shock herself and her brain only registered what she saw in front



of her but she could just make out the wail of the distant sirens. Help was coming but it would be too late she knew as her mind drifted off into the terrible darkness.

Despite the seatbelts they had been wearing, the beautiful little girl had been ejected from the mini van during the two violent pirouettes it had done after impacting with the four-wheel drive. Her fragile little body had been ripped from her seat and hurled through the side window, head impacting with glass, little neck snapping as bone met safety glass that simply could not withstand the magnitude of the physical forces that come with high-speed crashes. Crumpled and silent the child now lay in her own spreading pool of blood, dying quietly on the road.

## The Firefighters

The sight in front of him sickened the Fire Officer as the truck pulled up in front of the crash site.

"VZ8AP, this is Darwin 63," said the officer over the radio, voice tight with emotion and high anxiety.

"This is Control, go ahead 63." The girl in the control room knew that the situation report from the Fire Commander was not going to be good news. She had received the

numerous emergency calls to the accident rung in from horrified motorists who had come across the devastation.

"Control, we have arrived on scene.

Two vehicles involved. Three persons trapped, major injuries sustained, children involved, Ambulance crews required as soon as possible. We will be on scene for an extended period. I want Police to block off the road at both ends and divert traffic for the duration of this call."

"Roger Command, Ambulance already notified and will be there shortly, Police informed of your request."

The fire officer hated Motor Vehicle Accidents. MVAs were the worst kind of jobs the Fire Service had to respond to because of the human wreckage. The officer moved quickly around the scene sizing up the situation. He hated seeing people in distress. The blood and gore was one thing but the victims' screams were what he really struggled with. But they weren't screaming at this one. The cars had hit at great speed, that was obvious, but the area looked as if a bomb had hit it. To the untrained eye it would have been impossible to tell just what the hell had happened but to the firefighters frantically setting up the rescue equipment it was obvious. The skid marks, the point of impact, the positioning of the vehicles and the spread of debris told the whole terrifying story.

# ROAD CRASH RESCUE

The driver of the four-wheel drive had obviously lost control and crossed over to the wrong side of the road. In a split second he had realised his fatal blunder and stood on the brake pedal sending the heavy vehicle further out of control as he over-corrected. The mini van and its innocent victims were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Given that there were no skid marks from the mini van, the Fire Officer knew that the family probably did not even know that the finger of death had pointed them out for execution, leaving the driver no time for evasive action. Twisted, distorted, barely recognisable pieces of metal lay everywhere. Every window of the two vehicles had exploded out, covering the bitumen road in a blanket of glass. A head light here, a bumper there, plastic, rubber, glass and twisted metal all around.

While the crew set up the rescue equipment the officer briskly walked around the scene sizing up the problem and the challenge that lay ahead. In a few quick strides he reached the closer of the two vehicles, the four-wheel drive. The vehicle was on its side and the officer crouched down to look in the smashed windscreen to inspect the victim inside closer. It was not the firefighter's job to pronounce a victim dead; that was for the paramedics to decide but the officer could see that this man had breathed his last. There was not a drop of blood to be seen but the crazy angle of the man's head in relation to his body told of the massive force inflicted on the fragile neck. The bruising at the base was sickening and black, the head twisted almost full circle, dead eyes looking straight at the would-be rescuer, body still strapped into its seat, the stench of alcohol strong. Empty beer cans lay strewn around as if to decorate the macabre scene. His hands were shaking and he felt sick as he sprinted the short distance to where his crews were tending to the child.

The mini van was half the length the manufacturer had intended. Pushed in at the front with such vicious force that the two elderly people were stuck fast and their extrication would take a lot of time and care.

It would be a delicate operation to free them. That was not his priority now however – the child was.

Each and every motor vehicle accident presents a unique set of problems that the rescuers must overcome. No two accident scenes are the same. Each has its own set of challenges, hazards and dangers. The fire crews knew that for the van's occupants,



time had just about run out. The ambulance officers had arrived and with the firefighters were frantically working on the broken and dying little girl as she lay silently on the bitumen road. They were trying to get saline drips into the victim to counteract the deep shock from blood loss and were bandaging, trying desperately to stop the thick, dark, rich red coloured blood leaking out from her little body. The firefighters working over the child were frantic. With first aid kits and respiratory equipment desperate to find a sign of life, desperate to hear a little cry, anything that would tell them that this beautiful little girl might just make it.

A race against the clock had begun for the ambulance and fire crews to stabilise the three victims and get them to the hospital to give them the greatest chance for life.

The 'Jaws of Life' as the general public called them was in fact a combination of two distinct pieces of equipment. The 'cutters' looked very much like a pair of giant scissors.

