

The Australian

FIREFIGHTER

GREG 'BUNGY' WILLIAMS RETIRES | INSURE A FIREFIGHTER



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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

Authorised by P Marshall
410 Brunswick St, Fitzroy VIC 3065

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National President
Mick Farrell



National Secretary
Peter Marshall

From the National Secretary

Not in living memory — not even in the worst excesses of Victoria's Kennett Government attacks on that State's fire services in the 1990s — have Australian fire services been under such attack.

The profound changes happening across Australia — but particularly in the recently right-wing eastern States — will test our unity in ways that younger members have not previously experienced.

We are fighting economic rationalists who put balance sheets before community safety, and who simply don't understand the nature of firefighting.

Where was the warning to the public before the last round of State elections that their fire services were to be cut back — not bolstered to keep pace with population growth, and the bushfire predictions relating to climate change?

Where was the consultation before the savage cuts were finally revealed?

It shows a profound misunderstanding of the role of emergency services. Instead of insuring to minimise suffering, these governments would rather the community pays after the event.

This economic vandalism of fire resources developed over decades is a betrayal of the community, particularly the rural areas that have been so hard hit by disaster in recent years.

“THIS ECONOMIC VANDALISM OF FIRE RESOURCES DEVELOPED OVER DECADES IS A BETRAYAL OF THE COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY THE RURAL AREAS THAT HAVE BEEN SO HARD HIT BY DISASTER IN RECENT YEARS.”

As relayed in other articles throughout this edition firefighters around Australia are facing budget cuts, austerity measures, attacks on the professionalism of firefighting and their core terms and conditions of employment.

The newly elected Queensland Government has wasted no time attacking the public sector including the firefighters and other emergency services. Legislation is introduced and passed at alarming rates and some changes will have significant impact on collective bargaining and therefore the key terms and conditions of employment for years to come.

In the ACT and NSW decisions are being made to close stations to avoid overtime or to use non career staff to relive when career staff are available. Rosters are under attack.

In Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia the professionalism of firefighting is being undermined with attempts to employ non-operational firefighters into middle and senior management roles.

All of these decisions have direct implications on the safety of firefighters on the fireground and ultimately the safety of the community.

In Victoria, the revelation that the government will cut fire protection came a week after it announced an extension of the fire levy it promised to scrap!

For country Victorians it must feel as if they are being doubly punished for Black Saturday. Already they face higher power bills so the power companies blamed for many of the fires can recoup their losses!

Now the State Government wants them to shake the tin and raise money for their local brigade.

They haven't got uniform or equipment for CFA volunteers. In fact, they're trying to cap recruiting new volunteers.

They're cutting protective clothing, equipment, first aid training, ration packs, early warning like fire spotting towers, IT projects to protect firefighters, safety manuals, etc etc

And they they want CFA brigades to “self fund” ... to raise their own money.

They say frontline firefighting won't be affected – but it clearly is.

They're misleading the community – they're misleading Parliament.

We look back at Victoria's mean-spirited MFB in the 1950s when they demanded that overnight crew remain awake and press a bell every two minutes to prove it, or face disciplinary action or dismissal. We wonder how an employer could be so vindictive and plain silly.

We may yet see our own equivalent challenges in our time. Beancounters don't understand why firefighters aren't working at full pace through their full shift. They don't understand the ebb and flow of work, the quiet days and the frantic days, the busy nights of house fires and car accidents. Again they're talking about restricting sleep on overnight shifts.

Worse, with their crystal ball technology, they want to predict when and where fires will happen and roster as needed!

These cuts will cost lives and property. We must alert the community to the serious risk these penny-pinching politicians are posing for families, homes and workplaces.

Strength in unity.



National Secretary Peter Marshall.

PETER MARSHALL ■



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From the National President

There is some bleak reading in this issue of *Australian Firefighter*.

Our industrial conditions are under threat.

In Queensland Premier Campbell Newman is bullying the public sector with the axing of 14,000 public sector jobs in that State, including, it is reported, 57% of all uniformed positions in the QFRS' Rural Operations arm.

In New South Wales, the O'Farrell government continues to target the public sector, with a cuts of \$1.7 billion from education and \$3 billion from health over four years.

And in Victoria, budget cuts of \$66 million to the MFB and CFA will supposedly not affect frontline firefighting — yet the evidence already suggests otherwise.

But while the beancounters worry about the money, firefighters and others are worrying about the impact on public safety.

The national newspaper *The Australian* recently reported on the forecast for this summer. According to forecasters at the Weather Channel, after the wettest two-year period on record, Australia is set to have a hot and dry summer this year as the El Nino phenomenon takes hold in the central and eastern Pacific.

“THE FIGURES SUGGEST THAT DISASTERS LIKE BLACK SATURDAY COULD BECOME AN ANNUAL OCCURRENCE IN THIS COUNTRY.”

They say Australia could expect a spike in cyclones, a return to heatwaves and an increase in grass fires from October to April.

The Weather Channel senior meteorologist Tom Saunders warned: “It will be the hottest and driest extreme weather season in three years. We are not expecting any part of Australia to have below-average temperatures. Only parts of Western Australia can expect rainfall above average.”

This is a relatively short-term forecast when compared with the 2009 report prepared by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney.

The UFU Victoria commissioned the research because of concerns about the future, and the implications of climate change. The research was preliminary but terrifying.

It predicted a significant increase in the number of days of very high fire danger with the largest changes occurring in the interior of NSW and Northern Victoria ... an area like Mildura could have up to 90 days a year – that's three months – of extreme fire danger.

The figures suggest that disasters like Black Saturday could become an annual occurrence in this country.

To handle this threat, the research calculated that Victoria will need 30 to 44 per cent more firefighters by 2026 — that's an extra 1000 professional firefighters on current numbers — most of them in rural areas

The report also looked at trends in volunteering. There has been a slight overall increase in CFA volunteer numbers following Black Saturday, but the research indicates the general trend is a decline in the number of volunteers in recent years. It is projected that the ratio of active volunteer to professional staffing will decline from the current 38:1 to 31:1 by 2026.

Current difficulties associated with volunteer numbers as reported across all fire services:

- in many rural communities, volunteer brigade member numbers have dropped and those remaining are ageing;
- in some new housing developments on urban/rural fringes, brigade memberships remain low, notwithstanding increased protection level needs;
- for many brigades on urban/rural fringes, it is difficult to find crews 9-5 weekdays;

On a brighter note, this issue updates on the efforts by Australian firefighters to raise money for those affected by muscular dystrophy, a cause which was highlighted for us when comedian Jerry Lewis visited us in 2010.

We look at the efforts of Tasmanian firefighters, and how this has brought them closer together.

