



SITREP 12/17

Fire and Emergency Services Levy

The Berejiklian Government has finally introduced its Fire And Emergency Services Levy Bill to replace the current levy on insurance companies (not policy holders) that funds three-quarters of the \$1 billion per annum cost of running FRNSW, the RFS and SES. This new "FESL" was until recently known as the ESPL, but somebody decided that Emergency Services Property Levy sounded too much like the big new tax that it is and borrowed the friendlier-sounding FESL from Victoria instead.

Debate on the Bill was adjourned until the end of this month, when the Government hopes to ram it through Parliament. The Government's FESL website (emergencyservicespropertylevy.nsw.gov.au) unhelpfully advises that "*FESL rates are still being determined*" and that "*Levy rates will be published on 30 April 2017 when property values and the budget for the emergency services agencies for 2017-18 are known*". Cynics could be forgiven for thinking that the Government was trying to hide the actual cost impact from the Opposition and the public at large until after the Bill is passed.

The Union office has spent the last week or so reviewing the Bill and modeling its impact, but this work is not yet complete so we've reserved our final judgment on the Bill. More to follow in SITREP 13.

New Minister

My first meeting with new Minister Troy Grant last week was positive. He appears more receptive to our concerns than his predecessor, and has a real-world understanding of retained firefighters. Which he is going to need if the Department presses ahead with its RBRP cuts. More on that next week.

Review of workers' comp scheme - update #1

Any member who has had the misfortune to be caught up in the workers compensation disputes handling maelstrom could have told you this, but the NSW Parliament's Standing Committee on Law and Justice last week found the system of handling disputes between insurers and injured workers to be riddled with delays and inconsistent decision-making. As reported in SITREP 29/2016, the Union made a submission and also appeared before the Committee.

The Committee found insurers had issued notices that claimants found "confusing and overwhelming" and recommended they be simplified and easier to understand. In line with the Union's submission it also recommended that covert surveillance by insurers be better regulated with a set of guidelines on acceptable conduct. This was in response to evidence from injured workers who were dealing with mental health issues including anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychologists have blamed aggressive insurance company surveillance techniques for aggravating an existing mental health injury.

The recommendations also aim to stop insurers from doctor-shopping for medical opinions that support their denial of claims. Of course, whether or not these modest recommendations are ever implemented depends on the Berejiklian Government, whose form on workers comp says you wouldn't bet on it.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Leighton Drury".

Leighton Drury
State Secretary

Friday 17 March 2017