They are hydraulically operated, giving them enormous cutting power, and could, in fact, sever almost any part of a smashed car. The spreaders, an oversized pair of pliers, could open and close with similar strength, designed to pry open squashed and twisted metal. There was plenty of that to go around here thought the officer as the crews took up their positions and got to work.

Two firefighters were at the front of the mini van working on freeing the grandparents and things were not going well. Not well if you were watching the clock because although the seasoned firemen were working fast, it was too slow for the critically injured couple. Both firemen had been to plenty of MVAs but they felt especially sick this time. Having to work in so close to the horrifically injured couple, covered in their blood and hearing their ragged breathing was giving rise to enormous stress. Those throwaway comments that people made about 'getting used to it' and being 'de-sensitised'

were so very wrong. If anything, it brought on more stress and anxiety with each and every response to an MVA. You can never get desensitised to the sounds of someone dying and these three family members were a close-knit unit that had now been blown apart. The firefighters working at freeing the couple from the mini van wrestled with the incredibly heavy cutters and spreaders trying bit-by-bit to chop pieces of the car away. With their faces so close to the dying couple, the firemen could not help but look at them. It was horrific. The old man was smashed badly. It looked like his right leg had almost been torn completely off and was hanging by only a few sinews. There was blood absolutely everywhere and the two firemen could not help but be covered in it. The more senior one looked at his partner and he thought they looked like two surgeons in an Emergency Room up to their armpits in gore. The elderly man was drifting in and out of consciousness and his damaged head was being supported by one of the ambulance officers.

A very large pool of blood had formed on the floor of the van where his feet were and it was starting to set and congeal. It looked like soft jelly and it smelled like death. The man had lost too much of it. He was so drenched in his own blood that it was impossible to tell what the rest of his injuries were. A quick glance at the woman told the firefighter that she was trapped fast and only her right arm was free. Her arm, despite the splintered bones poking through, was trying to reach for her husband's hand and her good eye, through its tears, was searching for him. The other eye was a mess. Blood, ooze and clear fluid leaked from a massive penetrating wound. It ran down her cheek and onto the bright floral dress she had worn for the fun day that they'd planned.

Crush victims rarely live when freed from a wreck. As the dashboard of a car smashes against their chest, stomach and legs, blood and normal fluid flow in the body is severely restricted. In most cases it simply stops flowing and the person dies on the spot. If they are lucky they get to live for a few more minutes, just until the rescuers can get the crushing weight off them. The paramedics were trying to get out of the way of the firemen as they cut, pushed and twisted the metal, fighting for the victims' lives. The more senior of the two firemen had tears running down his face as he worked. He looked at his mate. So did he.

The Fire Officer watched the two men as they fought to free the elderly couple. He knew they were doing it tough and walked over to them, reaching out, putting a hand on each of their shoulders.

He spoke quietly to them as he bent low, close to their ears, offering words of encouragement but knowing that they were empty words. Time was running out for all of them.

He wheeled around and went back to the six-year-old girl. The firefighters working on her were in deep distress, their actions frantic, hands pushing down on the small chest, trying to get the life back into her, taking turns for compressions and then breaths. Her injuries were terrible and the impact of the four-wheel drive had ripped the life from her leaving her almost unrecognisable as the bright young girl she was a few minutes ago. Like all people who work on the frontline with road crash rescue, the firemen working on that girl that day were deeply committed to the fight for life on behalf of the daughter, granddaughter and niece they now sweated over.

## EACH AND EVERY MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT PRESENTS A UNIQUE SET OF PROBLEMS THAT THE RESCUERS MUST OVERCOME. NO TWO ACCIDENT SCENES ARE THE SAME. EACH HAS ITS OWN SET OF CHALLENGES, HAZARDS AND DANGERS.

The fight for her life was on and it was furious with drips, tubes, oxygen and bandages all being applied. She wasn't moving and deep down the officer knew she never would.

He squatted down next to his crew members to help. He was astonished to see that the little girl was starting to stir. She was gaining consciousness and he felt a small leap of joy in his heart amongst the complete carnage of the horror he was witnessing. Amazingly the team working on her had managed to get her back and her blue eyes were fluttering open.

Her little moans were the sign of life that the crew wanted to hear. With two firemen, the fire officer and an ambulance officer looking over her she opened her eyes, looked at them, whispered, 'Mummy, please help me. Please mummy, where are you?' and then she died. Her massive internal injuries had conspired against the rescue team's best efforts and she could not be saved. The powerful sight of her blonde hair, her perfect skin, her pretty face covered with blood and eyes glazed over was an image instantly and irrevocably seared into the memories of the team as they looked at each other in complete shock. They started to work on her again but the fight was lost.