Another story of interest is the unique campaign in Victoria to provide insurance for firefighters.



National President Mick Farrell.

MICK FARRELL ■



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Fire protection boost for Canberra residents

ACT firefighters are claiming victory in their dispute with the ACT government over temporary station closures.

The ACT Government has approved the ACT Fire Brigade getting two extra pumpers and crews to cover fire stations when a crew is dispatched for training or other non-emergency tasks during daytime hours.

The boost takes effect from November, and follows firefighter concerns that Canberra fire stations have been increasingly going off-line — being temporarily closed for minor vehicle repairs, errands, or off-site training. With no local pumper or crew, any emergency response had to come from another station, further away.

United Firefighters Union ACT secretary Dave Livingstone says the extra two pumpers mean that all fire stations should be fully staffed and ready to respond at all times.

Canberra has nine fire stations, each with a pumper and a crew. These fire stations are strategically located so that all Canberra residents are quickly protected in an emergency.

Increasingly these fire stations have been going off-line, being temporarily closed for minor vehicle repairs, errands, or off-site training.

“We have had frequent gaps while a crew is off training, or taking their pumper to Fairbairn for maintenance,” says Dave.

“Inevitably this could have led to the loss of life or property, which could have been prevented with a prompt response.

“We congratulate the ACT Government for listening to firefighters’ concerns and committing to providing two extra pumpers and crews, when staffing levels reach a proper level after the next recruit course

“Funding for extra firefighters was foreshadowed in the 2008-2009 budget. It’s taken four years to get there — now the challenge is to maintain the ACT Fire Brigade at that strength.”

Earlier, ACT firefighters went public over their concerns. While they told media that Canberra’s fire stations were repeatedly being closed, the government claimed no fire station had been closed in the past two years.

Dave Livingstone responded: “A fire station without trucks and firefighters is just a building with loud bells.”

Many of the closures were simply unnecessary – minor vehicle maintenance and administrative errands.

The Emergency Services Agency has a small fleet of mobile mechanic vehicles, so fire trucks and ambulances spend as little time as possible outside of

their response areas, and the best level of fire cover is maintained.

Yet recently the pumper from Charnwood Fire station had to travel to Fairbairn to have its indicator light cover replaced. It would have been easier, and safer, to have the workshop’s truck travel to Charnwood with four screws and a light cover.

The Emergency Services Agency also has delivery vehicles so pumpers don’t need to go to headquarters at Fairbairn to collect uniforms, equipment or station items.

The other reason pumpers are out of action is when firefighters travel to Hume for training. Ongoing training is essential, but this should not be at the expense of holes in Canberra’s fire protection.

At the height of the dispute, firefighters refused to take their trucks out of their fire station response areas except for emergency calls.

They lifted the ban when the fire service took the union to Fair Work Australia.

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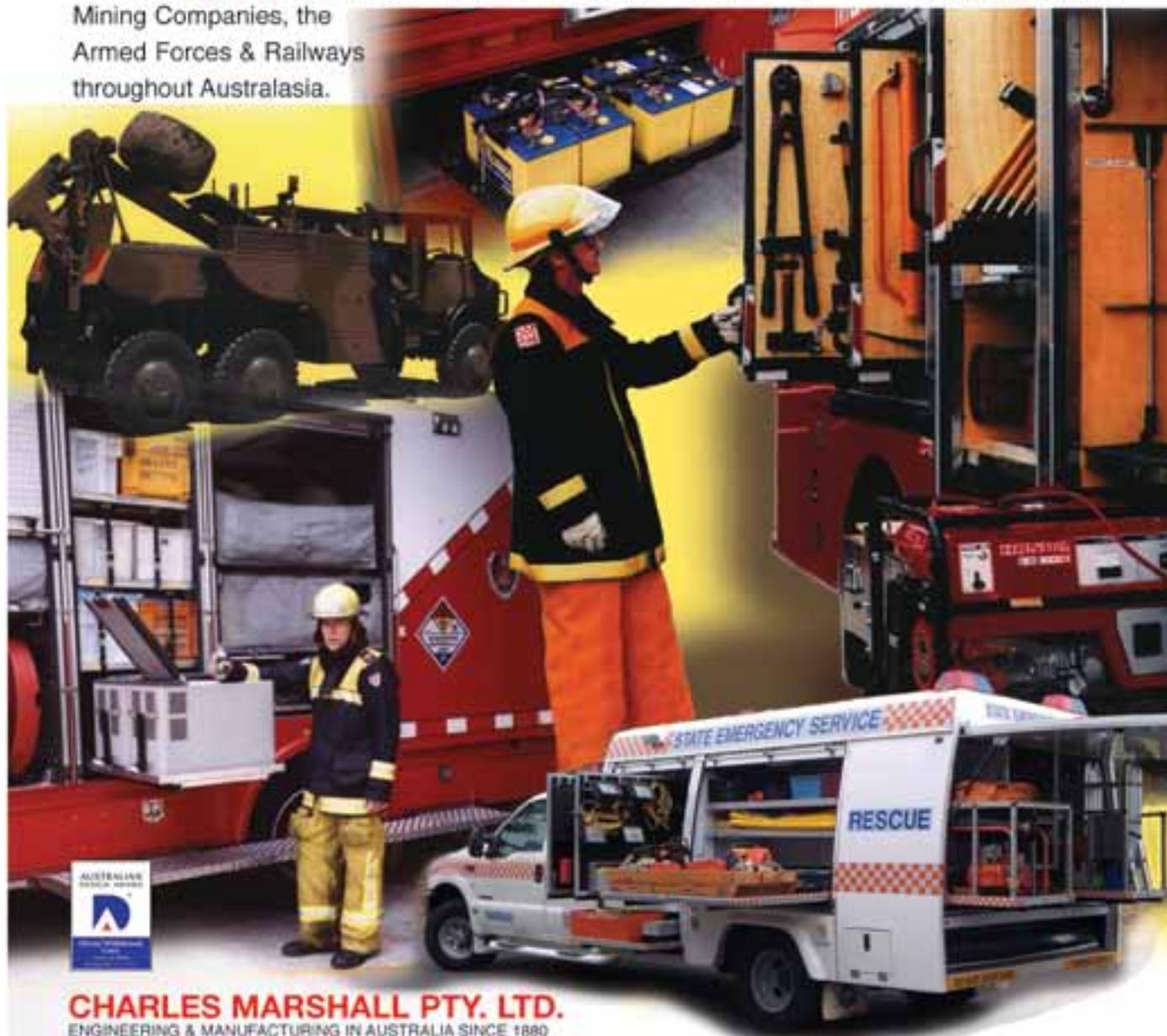
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CFBT

The introduction of CFBT was welcomed by members as a real benefit and an opportunity to practise specific firefighting skills. It was thought at the time that ASA would seek CASA endorsement for this training to tick a few more boxes and this has turned out to be the case.

