



7 June 2022

The Hon. Steph Cooke, MP  
Minister for Emergency Services and Resilience  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Via email: [office@cooke.minister.gov.au](mailto:office@cooke.minister.gov.au)

Dear Minister Cooke,

**RE: NSW professional firefighters should not be left behind**

As you are no doubt aware the NSW State Government yesterday made significant announcements regarding increased funding and resourcing across the health sector including NSW Ambulance. This includes a one off \$3000 “thank-you” payment.

Alongside this announcement your government has also announced an increase to the current public sector wages cap of 0.5%

While the FBEU and its members acknowledge these announcements it seems that once again your government has left professional firefighters behind.

While your government was developing these policy announcements for Health, NSW’s professional firefighters were in the Industrial Relations Commissions being forced to fight for basic rights in our Award such as the right to be consulted on key decisions that impact their work and safety each day.

This is not good enough from the NSW Liberal/National government nor by you as Minister.

For too long professional firefighters have been asked to “make-do”, continuing to do more with less through major emergencies including the Black Summer bushfires, the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent floods.

While firefighters have been focused on protecting the community of NSW your government has allowed FRNSW to:

- Close over 50 Fire Stations across NSW.
- Abandon standards of fire cover meaning the community cannot be guaranteed a fire response in a timely manner.
- Abandon safe systems of work leaving firefighters at risk on the fireground.
- Fail to recruit even close to enough firefighters to keep up with population growth.
- Allow Fire Stations and appliances to become so outdated many can now be considered dilapidated and no longer safe.

Firefighters have continued to be patient seeking reasonable resolution to their concerns however as the representative body we can no longer wait.

As you are aware, we are currently in contested Award negotiations for new Awards to cover both permanent and retained professional firefighters across NSW.

To date the FBEU’s position, which has consistently been rejected by your department, has been entirely reasonable with our most recent position to FRNSW as follows:

- 1 year term with a 25 February 2023 expiry date for 3 awards.
- The Death and Disability Award to be resolved via one further conversation between the parties to ensure clarity on all matters.
- Wages increases in accordance with the FBEU's original log of claims.
- FBEU's proposed 'Medical First Response' draft clause, which would properly investigate this work, to be included in the Permanent Award but retitled to account for FRNSW's feedback and for work to be referred to as 'Emergency Life Support' (attached)
- FBEU's consultation provision as provided at the meeting of 6 May 2022 to be included in both the Permanent and Retained Awards (attached)
- FBEU's Disputes Avoidance Procedure as outlined in our original log of claims be included in both the Permanent and Retained Awards.
- FRNSW updated definitions of emergency meals and refreshments to be include in both the Permanent and Retained Awards.
- Insertion of FRNSW's agreed Relativities clause.
- Insertion of FRNSW's agreed Regional Training Roster clause.
- Insertion of FRNSW's provision regarding payment of annual leave for retained in the Retained Award.
- Inclusion of FBEU's updated agreed list of Authorised Duties in the Retained Award.

FRNSW have however refused to accept this reasonable offer of settlement put by the FBEU and advised they intend to proceed to arbitration.

A key threshold issue which remains outstanding is FRNSW's position that firefighters agree to perform an expanded role of medical work. This role is proven in other jurisdictions where it is performed, to directly correlate with a significantly increased risk to firefighter health and well-being and mental health illnesses, particularly when implemented without proper support.

Despite this, FRNSW have pushed ahead to seek to implement this program with no proposal for proper training, resourcing, policies and procedures nor support for employees. To add insult to injury, the position of your Department is that firefighters should give up current conditions to pay for this expanded service on the basis that this is required by current Government wages policy.

Given the announcements made today, including the significant investment in NSW Health and Ambulance Service I can advise that the FBEU will absolute not entertain firefighters performing this role without an equally significant investment in the resourcing needs facing firefighters.

I write to advise you that today the FBEU will be re-examining its position in the context of Award negotiations to ensure that no Minister leaves us behind. Firefighters deserve better.

On this basis I seek an urgent meeting with yourself to fully brief you on these matters.

Please contact me directly via email, [ldrury@fbeu.net](mailto:ldrury@fbeu.net) to schedule a meeting.

Kind regards,



Leighton Drury

State Secretary