### The Funeral

One week after the crash and a day after Christmas, the funeral for the two grandparents and the little girl was held. The Cathedral was packed. The immediate and extended family sat in the front rows, heads down, sobbing with the pain and loss they felt. The family was broken and could never be fixed. For them it was over and they were destroyed, destined to go through the rest of their lives on automatic, never really taking any sort of joy from life because their parents and daughter were gone.

The three coffins were lined up at the front. There was a picture in a frame atop each of the coffins. The photos were of the three victims that each coffin contained with the photo frames positioned so that they were looking back at the congregation of sobbing relatives. Throughout the service the Priest had talked of healing and forgiveness but there was to be none of that on this day.

The fire officer quietly slipped into the back of the church and took a seat. He was looking for closure, something that would assuage the deep sense of sadness, sorrow and loss he too felt after the accident. Although he only known the three people in the coffins for a very short time, the connection had been deep and had impacted him like no other. He felt broken inside and wanted desperately to be fixed somehow. As he lifted his head to look forward, his eyes caught the sight of a little boy with a single flower leave his seat in a pew at the front of the church.

The boy went to the smallest of the three coffins, paused and then placed the flower on the top of the coffin in exactly the place the little girl's heart would have been. As the little boy turned around to go back to his seat, the fire officer could clearly see the tears streaming down the face of the boy.

The fireman started crying too. The scene had ripped the officer's heart out and his head had fallen into his hands for the rest of the service. He didn't stop crying for three days after that.

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# New helmets for the MFB

The final component of the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade's PPC and Station Wear Project began in February with the introduction of the Rosenbauer HEROS-Xtreme Structural Fire-fighting helmet.

The issue of the new helmet concludes the MFB program to replace fire-fighters personal protective clothing, equipment and station uniforms with the latest technology in fire-fighter personal safety. The Rosenbauer HEROS-Xtreme helmet was chosen after a worldwide search and an intensive evaluation and consultation process involving firefighters, the UFU and technical experts. The helmet is manufactured in Austria and is certified to what is currently the toughest standard for structural fire-fighting helmets, EN443:2008. The new EN Standard incorporates a flame engulfment test and a high impact test thus ensuring the helmet provides optimum protection for Melbourne's fire-fighters.

The style of helmet was selected in response to injuries sustained by our colleague, Leading Firefighter Richard Zapart during a factory fire in Melbourne's west in October 2007. Due to the extreme heat exposure, the external visor of Richard's helmet melted and dropped down to block the exhalation valve of his breathing apparatus. The Victorian Branch insisted that any replacement helmet that was introduced must have an internally mounted visor to prevent a recurrence of this type.

The MFB will be the first fire service in the country to introduce the European "jet style" helmet which will look distinctively different from traditional style fire-fighting helmets.

Some of the features of this new helmet include:

- Internally mounted protective glasses and a visor
- Superior weight distribution and balance
- Quick and easy adjustment via an external rubber knob
- Comfortable internal harness and padding
- Integrated ear protection

The MFB has selected a range of colours for each rank that aims to improve identity management and make it easier to identify different ranks at the emergency scene.



Modelling the new hat: Left: Station Officer Brendan Veal, Right: Qualified firefighter Steve Kemper, Centre: Mike McCumisky proudly wears the original MFB kit.



Firefighter



Leading Firefighter



Station Officer



Senior Station Officer



Commander



Assistant Chief Officer



Deputy Chief Officer



Chief Officer

The safety and visibility of the helmets has been further enhanced with the application of high visibility silver reflective tape with rank and surname identification.

The Rosenbauer helmet is the fourth helmet to be used by the MFB during the last 50 years and demonstrates the improvement in firefighter safety that can be achieved through the introduction of new technology. The image above highlights the improvement

in safety that Melbourne firefighters have achieved through the years transitioning from a brass helmet to a very basic safety helmet to a helmet with an internal safety shell and now to the current high-tech Rosenbauer helmet. ■

**PHIL TAYLOR**  
**COMMANDER PHIL TAYLOR IS COMMANDER OF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT, CENTRAL ZONE, MFB, VICTORIA.**

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In May 2007 as part of an academic course held at the Australian Institute of Police Management in Manly, I was confronted with the task of writing a futures paper. The paper was to focus on 2020 and one of my ideas on how to provide better safety and intelligence for firefighters was the introduction of a remote control drone that would provide thermal imagery and would also converse directly with the on board computer located in the responding fire appliance.