At a meeting in Melbourne Andrew Rushbrook and Rodd Sciortino stated that this training would not be made mandatory until all of the Union's concern had been addressed. Despite additional measures relating "to the use of PPE and procedures to further enhance the hazard/risk mitigation controls already in place", all of the Union's concerns have not been addressed. ASA claim that their training aligns with that of other agencies on which their program is modelled. Interestingly a number of other Branches of the UFU of A around the country have banned/ceased this training for the same reasons as this Branch: the health and safety of members.

Currently, participation in this training is voluntary in accordance with BCOM resolution and agreement between the Union and the Executive General Manager ARFFS. There has not been any discussion or agreement between the Union and the EGM to change this position.

The Union was advised on September 10 that because ARFFS believe they have "now managed the risks associated with CFBT to As Low as Reasonably Practicable (ALARP) ... "CFBT will resume as a mandatory training requirement."

Even if "ALARP" was an acceptable position, the Union contends that this position has not been reached as there is still work that has to be done on safer, cleaner alternative fuel sources, the mitigation of the effects of off-gassing and the facts around dermal and aural absorption of products of combustion.

The ARFFS state that they are of the **opinion** that the current fuel source presents a lesser hazard than a proposed alternative "given its propensity to produce what the QFRS Scientific Branch expert believes to be benzene thus increasing the risk to ARFF personnel." The trouble with this is that the QFRS expert qualified that statement that

he has no evidence that this is the case and secondly, when it comes to questions of health and safety it is not opinions that count, it is the FACTS and the ARFFS have not produced the facts. It is not for the Union to refute the safety of one product over another, it is for the employer, under their duty of care, to prove what they are proposing is safe and the ARFFS have not done this.

The position of the Aviation Branch at this time remains that participation in this training remains voluntary. Any attempt by the ARFFS to coerce its employees to compulsorily undertake the training amounts to an abrogation of its duty of care to its employees and an unlawful and unreasonable instruction which will be met with an appropriate response.

A copy of the ARFFS letter of September 10 and your Union's response is on the Branch website.

Fair Work Australia Matters.

The Union and Airservices were in conferences before Commissioner Deegan on three matters. The matters related to remote leave fares, alternative duties and advertising FIFO positions.

Outcomes on the matters are:
Alternative duties - the Commissioner indicated that the meaning of the clauses in the current CA did not fit neatly with the interpretation of either of the parties and the parties should negotiate an agreed interim position pending the next round of CA negotiations.

The interim position is:

- *The alternative duties Management Instruction will only apply to employees where it has been medically determined they are fit to return to duty and in some capacity (dependent on the nature of injury or illness) perform duties that are restricted;*
- *The employee will maintain their normal shifts for a period of up to two weeks and if after this two week period they are still not fully recovered and able to perform full operational duties the employee will be directed to work in accordance with the 38 hour week provisions in the CA;*

- *Personal leave will only be used and deducted where the employee is certified by a medical practitioner as being **unable** to perform any duties or attend the workplace.*
- *The relevant HR instruction is also to be amended to reflect the amended arrangements*

Remote locality leave fares – The Commissioner was extremely concerned about the manner in which Airservices had handled this matter. The Commissioner directed Airservices to develop a position for the Union's consideration.

Airservices have proposed that "to facilitate a resolution and as a gesture of goodwill they will pay to eligible employees, and their dependents, in Cairns and Townsville a without prejudice payment equal to one economy airfare of \$548 gross for Cairns employees and \$451 gross for Townsville employees for each year of eligible service in these locations commencing from 2009 to 2012. These payments will be reduced by any payments or reimbursements already received by the individual employees."

The issue of child fares and rates will be raised at the forthcoming DCC meeting in Canberra on 25th October. This is important because effectively, child fares have not existed for a number of years.

FIFO – this dispute centred on the right of ARFFS to advertise a FIFO position with a stipulated residential location. The Commissioner preferred the ARFFS interpretation on this matter and made the following recommendation:

*"(a)the UFUA accept that Air Services may legitimately advertise FIFO positions with the proviso that the person filling the particular position will be required to have a home location at a particular place; and
(b)Air Services recognise that, on any occasion where such a proviso does not form part of the advertisement for a FIFO position, the current home location of the successful applicant will be their home location for the purpose of the FIFO conditions under the Agreement."*

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Industrial actions heats up in Queensland

Queensland firefighters have voted overwhelmingly for protected industrial action as relations sour with the LNP Government of Campbell Newman.

A record 99% of career firefighters across Queensland voted in favour of industrial action in a 'secret ballot' under the Newman government's controversial new industrial laws.

The ballot conducted by the Electoral Commission of Queensland and counted on September 24 empowers firefighters to take legally protected industrial action and avoid the new draconian fines legislated by the LNP government.

The huge ballot return rate and overwhelming endorsement are unprecedented. United Firefighters Union (UFUQ), State Secretary John Oliver said the results demonstrated the resolve of firefighters and communication officers to fight for a fair deal.

The ballot had a particularly high return rate considering the number of members who notified the union of concerns such as not receiving a ballot paper and documents being sent to the wrong address. Unfortunately, ECQ did not use the updated addresses supplied to them by the union, but relied on information provided by QFRS.

Firefighters and communication officers have claimed only a few moderate issues about modernising some of their employment arrangements, but have been faced with a raft of sweeping demands and cost cutting claims imposed by QFRS and the state government.

QFRS and the state government refuse to retain common sense consultative arrangements which have been essential features of previous agreements, have objected to the inclusion of an occupational health and safety clause, and are insisting on trade-offs to fund modest wage adjustments.

Some of the QFRS and government claims are so naïve you really wonder who has dreamed them up.

Unfortunately, many of the government's cost cutting demands will risk community safety and UFUQ members want to negotiate sensible arrangements without indiscriminate slashing.

QFRS are demanding that firefighters concede to a casualised workforce, 'simplified' remuneration and the removal of 20 or so existing clauses from their current agreement.

UFUQ has made repeated efforts to meet with the Emergency Services Minister Jack Dempsey but so far he is avoiding the union.

Industrial action in the form of bans and limitations across the state of Queensland were set to begin immediately. But firefighters assured the public that, as dedicated professionals, they would not hurt the community.

The initial action would see members on a staged basis, for up to one day's duration, ban all work except:

- Answering incoming calls;
- The processing of, or the mobilising of resources to:
- 000 emergency calls;
- Fire calls;
- Primary alarm activations;
- Turnout notifications;
- Special calling;
- Escalating alarm levels;
- Emergency agency notifications and permitted burns.

