



# SITREP 14/17

## **RBRP threatens Retained system – update #2**

This is the first update on the RBRP threat since SITREP 2/17 due to the focus at that time of both the Union and Department on the negotiations for new permanent and retained awards. There was nothing more heard from the Department until mid-March, when Interim Commissioner Hamilton suddenly wrote to advise "*FRNSW intends to move forward to implement the Risk Based Response Protocol program in the near future*". That letter prompted an immediate Union response, and led last week to the first (and only) real face-to-face meeting between the parties on the RBRP issue in almost four months. A copy of both of those letters can be found as a link in the online version of this SITREP.

The upshot of that meeting was that no progress was made and so the Department gave the Union until Easter to come back with alternative proposals before it begins the RBRP commencement process. That's only a week away, so there will definitely be more to follow on this in SITREP 15.

### **AFA response - two or none?**

As members would be aware, one aspect of the RBRP is the proposed response of only one appliance to most automatic fire alarms (AFAs). The response of two crews to AFAs is as much about our safety as it is about operational capability. The Department might see single-pump responses as an easy way to save a few bucks (and to help bring in MFR, as reported in SITREP 24/13), but we don't.

To add insult to injury, the Berejiklian Government intends allowing this to happen barely 4 months after it ramped up the charge for AFAs to an eye-watering \$1600. To put that in perspective, it was "just" \$500 when O'Farrell was elected just 6 years ago. Only the Liberals could attempt to cut a public service by 50% after increasing the charge for it by over 300%.

The Department has been warned that the Union may ban single-pump responses to AFAs, potentially leaving the Berejiklian Government facing the choice of two pumps or none. More to follow.

### **Berejiklian's billion dollar new tax Update #1**

Further to SITREP 13/17, the Berejiklian Government's Fire and Emergency Services Levy Bill passed both houses of Parliament last week, despite opposition from both Labor and the Greens, who were opposed outright and went so far as to join the FBEU in questioning why there is a separate levy for fire and emergency services at all. For links to Hansard and the FESL debate (MLC David Shoebridge's speech on 29 March was a standout) see the online version of this SITREP.

Labor was unfortunately more accommodating of the Government's position and sided with it on the principle of a land-based tax to replace the levy on insurers, but nonetheless opposed the Bill as explained by Labor MLC Adam Searle:

*"We have difficulties with the detail of the scheme. We support the principles embedded in the legislation, but our profound concerns are that the bill as it currently stands will significantly shift the cost of funding emergency services in this State further onto the shoulders of individual households and away from owners of commercial properties and other businesses, which will lead to a significant windfall for insurance companies. Those are our concerns. The Opposition will not support the bill."*

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Both Labor and the Greens repeatedly quoted our figures, even if we detected a degree of uncertainty amongst at least some of the ALP members about our calculations. The Government has promised to release its own calculations on 1 May, at which point we will all know just how close our estimates in SITREP 13/17 were. We remain confident that we were very close.

The best response the Government could manage was a less than convincing comment that the FBEU's figures "*do not appear to accurately reflect the amount of FESL that property owners will pay*". We'll all know soon enough. In the meantime, members who are interested can find the full tables that we produced for the Parliamentary debate in the online version of this SITREP. We recommend that all households locate and keep any recent home and contents insurance policies they can find in order to measure the real saving (and some households *will* save) or cost of the FESL.

If we are correct about the real cost of the FESL then the Government can expect a backlash about the big new tax that Gladys just handed hundreds of thousands of households when the next council rates come out in July. And again in October, and January 2018, and every quarter through to the March 2019 state election. While the old ESL appeared on your insurance policy (if you had one) only once per year, this new FESL will appear on everyone's rates notices 4 times a year.

It's possible that nobody will notice or care and our efforts here were wasted, but I hope not. Aside from having done the right thing by alerting the public to this billion dollar insurance industry rip off, it's also possible that the FBEU's work on this issue will further undermine public confidence in the Berejiklian Government and help remove it from office in 23 months' time. Or, if you are a voter in the North Shore, Manly or Gosford by-elections, tomorrow.

## North Coast floods and Cyclone Debbie

Members' feedback to the Union office suggests that the advice from the Department on what and how to claim for attendance at the North Coast (NSW) floods and Cyclone Debbie (QLD) is currently erratic at best. The Union has sought a meeting with the Department next week to work through all the issues and ensure that management is clear on all members' entitlements.

Detailed advice will follow in SITREP 15 but for now the Union can confirm that:

- retained members who have attended either incident (ie NSW or QLD) will in most cases claim and be paid in accordance with the Award's Clause 29 - Attendance at Major Emergencies;
- permanent members who have attended the QLD emergency for 48 hours or more will in most cases have done so under the Award's Clause 12a - Interstate and International Deployments; and
- permanent members who have attended the NSW floods only have definitely not done so under Clause 12a, and remain entitled to all of the Award's standard provisions.

Leighton Drury  
State Secretary

Friday 7 April 2017