



The Hon Stuart Ayres MP

Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Minister for Sport and Recreation

Minister Assisting the Premier on Western Sydney

Mr Jim Casey
State Secretary
NSW Fire Brigade Employees' Union
1-7 Belmore Street
SURRY HILLS NSW 2010

Dear Mr Casey *Jim,*

As you will recall, earlier this year after being appointed as Minister for Police and Emergency Services, I met with you and a range of issues were discussed. These included, but were not limited to, opposition by the Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU) to the practice of temporarily taking selected fire stations offline when there are staff shortages (TOLing), your concerns that the NSW Government may not consider Firefighters to be "front line staff", and concerns about the impact of the Labour Expense Cap (LEC) on Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW). In addition, I spoke to you about the impact of high levels of Firefighter sick leave and resultant overtime, and the need to consider the entire resource profile of FRNSW when discussing possible enhancements to service provision.

I assured you that the NSW Government considers Firefighters to be front line workers, and that I would look into the issues you had raised with me. Having now been the Minister for some months and having had the benefit of gaining a greater insight into the operations and resources of FRNSW, I would like to provide you with an update with regard to some of the matters we discussed.

After the end of the 2013/14 financial year I asked Commissioner Mullins to provide me with a comprehensive analysis of FRNSW financial performance, Firefighter sick leave trends, overtime costs, and possible opportunities for service delivery improvements. This review highlighted the outstanding financial performance of FRNSW, the improving industrial relations environment and achievement of cooperative workplace reforms, and possible opportunities for incremental improvements. It also highlighted that the practice of TOLing had succeeded both in reducing overtime costs, to the point that it enabled FRNSW to meet LEC requirements, and had also contributed to a change in culture within the organisation whereby rates of sick leave have decreased.

Following this review I directed the Commissioner to develop options for my consideration which may have the effect of reducing the need for TOLing, whilst maintaining appropriate cost controls.

I am pleased to advise you that I have approved a range of measures for immediate implementation as follows:

- Approval to recruit an additional 40 Permanent Firefighters (10 per Platoon) who will act as a relief pool in Sydney, specifically to reduce the need for TOLing

- The placement of five new multi-purpose 4WD water tankers at fire stations on Sydney's urban / bushland fringe. These will be staffed by the 40 relievers (10 per Platoon) on Total Fire Ban days and sometimes also on days of severe weather alerts (high winds and storms). If absenteeism reduces to levels committed to by the parties as part of the 2008 Award (an average of 87 hours per year per firefighters), these firefighters would be available to staff the tankers most of the time, not just during severe weather and fire events
- Provision of an additional \$1.375 million to the Community Fire Unit program to enable equipment and technology enhancements recommended in a report by the Bushfire Natural Hazards CRC following the Blue Mountains bushfires

I am sure that you will agree that the above measures will make a significant difference to the front line capabilities of FRNSW as a first response emergency service. The budget performance of FRNSW together with evidence of continuing workplace reforms has significantly influenced the Government's decision in this matter. Of greatest significance is the reduction in sick leave and overtime costs which has been a major factor in enabling FRNSW to meet budget targets. I believe that this is further evidence of the commendable commitment of firefighters, and that it should be both recognised and rewarded.

The reduction of TOLing, is now a matter firmly in the hands of FBEU members. Analysis has shown that an additional 10 relieving firefighters per Platoon should eliminate the need for TOLing on most days and nights of the week. If absenteeism increases, there will be a consequential decrease in the ability of FRNSW to meet budget requirements. The only tool realistically available in such a situation will be to increase TOLing. I hope that this will not be the case and that Firefighters will continue the trend toward the agreed sick leave target of 87 hours per year.

Please do not hesitate to contact Commissioner Mullins should you have any queries regarding the matters covered in this letter.

Yours sincerely



20/11/14

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