During the periods of industrial action Queensland firefighters promised they would ensure that emergency responses and fire calls were maintained and community safety wasn't at risk.

QFRS have threatened to deduct pay for any period of rostered duty when bans or limitations are undertaken. They will not accept any "part performance" of your duties, no matter how minimal the industrial action.

But as 'protected industrial action' it is unlawful for QFRS to threaten any reprisals against members taking this action, other than to withhold pay for the period.

Key QFRS demands are:

- A completely re-written certified agreement.
- All QFRS demands are interrelated.
- Wage rises are conditional upon agreeing to all of their demands.
- Wage rises are "up to 2.7%" per year conditional on cost savings.
- Firefighters and station officers to be paid an aggregate wage.
- Aggregate wage to consist of payment for:
 - * Base wage (with 1.6% increase)
 - * Weekend and shift penalties (27.88%)
 - * 38 hour week allowance (6.73%)
 - * 2.5% buy out of any future claims for work changes or new allowances.
 - * Public holiday penalties (5.5%)
 - * Travel, mileage and meals (\$10.90 per fortnight)
 - * 5 "pre-paid" overtime shifts at 150% (reduction in pay rise value of about 1.4%).
 - * Aggregate wage not paid on overtime, sick leave or superannuation.
- Abolition of the 10/14 roster unless we concede to their aggregate wage.
- Introduction of casual employment.
- Abolition of consultative provisions.
- Restoration of managerial prerogative.
- Agreement and award stripping.
- Dilution of grievance and dispute resolution procedures.
- Amendments to underpinning award to cement in changes.

UFUA QUEENSLAND BRANCH

Branch President: Mark Dearlove
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All states converged on Melbourne recently for a meeting of the UFU National Executive. It was alarming to hear from other State Branches the concerted attack on public sector employees. Of greatest concern was the funding cuts being made to fire services. State Liberal Governments making these attacks are trying to convince the public that no 'front line services' will be affected. Fortunately the general public is not naïve to this spin.

It is troubling that the Victorian Government is ignoring the recommendations of its own Royal Commission into the Black Saturday fires. These recommendations for additional staff, that had already been committed to, are now being scrapped. These cuts announced by the Government will put further pressure on already vulnerable areas.

The National Union will be ensuring pressure is kept on these Government who attack fire services for quick budgetary relief.

On the back of 2011 amendments to Commonwealth laws for presumptive cancer, the SA Branch is undertaking a program to shift attitudes in regard to occupational health and safety. Toxins, contaminants and industrial chemicals pose a direct risk to the safety of our firefighters. As we now know, this exposure associated with firefighting increases the likelihood of contracting certain cancers. No law change alone can adequately address this issue; there must be a shift in our approach to occupational safety to ensure the greatest level of mitigation possible.

For instance, new mechanisms for the delineation of clean and dirty areas of stations must be a priority. The contaminants that are present on our P.P.E. must remain separated from our living areas. A recent visit to southern Queensland by our OH&S coordinator Neil Mangelsdorf provided valuable insight into the station engineering features that have been utilised to produce contaminated to clean transition areas.

We are in a fortunate position in South Australia that management shares our views on this important matter. It is critical that we capitalise on this good faith and make real advances toward a cleaner and healthier environment.

Presumptive cancer law developments in Canberra and our prosecution of the matter in South Australia have been a harsh wake up call for many of our members who have taken existing work practices for granted. Greater awareness of the cancer risks faced by firefighters, coupled with law change and more emphasis on early intervention can only lead to positive outcomes for both firefighters as well as government health budgets.

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Certified Agreement

Civil Air Australia have reached "in principle" agreement with Airservices for a new Certified Agreement and ATCs are currently considering the proposal.

While the ARFFS Agreement does not expire until April 2013 the next round of negotiations will commence in the near future so start preparing ideas for those negotiations.

139H (MOS) Review

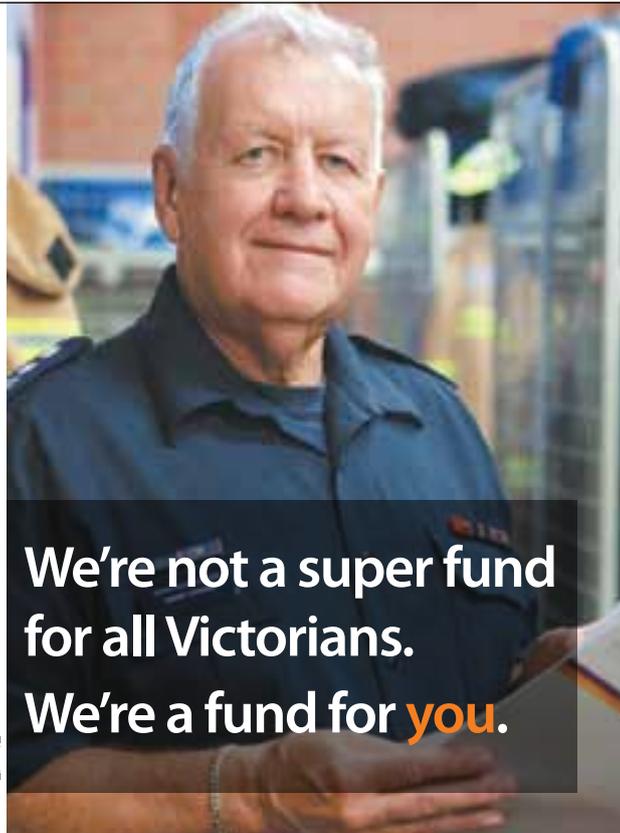
A review of 139H (MOS) is underway and in May the Branch was invited to comment on the work done to date. Due to a lack of information important to an informed response a request for the information and a face to face meeting to discuss the review process was made. Neither were realised.

On September 11 advice of further revisions and invitation to comment was received, still without any response to the previous concerns raised.

Our concerns about lack of proper consultation and the review process were addressed to John McCormick, Director Aviation Safety at CASA, and he has agreed to meet with the Union in Canberra on October 23.

UFU AVIATION BRANCH

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Aviation Branch Secretary: Henry Lawrence
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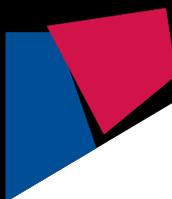


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The Tasmania Branch welcomes two good news stories for this edition of the national magazine, namely the handing down of the Myer decision (see separate article) and the commencement of the 2012 firefighter recruit course.