## CyberQuad Maxi

Endurance	Up to 35 min
Payload	Up to 800 g
Altitude	1km (video link)
Range	1km (video link)
Noise	75dBA @ 3m
Dimensions	560 x 670 x 200mm
Weight	25-30 Kilos

### Description

A WA invention being trialled by Victoria's MFB gives firefighters unique visual access in emergencies.

In 2009 whilst attending a Defence Industry course, SSO Brett Cowcher and myself attended the Defence Show in Adelaide which was full of many exhibitions, introducing the latest and greatest in available technology. It was at this show that we came across the Cyber Technology stand and the impressive CyberQuad which is a remote control helicopter with excellent photographic capability. Cyber Technology is an Australian company, located in Bibra Lakes, Perth. Another impressive factor was that the CyberQuad aircraft was an Australian invention which is manufactured locally at the Cyber Tech factory in Perth.

Cyber Technology is an Australian-based Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) designer

and manufacturer focused on providing quality international UAV solutions. Established in February 2006 and proudly West Australian, Cyber Technology is an industry leader and innovator in the UAV field. As a small-medium enterprise (SME), they pride themselves on their ability to respond quickly to customer enquiries and designing UAV solutions that satisfy new and unique requirements. They have provided UAV solutions for search and rescue operations, military support, high-end surveillance, law enforcement, environmental conservation, agricultural operations, oil and gas structural inspection operations, and cinematography/ photography applications. Emergency services all require unique and innovative equipment

# CYBERQUAD

to provide the best support for their fire-fighting teams on the ground, much the same way the military do. Even though the initial sales have been mainly to defence and law enforcement, there seemed to be many advantages for a fire service to take them on and design specific capabilities such as thermal imaging and air monitoring into the armoury of the CyberQuad.

The Cyberquads are compact, hovering, unmanned aerial vehicles, for various remote airborne sensing and imaging applications. With skilled pilots the Cyberquad can fly into nearly any emergency incident and provide live photos and video footage that can be viewed by the pilot, on a portable monitor that is part of the CyberQuad equipment. Any other personnel in the vicinity can also view the portable monitor. An Incident Controller and others can wear remote armband monitors, which receive the same images as the portable monitor next to the pilot. This same footage can be utilised by the Incident Management Team (IMT), gathered in the new Control Unit. The MFB has limited intelligence-gathering equipment and nothing that can provide photographic or video images for incident control. The CyberQuad is intrinsically safe and has the capability to carry an air monitoring device, which means it can be used in almost any type of incident in which we need to sample the air quality, fire, incidents, toxic emissions, etc.

Whilst the CyberQuad can be used to help facilitate training drills, its main uses will be in post incident analysis and debriefs, fire investigation, media productions and for intelligence gathering in a range of different scenarios, such as:

- Aerial views of fires
- Internal compartment footage in appropriate buildings
- Hazmat investigation, including air monitoring
- Hazmat identification of materials concerned
- Intelligence link for Incident Management Teams (IMT) and Emergency Management Teams (EMT)
- Search equipment in different circumstances
- HART intelligence
- USAR intelligence
- USAR tool for checking work areas and surrounding buildings, walls, etc
- Marine response intelligence
- Fire Duty checks
- Thermal Imaging



- Provides evidence, to support the Incident Controller
- Task force tool for aerial overview
- “Over the Hill” surveillance, in difficult to access areas
- Toxic or terrorist gas attacks
- OHS advantage where dangerous atmospheres exist

After the Coode Island fire in 1991, the Chief Fire Officer of the time, Jeff Godfredson, had this to say: “The issue of hazardous materials incidents and fires, as exemplified in the Coode Island fires, continues to challenge our resources and ingenuity. It is a clear example of why we

need to remain at the cutting edge of technology and expertise.” (Wilde, *Life Under the Bells*)

This sort of technology and expertise is mainly used by the military. We have purchased this equipment and now bring ourselves to the cutting edge of current equipment and technology. The technology itself will only improve and as we establish ourselves as a customer, we will be able to identify areas that we can improve and target as value improvements. Research and evaluation for this equipment is extremely difficult to acquire, as the major customers of the equipment, to date, are Defence and the Police, who both

have security issues with releasing data, regarding intelligence based equipment. There are currently no fire services using the CyberQuad anywhere in the world, so the MFB has the chance to lead the way in new technology. There are other types of UAVs being used in parts of Europe with some success. There are a number of issues that we have identified that make the CyberQuad a much better investment than the various overseas units. Amongst those advantages are the price, which is significantly cheaper than the European counterparts and the excellent safety features of enshrouded blades, which take away the many risks involved with having an aircraft with exposed blades.



