



# SITREP 41/13

## **O'Farrell's fire service budget cuts**

We've been asked numerous times over the past week if the O'Farrell Government had cut the fire services' budgets? When it comes to employee-related expenses (ie, our jobs), the attached table shows that the answer is a very large (\$54M) yes.

The Government claims it hasn't cut the budgets, it's increased them – which is true if you look at the bare figures and ignore minor details like inflation and scheduled wage increases. For those of us living in the real world, relying on real jobs and real wages, the truth is they've made cuts in the order of 8% to the employee-related budgets of both fire services over only three years.

Both FRNSW and RFS jobs have already been cut. FRNSW has so far avoided mass terminations only by temporarily closing stations (TOLing), but there are further, deeper cuts in store that even large scale TOLing will not cover. Who voted for that?

## **Bushfire emergency - As bad as it gets?**

The bushfires over the last week has been accompanied by the usual RFS sponsored media frenzy. "Red October", as some hacks are now referring to it, was not the end of the world. Weather conditions, and the work of both professional and volunteer firefighters, minimised the loss of life and property.

What was unusual was the timing of these fires. Having such significant fire activity in October does not bode well for the 2013/14 fire season. This raises two political questions. Firstly, and most immediately, the events of this week highlight just how irresponsible the O'Farrell Government's budget cuts are. Secondly, the increasing incidence of extreme weather behaviour, which is broadly understood to be symptomatic of wider climate change, suggests that our job is going to get harder and our workplace less safe over the coming years. We need action on both.

Over the coming week the media coverage will be less about "bushfire heroes" and more about the causes and repercussions of the fires. We will be arguing, wherever and whenever possible, that the NSW Government must reverse the budget cuts.

## **Bushfire emergency 2 - interstate deployments**

Members would be aware of the arrival this week of ten MFB (Melbourne) appliances to cover for Sydney station crews and appliances that were redeployed to the urban fringe and/or to various strike teams around the state. The appliances were jointly crewed by two MFB and two FRNSW firefighters, maintaining the safe and effective minimum crewing of four that is standard in NSW, but absent south of the Murray. Ten QFRS appliances also arrived, however these were assigned directly to strike teams.

Several members have expressed concern over the arrival of interstate firefighters while many off-duty FRNSW firefighters remained ready and available to work. The Union understands that the MFB was called upon for a shortage of appliances, not firefighters, hence the split crews - our members could not be expected to operate unfamiliar interstate appliances and pumps.

The Union will be seeking a general post-mortem over the week's operations, including the seemingly reasonable deployment of interstate resources, but the many reports of members not being recalled to duty will be front and centre in those discussions. More to follow.



# SITREP 41/13

*Continued from Page 1*

## **Bushfire emergency 3 - Retained strike teams and Clause 29**

The Department activated the Retained Award's Clause 29, Attendance at Major Emergencies in response to the bushfire emergency over the last fortnight, advising the Union that strike teams were formed in MN1, MN2, MN3, MW1, RS1, RS2, RS3, RW1, RW2, RN1, RN2 and RN3 and, importantly, that all members were notified of this in advance. If this was not the case then Clause 29 may not apply.

Retained members who were notified of the operation of Clause 29 before deploying should be paid in accordance with that Clause. Retained members who were not so notified, or who responded other than as part of a strike team, should be paid as normal under Clause 6 including, if working in excess of 10 consecutive hours, overtime rates. Members with further questions about their entitlements under Clause 29, or who experience difficulties with their pay, should contact the Union for further assistance.

## **Who voted Liberal? Not the people of Miranda**

Last Saturday the voters of Miranda gave the O'Farrell Government a by-election belting with a record 26% swing against the Liberal candidate, and we were there to help. Scores of FBEU members donned old issue helmets and overtrousers to ambush the Government by handing out flyers urging voters to "Stop O'Farrell's fire station closures - put the Liberals LAST".

How did we go? Well we certainly influenced the result - around 2% of the swing was down to the FBEU's intervention. We also let tens of thousands of voters know first hand about O'Farrell's irresponsible station closures and budget cuts. If we can manage a similar mobilisation come the next state election in March 2015 then it is possible that many of the Government's more marginal seats (there are 20 on a margin of 10% or less) will fall.

The Union's Sydney South Sub-Branch delivered big time and made this happen. Special thanks to all members, staff and officials (and to SSSB Secretary, Mick Nairn, in particular) who put in some long hours on the day. We are a small union, and we are not affiliated to any political party, but we made more of a difference than unions ten times our size, both in respect of members and finances, to this by-election. There is a lesson in this for other workers and other unions.

There is also a lesson in this for Government MPs: stop the cuts to our job, or we'll be coming for yours.


## **AGM on next Thursday**


Members are reminded that the Union's Annual General Meeting that was this week postponed due to the bushfire emergency will now be held commencing 0900 hours next Thursday, 31 October at the Union office meeting hall, Belmore Street Surry Hills.

**Jim Casey**  
State Secretary

**Friday 25 October 2013**

## NSW fires services' employee-related budget cuts

						
FRNSW	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total	
	\$ 000	\$ 000	\$ 000	\$ 000	\$ 000	
Actual / Required	502,352	514,911	527,784	540,978		
Budgeted		509,476	513,285	514,617		
Shortfall	-	5,435	14,499	26,361	46,295	

									
RFS	2010/11	\$ 000	2011/12	\$ 000	2012/13	\$ 000	2013/14	\$ 000	Total
									\$ 000
	Actual / Required	90,321		92,579		94,894		97,266	
	Budgeted		91,523		92,512		93,085		
	Shortfall	-	1,056	-	2,382	-	4,181	-	7,618

COMBINED		-	6,491	16,880	30,542	53,913
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**Note:** The "Actual / Required" figures shown for 2010/11 are as reported whereas the figures for 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 in blue type are a 2.5% increase on the previous year, this being the already confirmed wage increase for all employees of both services for each of those years and therefore the bare-minimum necessary to maintain employee-related funding at their 2010/11 levels.