The Myer decision was welcomed by the UFUA and congratulations are in order for Chief Officer Mike Brown and the TFS legal team that strongly defended the position of the TFS and the firefighters who attended the Myer fire. The UFUA is proud of our members and the good work that they undertake for and on behalf of the community. It is right that the Fire Service and Firefighters be protected from litigation when they turn out to an incident and perform to the best of their ability to protect life and property. Well done to all those involved.

The new recruits will complete their training by October 12. The new firefighters have waited patiently for their 2011 induction to finally commence this year. Their presence in career stations around Tasmania will be appreciated by

all career members. The last 12 months have proved very difficult at times with firefighters having to undertake extra shifts to cope with staffing shortages.

Firefighters do not ask for much when they go about their duty but are entitled to:

- have enough staff available to attend an incident in a timely and safe manner.
- be provided with the best quality personal protective equipment
- an appliance that will reliably perform for all incidents
- maintain their skills and competence in an orderly manner

These matters are at the forefront of the union's agenda at all times.

The Tasmania Branch Annual General Meeting has been scheduled for December 7 and will be held in Hobart with video conference facilities available for members in the North and North West of the state. All members will be advised of the details by Union News.

In other news, the Branch Committee of Management has commenced preparation

for negotiations on next year's enterprise agreements. All Union Workplace Representatives will be invited to attend a bargaining workshop to be scheduled for the first quarter of 2013. The bargaining process is a very important time for UFUA members. The tight fiscal policy of the current state government will present several challenges for the union during the bargaining negotiations.

Congratulations to Greg Williams for his 18 years of service to the TFS (see separate article).

The UFUA Tasmania Branch wishes Greg all the best in his retirement.

GREG COOPER, ACTING BRANCH SECRETARY

UFUA TASMANIA BRANCH

Branch President: Darren Gye
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Legal action over 2007 blaze ends

Tasmanian firefighters have welcomed the end to long-running litigation over the September 2007 blaze which destroyed the Myer store in Liverpool Street, Hobart.

Myer and the building's owner, the Retirement Benefits Fund Board, had sued the State Fire Commission and the Chief Officer of the Tasmania Fire Service for damages for negligence.

The plaintiffs alleged breaches of alleged statutory duties and for negligence, alleging various failures in relation to preparation and training prior to the fire.

But on August 24, Justice Alan Blow of the Tasmanian Supreme Court ruled that the fire service's immunity under state legislation covered events surrounding the disaster.

Myer has since announced that it will not appeal the decision.

Myer and the Retirement Benefits Fund Board had claimed that the fire brigade, and its then chief officer, John Gledhill, had failed to produce a fire plan for the building and that firefighters were inadequately trained.

Justice Blow says he was required to determine:

- (a) Is the First Defendant (the State Fire Commission) entitled to the statutory immunity provided under section 121(2) of the Fire Service Act 1979 (Tas) with respect to the liability and damage pleaded at paragraphs 35 – 39 of the Statement of Claim?
- (b) Is the Second Defendant entitled to the statutory immunity provided under section 121(1) of the Fire Service Act 1979 (Tas) with respect to the liability and damage pleaded at paragraphs 35 – 39 of the Statement of Claim?"

After many pages of argument he concluded: "I determine that the answers to the questions for determination are (a) Yes; (b) Yes."

The UFU Tasmania says this is a good decision.

In dealing with a structure fire, firefighters are required to make split second decisions. In the case of the Myer fire, a major CBD department store, there were issues with the sprinklers and concerns over electrical dangers.

In addressing such hazards and the risk to life, firefighters shouldn't have to be looking over their backs, worrying that someone might sue them.

The full judgment is at <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/tas/TASSC/2012/54.html>

Fire protection budget slashed

The Victorian Government has confirmed it will cut \$66 million from the fire protection budget – \$41 million from the Country Fire Authority, and \$25 from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

Firefighters say the cut to the CFA budget is an insult to the memory of the 173 people who died, the 414 who were injured, and the thousands who lost their homes in 400 separate fires on February 7 2009.

UFU secretary Peter Marshall told media that the plans undermine the recommendations of Royal Commission into the Victorian Bushfires and show the State Government has already forgotten the tragic lessons of Black Saturday.

Apart from placing people and their homes at risk, the cuts are false economy.

The Black Saturday fires cost \$4.4 billion according to the Bushfires Royal Commission's final report, which says this is a "conservative" figure.

And these costs do not include the financial and economic costs of devastated businesses, particularly agricultural losses, livestock, and production, let alone the incalculable human cost.

And while the State Government is cutting back on fire protection, the Victorian Climate Commission's recent report warns of the State's increased fire risk:

"Conditions for large and intense bushfires are likely to become more common in the future. The number of 'very high' and 'extreme' fire danger days could increase significantly over the next few decades.

"Many types of climate-related extreme events are expected to increase in frequency and intensity in the future. The heatwaves, drought and bushfires of the past decade provide Victorians with a window into that future.

"Critical infrastructure, such as roads, railways and power lines, is vulnerable to prolonged exposure to high temperatures."

While the government is stripping \$66 million from community protection, it has recently given power companies \$62.5 million for infrastructure, part of a total package of \$200 million of taxpayers' money.

(The Bushfires Royal Commission found power faults responsible for five of the 11 main fires.)

The government has further rewarded them by permitting power companies to increase power prices across most of rural Victoria by \$1.30 a year initially, to peak at \$13 extra a year under the government's plan. The power companies are making big profits at the benefit of their customers and other taxpayers.

Leaked documents have exposed the State Government's claim that it will maintain frontline fire services despite the budget cuts.

According to a memo to CFA staff and a newsletter to local members, the impact on local firefighting in the Loddon-Mallee Region includes:

- Restrictions on recruiting volunteer firefighters (brigades need prior approval)
- Issuing second-hand uniform to volunteers (Wildfire and Structural Personal Protective Clothing)
- Caps on new firefighting equipment
- Caps on vehicle costs and building maintenance
- No additional funding
 - to cover CPI increases in the cost of diesel, power, telecommunications
 - to support additional Divisional Command Centres or new fire stations.
 - or for training 40 additional brigades gained under new boundaries.
- the cost of firefighting being pushed back on volunteers with the CFA aiming to "Encourage those brigades capable of doing so to fully fund their own initiatives."

Previously reported are the cuts in the Grampians Region:

- Staff cuts, vacancies not filled
- Where possible new recruits will be issued with second-hand gear
- Cuts to early fire warning by capping the costs of fire spotting towers
- Reviewing the issue of ration packs to firefighters
- Cutting back first aid training
- Deferring non-essential building maintenance

One outer metro CFA station which asked for 6 copies of the essential "Overall fuel hazard guide" and was told they could only have one, and to share it.



