



SITREP 15/16

2016 federal election called

Australians head to the polls on Saturday 2 July (seven weeks from today), for a double dissolution election, ostensibly due to the current Senate's rejection of the Turnbull Government's anti-union bills.

This election is an opportunity for all Australians to elect a government that understands the lives of working people and will govern in our best interests. Australians deserve a government that will put our interests first, create real jobs and fund health and education with revenue from a fair and equitable tax system. Cutting corporate taxes and crossing your fingers isn't a plan. We need a government that will support a vibrant public sector, recognise and respect workers' rights and encourage new industries and new secure, well paid jobs.

The Turnbull Government has failed us. The FBEU recommends that members **put the Liberals last**.

Jim Casey and Grayndler

Most members would by now be aware that the Union's current State Secretary, Jim Casey will be the Greens' candidate for the Sydney seat of Grayndler, currently held by the ALP's Anthony Albanese. To be clear, the Union is campaigning neither for nor against either candidate or party and we wish both Jim (a firefighter, FBEU member and advocate for working class people) and Anthony (a long-standing friend of the FBEU and advocate for working class people) well in what looms as a potentially tight contest. Our advice to members within Grayndler is therefore, as elsewhere, to **put the Liberals last**.

Members should note that Jim (who is presently on leave without pay from the Union) is comfortable with his Union's neutrality on this question and as reported in SITREP 4/16, that no FBEU funds or resources have been or will be offered or used in his election campaign.

Workers Comp medical appointments Know your rights

The Department's workers compensation insurer is attempting to undermine members' doctors by compelling members to attend appointments with insurer-picked doctors and threatening their workers comp benefits if they do not. One member received a SMS instructing him to meet a psychologist in a shopping centre café 80km from home and another was grilled for seven hours by a psychiatrist he had never met. The insurer even claimed that the purpose of the appointment was to ensure the member got the best possible care, when in reality it was seeking evidence to undermine member's claim.

WorkCover has issued clear guidelines on when and how members can be required to undergo medical assessments. Text messages and phone calls do not satisfy those guidelines, and depending on the purpose of the appointment you may not be required to attend at all. Members who are contacted by a doctor, rehabilitation provider, case manager or the insurer and told to attend a medical appointment are advised to:

- request the notification in writing;
- request a contact email address for the person asking them to attend the appointment; and
- contact the Union office for further advice and assistance as soon as possible.



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Blood sugar testing

A recent flu vaccination session at one permanent station saw members asked (in a closed room away from other members) if they would also like their blood sugars tested right there and then. Most refused but at least one agreed. Why the concern? Blood sugar measurement is a diagnostic and management tool for diabetes, which sits on the Department's list of 'flags' for fitness for duty. There have been numerous medical retirements where diabetes/blood sugar management was the major factor.

Apart from the issues of medical privacy and basic sharps control hygiene, the test offered had limited value from a diagnosis point of view as a one off test. Worse than that, it could flag false positives (particularly if it is not conducted by a qualified professional, ie a nurse) and force you off duty while the Department determines whether there is actually anything wrong. Members are advised to decline offers like this. If you are curious or concerned about your health then see your own doctor.

RTAS "upgrades"

The Union yesterday raised our concerns with Commissioner Mullins over this week's RTAS changes, which we were not consulted over and do not agree with. We have requested that the system revert to its previous operation asap (including hanging up after 20 seconds) and while Mr Mullins stopped short of agreeing there and then, he did commit to urgently review the situation. More than next week in SITREP 16.

In the meantime, retained members are reminded that you are not required to confirm whether or not you are responding to a call. Indeed, the Union advises against doing so. Knowing that four firefighters are on their way to a call would very quickly lead to the Department initially notifying only four members rather than the entire station. This would drastically reduce both retained income and jobs. Members are required to declare 24 hours availability each week and to attend a minimum of 33% of all calls and 75% of all drills. And nothing more.

In brief ...

- Further to SITREP 14, the Department this week agreed to maintain Weston and Abermain as separate brigades until at least January 2017 while negotiations over their proposed merger continue.
- Tickets (\$45) for the 2nd Rex Threlfo Annual Toast to be held at Doltone House, Hyde Park on Tuesday 19 July go on sale online next Friday.
- As first reported in SITREP 10, 341 Kariong moved to 24/7 permanent staffing, and 292 Doyalson to Special Roster at 0800 hrs yesterday. Discussions are already underway over 452 Tamworth.
- The recently threatened mass transfer of members in ME3 has been put on hold following Union representations to the Department, which yesterday agreed to consult before any new transfer policy or procedure is implemented.

Darin Sullivan
President and Acting State Secretary

Saturday 14 May 2016