The CyberQuads were purchased in November 2010 and five pilots have been trained initially to assist in the development of a suitable training course and also to educate potential pilots in the operation and uses of the UAV. The project team are currently working through the consultative committees within the MFB to allow progression of the project. With such new equipment, there are a lot of areas to work through which include:

- Deployment of the aircraft and pilots
- Location of the CyberQuads
- Pilot selection
- Sufficient training course
- Working within CASA regulations
- Safe training sites and work instructions for operating near people.

Once agreement is reached the selection and training process will take approx 6 months to complete, so it will be some yet before the UAVs are ready for operational use. ■

**WILL GLENN**

**COMMANDER WILL GLENN, AN MFB AND UFU MEMBER SINCE 1984, IS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING, NORTHERN ZONE, MFB.**



# Ranks of Labor's true believers thinning

IN 1990 just over 40 per cent of employees were members of a trade union. That number now is less than 20 per cent. For a Prime Minister who was elected president of the Australian Union of Students and was a partner at labour law firm Slater and Gordon, Julia Gillard must feel as though her base is slipping.

Labor and the trade unions are generations removed from the ethos and numbers of the maritime and shearers' strikes of 1890. They are generations removed from the first meeting of the Australian Labor Party, held under the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine, and the NSW Trades and Labor Council sponsored Labor Electoral League in Balmain in 1891. These are proud traditions, but about as relevant to today's politics as the Queen's speech.

And there is more bad news to come on the union front. The bastion of trade unionism for some decades has been the public sector. The sale of public assets and the outsourcing of various service and IT functions means the prospects for organising in the public sector are declining.

In 1990, an astonishingly high 67 per cent of public sector workers were members of a trade union. That figure today is less than 45 per cent. In the same period, little more than 30 per cent of private sector workers were members of a trade union.

Now, the proportion is less than 14 per cent.

Indeed, the proportion of public sector workers among trade union members has declined somewhat. In 1990, the proportion of public sector trade unionists to all trade unionists was 45 per cent. Now, the proportion of public sector trade unionists to all trade unionists is 43 per cent. This change in the proportion of trade unionists is driven by the relative decline in the size of the public sector workforce.

In 1990, the public sector workforce was 27 per cent of the total workforce. Now, the public sector workforce is less than 18 per cent of the workforce.

The sale of public assets by Labor and Coalition governments, the big one being

the sale of Queensland Rail by a Labor government, will drive public sector union numbers down further.

Union numbers will not be enhanced by the recent announcement by Prime Minister Gillard of her desire to see principal teacher selection in state schools. Although not as radical as the headlines suggest, it has the potential to change the culture of unionism in the state schools' sector to reflect that of the independent sector.

In 1990, for example, fewer than 60 per cent of "educational professionals" were trade unionists. Now, fewer than 50 per cent are trade unionists. It is highly likely that this decline in trade unionism among educational professionals is driven by the rise of private schools. In the Queensland state school system, 96 per cent of all eligible teachers are members of the union (only the police and the fire brigade can boast similar numbers). The numbers drop away in the independent schools sector. Beginning with the Catholic schools, fewer than 65 per cent of teachers are unionised, but in the independent non-Catholic schools, particularly the more fundamental Christian schools, fewer than 20 per cent of teachers are unionised. Incidentally, non-Catholic independent schools are the fastest-growing sector of independent schools.

More recently, and setting aside the merits of the complaint by large retailers, competition from internet sales is likely to slow growth in store based retail sales and employment.

The consequence is to drive union numbers down even further. Union penetration among sales workers in 1990 was a little less than 25 per cent.

Union penetration now is not quite 15 per cent. There were 150,000 union members among the sales workforce in 1990, but now there are just over 100,000.

The implication for one of the larger, and in my mind most respected, unions, the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employee's Union is dire. A greater surprise is that in a growing workforce the number of sales workers has been relatively stagnant for the past 20 years.

State Labor governments rely heavily on the votes of public sector unionists. This generally holds true for federal Labor governments. Intriguing then that the Prime Minister is toying with the idea of principal selection of schoolteachers.

The concept may not stretch so far as to have the principal and the local parents act as employer – state education departments will probably remain the employer – but nevertheless, teacher unions may find the shift to local selection a more difficult environment in which to recruit members.

Implications for Labor in the long term could be severe. It may be left with emergency workers – police and fireys – at the heart of the trade union movement. ■

## GARY JOHNS

THE HON DR GARY JOHNS IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF THE PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY. AN MHR FROM 1987 TO 1996, HE WAS SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE AND ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THE KEATING GOVERNMENT. THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN *THE AUSTRALIAN*.



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