The Government says budget cuts won't affect frontline firefighting

And the MFB has frozen more than 80 IT projects, including the Spatial Data Collection Project.

According to one insider, this project "...will save lives and increase firefighter safety during major events. The proposed cuts (which seem to be in effect now) will see our front-line firefighters without the equipment and support that would be available, if not for these actions."

Despite the leaked memos and Emergency Service Minister Peter Ryan continues to insist that there will be no effect on frontline firefighting.

On September 4 he told media: "There is no way in the world we are going to reduce the front-line capacity of our agencies to be able to compete with the pressures that happen when inevitably we have the fires come again."

On September 12 he told Parliament: "I say again, as Mick Bourke has said repeatedly, that there will be no reduction in the capacity of CFA front-line services, and there will be no reduction in the ability of this great organisation to meet the ever-present threat of fire."

Ted Baillieu says in Parliament that the CFA has never been better off — yet Peter Ryan confirms they're cutting \$66 million from the fire budget.

Fiskville report

The CFA's Joy Report has confirmed that volunteer and career firefighters were exposed to toxins when training at its Fiskville training base in the 1970s and 1980s.

A report found that the CFA ignored warnings about using dangerous chemicals as a cheap fuel for training burns at Fiskville.

The CFA's admission that it exposed firefighters to hazardous chemicals at Fiskville is a first.

The six-month, \$4 million inquiry was prompted by a suspected cancer cluster.

The UFU says the injuries suffered in training at Fiskville are a lowpoint in Victoria's industrial history – and the State Government must move immediately to assist those affected.

It has again highlighted the need for the Victorian Government to pass laws recognising that certain cancers in firefighters are work related.

It is simply unjust that a federally employed firefighter at Tullamarine airport has recognition and support when facing cancer, but a stricken neighbouring firefighter from the MFB's Tullamarine fire station or the CFA's Greenvale fire station is abandoned to become a burden on their family and friends.

Separate to the exposure that toxins were used in training from the 1970s, previously secret water testing data has found high levels of contaminants in the dams that provide water for training exercises.

For years firefighters have complained of rashes, lesions and gastric illnesses after training at Fiskville but the CFA maintained that the water used in training was safe!

Presumptive legislation

Victoria's volunteer and career firefighters have united to call on all State MPs to support their campaign for State laws to recognise the increased cancer risk faced by firefighters.

Former CFA chief Brian Potter, who faces a range of cancers after years of service at the CFA's Fiskville training ground, is supporting the campaign.

The UFU and Volunteers Fire Brigades Victoria are contacting all State MPs and seeking an early meeting with Police and Emergency Services Minister Peter Ryan.

The move follows recent disturbing reports into firefighters being exposed to dangerous contamination and toxins at Fiskville.

The recent Joy Report confirmed that volunteer and career firefighters were exposed to toxins when training at Fiskville in the 1970s and 1980s.

Unregistered trucks

In an embarrassment for the CFA, a bureaucratic bungle has led to 22 fire trucks not being registered – some since 2004.

The vehicles were immediately taken off the road, leaving some stations undermanned or having to wait for back-up to respond to emergencies.

The Melton pumper was still off the road a week after the discovery after VicRoads objected that reflective metallic stripes on the truck did not meet current regulations.

Other unregistered vehicles were based in high fire-prone areas, including Marysville that was devastated during Black Saturday, and the Fiskville training ground.

The error put volunteers and career firefighters in a terrible position, where if they had have been involved in an accident where someone was injured, the liability would have been fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the volunteer and career firefighters.

UFU VIC BRANCH

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Branch Secretary: Peter Marshall
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National Industrial Issues

As Australia faces its hottest and driest fire season for a number of years various Governments and fire services around the country are instead concentrating on undermining the professionalism of firefighting and attacking key terms and conditions of employment.

The Australian recently reported an expected spike in cyclones, a return to heatwaves and an increase in grass fires in what has been classified as a severe weather season from October 2012 to April 2013.

Rather than consolidating a response to those conditions, shoring up numbers and ensuring all previously identified weak or hot spots are covered, Governments are choosing to cut budgets. This is flowing through to an attack on the terms and conditions of firefighters and the experience and training required.

The Queensland and Victorian Branches are currently facing serious challenges to key terms of conditions of employment including consultation on matters affecting firefighters in the workplace and the ability to challenge unlawful actions.

In Queensland the newly elected Liberal National Government has not wasted any time in legislating draconian measures, sometimes overnight and with no warning, that have wide-reaching implications for collective bargaining. This comes at a time when the Queensland Branch is negotiating its operational staff enterprise agreement.

The Queensland public sector is facing a significant struggle and the firefighters are in the thick of it.

There are some consistent themes around Australia when the types of clawbacks in terms and conditions and the attack on the professionalism of firefighting are considered.

In Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria there has been a push to employ non-operational firefighters from recognised fire services into operational roles, and in particular into middle and upper management roles.

This is a serious concern as it directly impacts on the safety of firefighters on the

fire ground and therefore the protection of cover to the community. The job is difficult and dangerous enough without having management that do not have the necessary experience of the fireground and the training required.

The necessary years of experience and training saves lives. These are standards long fought for. Firefighting is a profession and any eroding of the experience, skills and training required can only result in disaster.

In Queensland and Victoria there has been cancellation of recruit courses.

In Victoria this has wide-reaching implications as it is a direct breach of the requirements of the operational agreement and the clauses relating to safe staffing.

In 2009 a Board of Reference heard extensive evidence on the lack of cover in some areas and even the fire service at the time agreed that it had to bolster its numbers, build stations and introduce new appliances.

“THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE HORRIFIC FATAL BLACK SATURDAY FIRES IN VICTORIA FEBRUARY 2009 REINFORCED THE INADEQUATE COVER, IDENTIFIED HOT SPOTS AND LISTED A NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRED TO REDUCE THE RISK OF SUCH LOSS OF LIFE AND PROPERTY AGAIN.”

The Royal Commission into the horrific fatal Black Saturday fires in Victoria February 2009 reinforced the inadequate cover, identified hot spots and listed a number of recommendations required to reduce the risk of such loss of life and property again.

Despite those inquiries, the extensive evidence that has demonstrated the necessity to employ additional firefighters and open new fire stations, and the requirements that were then incorporated into the operational staff agreement, little has been achieved.

Instead the fire services are concentrating energy and significant legal resources on renegeing on those requirements.

The Victorian Government has cut \$65 million from the fire services for the first year with more cuts to follow and make the hollow claim that it will not affect front line operational staff or operations.

There is an attack on overtime and relief throughout the country. In the ACT the fire service was prepared to close down stations so staff could attend training.

