

Thousands more professional firefighters needed in Australia by 2020

The internationally recognised Climate Council has published a number of recent documents that have drawn heavily on peer-reviewed scientific literature, as well as on submissions to several recent enquiries and Royal Commissions.

In a recent publication the Climate Council have drawn upon an Australian research report published by the National Institute of Employment and Industry Research (the NIEIR).

The Climate Council agree with the NIEIR that by 2020 there is an urgent need for 5000 more professional firefighters across Australia.

In their 2013 report, the NIEIR stated –

“To keep pace with asset growth and population ... the number of professional firefighters will need to increase from approximately 11,000 in 2010 to 14,000 by 2020 and 17,000 by 2030.

When the increased incidence of extreme fire weather under a realistic warming scenario is also taken into account, a further 2000 firefighters will be needed by 2020, and 5000 by 2030.

Overall, this represents a doubling of professional firefighter numbers needed by 2030, compared to 2010.

These estimates are likely to be conservative because they do not account for the potential lengthening of the fire season, in addition to increased fire weather.

Further, they do not account for the increased pressures on the professional firefighting services due to declining numbers of volunteer firefighters.”

NIEIR 2013

The professional firefighter's role throughout Australia has increased to a point where they are responding to many different types of emergencies.

From structural fires, chemical spills, aircraft incidents and bush fires one day, to swift water, vertical / high angle rescue and emergency medical responses the next.

The role and value of professional firefighters to the community throughout Australia has greatly increased and now includes various separate qualifications and disciplines devised to better protect the population and their assets.

Climate Change is a major issue, however it is only one of the increasing pressures faced by professional firefighters and professional fire and rescue services around the world.

Over recent times climate change and its impact on Australia, (including the need for more professional firefighters across the country), has become a topic of discussion and an issue of debate within political circles.

The UFU welcomes these issues being discussed frankly, and we seek support from all politicians for the recognition that more professional firefighters are urgently needed.

We also welcome and support any announcements regarding the funding of the increase in professional firefighter numbers.

We seek federal government funding to go towards providing for the capacity for the states and territories to recruit and train the required number of extra professional firefighters.

The volunteers around Australia provide a great service, there is no disputing that fact but, simply saying that more volunteers and bush fire brigades (if they were available) will do the job is not enough.

Fully trained and qualified professional firefighters are needed to deal with the growing need to protect our communities.

Regardless of where they are in Australia, our cities and towns, big and small, our people, properties and infrastructure are all at greater risk from the effects of climate change.

The UFU seeks commitments from all those involved in campaigning for a seat in the Australian Senate or House of Representatives at the 2016 federal election for funding of the recognised need to urgently increase the numbers of professional firefighters across the country.