In NSW the fire service proposed taking career-staffed appliances off-line and therefore the closure of some stations to avoid paying overtime. Their austerity plans include using retained firefighters to relieve even if career firefighters are available. They have also rolled out an attack on rosters with proposals to reduce night shifts and encourage part time.

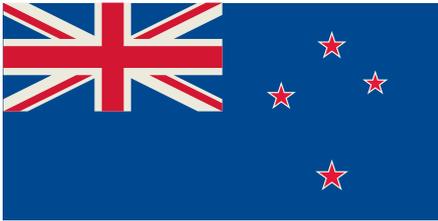
The National Executive held a meeting in Melbourne in September 2012 and discussed the issues each branch was facing and the campaigns and strategies being deployed to combat the attacks.

Firefighters have demonstrated their disgust at the budget cuts and proposed austerity measures by taking to the streets.

Hundreds of firefighters and ambulance officers marched on Queensland Parliament recently in a noisy demonstration.

More than a thousand firefighters marched through the streets of Melbourne culminating in a rally on the steps of Parliament on September 13 2012.

The UFUA is fighting back and not leaving any stone unturned to protect the conditions of firefighters including minimum staffing numbers and prevent the erosion of the experience and training required for career firefighting.



New Zealand

Relieving Firefighters – the 'fifth' shift

In the most recent collective negotiations between the New Zealand Fire Service and the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union, and subsequent discussions, agreement was reached on the introduction of new Relieving Worker positions. These new positions are over and above core staffing levels, and are not assigned to a specific watch. Instead, they are able to work across different watches to replace absences. In recognition of the flexibility that this provides the NZFS, those workers will receive, in addition to all other payments detailed in the CEA, an allowance of \$60 per week (gross).

Full details of how these new positions will operate are contained in Clause 2.3.5.2 of the new CEA. The new CEA is available on the NZPFU website or on FireNet.

NZFS and the NZPFU are working together to manage the introduction of these new positions and have met several times to progress this work since the CEA was settled. The introduction of these new positions will be phased over a number of years and it is anticipated that the first

group of these will be in place in early 2013.

Firefighter recruitment activity has been increased, with a total of 83 new recruits expected to be trained between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013. A 23-person course is currently at NTC, with a further 12-person course to commence on 1 October. There will then be two further 24-person courses between January and June 2013. This will enable sufficient staff to be recruited to replace exiting staff, and increase our overall numbers to enable the first group of Relieving Workers to be appointed.

Absences

The NZ Fire Service has been instructed by government to directly address the matter of absenteeism. Apparently levels of absenteeism in the Fire Service are the highest of all of arms of the State Sector.

Consequently the Fire Service has begun a project to develop a nationally consistent Absence Management Policy. The Union has a concern to ensure that any such Policy is fair, non-punitive and properly targeted.

The Union has reached an agreement with the Fire Service which establishes the overarching principles to be adopted. The Statement emphasises that:

- The intention is to assist Firefighters;
- Privacy issues are respected;
- That Collective Agreement provisions must be adhered to.

As well, the Fire Service has accepted that if an outcome of the implementation of the Absence Management Policy is an increased role for Officers, this will be taken into consideration as far as remuneration rates are concerned.



USA

Candidates' contrasting attitudes to firefighters

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney has told workers that he will oppose collective bargaining rights for fire fighters, police and other public workers.

His statement, in a written response to a questionnaire by the Fraternal Order of Police, is in line with his attempt, as Massachusetts governor, to strip fire fighters and police officers throughout the state of their collective bargaining rights.

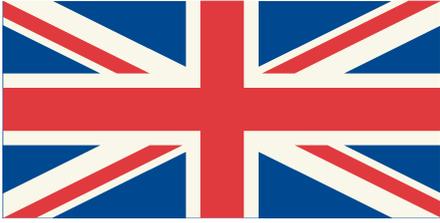
It's also in line with current policy pushed in Republican-run states, notably Ohio and Wisconsin, to strip state and local workers of all collective bargaining rights.

FOP sent a wide-ranging questionnaire on workers' issues to both Romney and incumbent Democratic President Barack Obama. One key question stated FOP's support for the Employee-Employer Public Safety Cooperation Act, legislation pushed in Congress - principally by the Fire Fighters - to tell those states that ban collective bargaining with public safety workers that they cannot do so.

In contrast, President Barack Obama says he supports a bill before Congress, the Employee-Employer Public Safety Cooperation Act, which would reverse the ban on collective bargaining by public safety workers in States which currently have one.

Mr Obama he would sign the Bill when it reaches him; he co-sponsored the Bill when he was a Senator from Illinois. Mr Romney has said he opposes the legislation, but promises to "consult" with "all stakeholders" about other issues.

Romney and Obama also split on whether first responders facing discipline by top brass should have due-process rights. They are also split on pensions for public workers. Obama says he supports the continuation of defined benefit - pensions for all federal law enforcement employees.



UK

Austerity measures hurting

Firefighters will join hundreds of thousands of other workers marching for their future in London and Glasgow on October 20, in protest at the Westminster coalition government's austerity measures.

Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack says the union wants a big attendance from FBU members and their families.

"Already our campaign coordinators in every region are looking at how this event can be built, transport arrangements."

Privatisation threat

Meanwhile firefighters in the UK's north-east fear mutualisation is the first step towards privatisation.

Cleveland's firefighters and emergency control room staff have grave concerns at any proposed 'management' takeover of Cleveland fire brigade under the Conservative government's mutualisation agenda. The drive towards some form of mutual fire and rescue service is a senior management driven initiative aided and abetted by an army of government funded consultants.

Despite management claims, there is no desire among firefighters and emergency control staff in Cleveland to adopt such a business model.

Staff are concerned it would not only lead to worse terms and conditions for themselves, but more importantly it could prove to be the stepping stone towards the eventual privatisation of a publicly owned, publicly governed essential emergency service.

Dave Howe, Fire Brigades Union Cleveland brigade secretary, says there is already evidence of what happens when the private sector gets involved in the UK fire and rescue service.

"In London, AssetCo were responsible for the whole operational fleet of fire and rescue service vehicles and they were in the courtroom more than the boardroom trying to stave off bankruptcy."



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School Fire Educator Greg 'Bungy' Williams Retires

After 18 years, 24,500 lessons to 90,000 primary school students, School Fire Educator Greg 'Bungy' Williams retired on June 1.



FOND FAREWELL: Railton Primary School Students (back from left) Daniel Williams, 11, Kyi Jacobson, 5, Shikayla Sheehan, 9 and Tarnae Bryan, 9, and (front from left) Teri Rand, 12, Makenzee Tuttle, 8, Lachlan Dawkins, 10, Firefighter Greg and Ashley Jones, 11. Picture Chris Tomes.

Greg Williams, commonly known as 'Firefighter Greg' on Tasmania's NW Coast, is so popular and well respected he can't even walk down the street or go shopping without someone saying, "Hi Firefighter Greg".

A school teacher once told Greg, "If the kids could vote they would elect you Prime Minister".

Greg was recently acknowledged by his fellow School Fire Educators when they named the main character of the School Fire Education Program after him. His 'Legend' will live on long after leaving the TFS.

We thank Greg for his professionalism, dedication and friendship over the years and wish him and his wife Joan all the best in the next exciting chapter of their lives. ■



Tassie firies team up for Muscular Dystrophy

BY VAL ANSETT PHOTOS: SENIOR FIREFIGHTER WARREN FREY

The Tasmania Fire Service, like other Australian Fire Services, was approached in April by the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation with the concept of being a part of the first national firefighting fundraising event. This event, called “Fill the Boot” has been held successfully in the USA over the last 50 years and has raised much needed funds for children and families suffering from Muscular Dystrophy. This is an illness that affects over 20,000 people in Australia. Most of these are boys. There is no cure, and most do not live to see their 20s.

For us, the true meaning of this event was brought home when two families suffering from MD came and visited Clarence Fire Station. Perhaps suffering is the wrong word. These four youngsters, whose bodies were failing them, brought with them an attitude towards life that we struggle to grasp each day. They radiated a true delight at being alive, and looked on in wonder as we explained what we did, showed them our tools and trucks, and lifted them from their wheelchairs into our world for a few short hours.

From that point, the idea of fundraising for these families became much easier.



A number of stations across Tasmania each held a fundraising event. For us in Hobart, we held a quiz night and raffle in early October. Through the extraordinary generosity of many local small businesses, we were able to raffle off almost \$2000 worth of prizes. People donated their time to host the evening, cook and cater for the 120 guests, and even our Industrial Officer Greg Cooper was able to offer his DJing abilities once the quiz finished. Firies, friends, family, members of the Muscular Dystrophy community and even the Minister for Emergency Services attended the night.

Other Stations raffled off trailer loads of firewood, held Grand Final barbecues or just all chipped in. All in all Tasmania raised close to \$10,000 from this event, and finished it off with a relay across the State by bicycle, motorbike and foot, ending at the Hobart Fire Station where the funds were officially handed over to the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation.

As firies, we are motivated by helping others and making a difference to someone's life. We see it almost every day. Personally, I found it very challenging to ask individuals and businesses to support our fundraising, yet by doing so we allowed so many others the opportunity to help. The generosity of local

Tasmanian businesses, support and admin staff and fellow firefighters humbled me, and I deeply thank them for this.

A phone call from one of our volunteer fundraising stations summed it up. The opportunity to fundraise had brought the entire crew together and focussed them on a single team building goal. Their event not only built on their own relationships, but further cemented their relationship with the community. It was fun, it was beneficial, and they even raised over \$1000 for those in need. An impressive effort on all counts. ■

Val Ansett is a Branch Trustee with UFUTas.

Insure a firefighter

Victorian firefighters have launched an unusual campaign to cover the MFB's cost of income protection for eligible firefighters.

The “Insure our firefighters” campaign will see firefighters rattle tins to raise funds for the MFB, at \$3 per firefighter per week.

The UFU won a historic victory when Fair Work Australia awarded Victorian firefighters employer-subsidised income protection covering non-work related injuries and illnesses.

The FWA-approved scheme will provide firefighters with income protection benefits at 75 per cent of base income, for up to 52 weeks, and is applicable to all Victorian Operational Staff.

The UFU launched its ‘Insure our Firefighters’ campaign at Richmond Fire Station where a rally heard from Melbourne firefighters, Wylie Hodder and Shane Lucas, who were forced to rely on donated leave and shifts worked by their fellow firefighters while they were off work battling life-threatening illnesses.

For more than a decade, Victorian firefighters have been unable to access industry-based income protection insurance.

Firefighters and their families, who face financial hardship due to an injury or illness outside of work, are currently forced to rely on ‘leave banks’ – the donation of accrued leave or long service leave entitlements by their colleagues.

In accordance with the FWA decision, the MFB is required to contribute about a quarter of the insurance premium with the remaining cost to be paid by individual firefighters. The MFB's required contribution, on average, is less than \$3 per week, per insured firefighter – the cost to individual firefighters, who elect the insurance cover, is about \$9 per week.

Significantly, implementation of the FWA-approved income protection scheme would remove firefighters’ forced reliance on the donation of accrued leave and the regular working of overtime shifts by firefighters to support colleagues off work and left without an income due to illness or injury. However



From left, MFB firefighters Tom Halloran, Wylie Hodder, and Joel Murphy. All three were stationed at West Melbourne Fire Station (where this picture was taken) when Mr Hodder began his 10-month battle against cancer three years ago. Tom Halloran initiated the shift and leave donations and Joel Murphy worked a number of shifts on Wylie's behalf. The trio joined the fire brigade four years ago and all are now stationed at Eastern Hill Fire Station in East Melbourne.

the MFB has recently lodged an appeal against the FWA ruling.

During the past three years, UFU ‘leave bank’ records show that Melbourne firefighters have donated more than 2000 hours of accrued leave to support sick and injured colleagues who were off work without an income. The leave donation represents only a fraction of firefighters’ support because the UFU cannot track donated shifts (day shifts are 10 hours, night shifts are 14 hours).

Should the MFB withdraw or lose its appeal against the FWA decision, funds raised by the ‘Insure our Firefighters’ campaign will be donated to the Royal Children’s Hospital Burns Unit in Melbourne.

32-year old Wylie Hodder is incredibly grateful for the donated leave and shifts worked by his fellow firefighters while he battled cancer and was off work for more than 10 months from June 2009 to April 2010.

With little accrued sick or annual

leave after less than a year with the MFB, Mr Hodder quickly used up his savings to help meet mortgage repayments and living costs. He shifted-in with his parents, who moved to Melbourne from the Northern Territory to support and care for him, while he underwent three rounds of chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant in his fight against non-Hodgkins Lymphoma.

When the first round of chemotherapy failed in August 2009, his then colleagues at MFB Station No 2, West Melbourne, organised a ‘leave bank’ on his behalf. During the next five months, firefighters at a number of metropolitan platoons worked 50 day and night shifts on Mr Hodder’s behalf and donated more than 260 hours of long service leave and accrued leave for his use.

Wylie Hodder returned to work as a firefighter in mid-April 2010 and now works as a firefighter at MFB Station No 1, Eastern Hill Fire Station, East Melbourne. ■

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