



13 May 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

Dear Minister Cooke,

RE: NSW professional firefighters lose confidence in their leadership

I am writing to you as the representative of professional firefighters employed by Fire and Rescue NSW (**FRNSW**), both permanent and retained, to advise you that firefighters have lost confidence in their leadership and FRNSW Commissioner, Paul Baxter.

The Fire Brigade Employee's Union (**FBEU**) is the representative body for over 6000 professional firefighters across NSW. Throughout April FBEU members met across the State in Special General Members Meetings (**SGMs**).

At these meetings a motion was passed advising that unless significant changes within FRNSW were outlined by Commissioner Baxter, then as State Secretary, I was to write to the Premier, the Deputy Premier, yourself and your shadow counterparts to clearly advise that FRNSW firefighters no longer had confidence in the Commissioner.

For some time now FBEU members have been extremely concerned about various reforms proposed by the Commissioner, along with failures in strategic leadership, which continue to be unresolved. At our SGM's members called on the Commissioner to communicate to all staff regarding the below matters as follows:

- The so-called 'plus plan' initiative be suspended and a joint FBEU/FRNSW review occur with deliverables important to FBEU members to be identified and then implementation of those to be continued; and
- A review of recent increases in non-frontline personnel to begin and take place over no more than 16 weeks, with reference to increases in non-operational and non-frontline roles such as but not limited to the Operational Assurance team; and
- This review specifically detail the expenditure caused by this sort of non-frontline increase and be undertaken with full consultation with the FBEU, with the full review report provided to the FBEU no later than one week after its finalization;

- The dangerous 2019/20 In Order which FRNSW contested in the IRC to allow FRNSW to take an extra 30 stations offline and for appliances to turn out with two firefighters to be scrapped;
- A strategic plan for new (additional) stations both permanent and retained be released within 12 months of the date of this motion, with no diminution of existing staffing or station closures, and this plan be released to the FBEU and then the public;
- A baseline of standardised amenities for FBEU members work locations to be created by FRNSW in conjunction with HSR's and the FBEU and released to the membership within 3 months;
- A full audit of all FRNSW firefighter amenities will be undertaken, completed and released to the FBEU no later than 12 months from the date of this motion;
- A fleet replacement program will be undertaken, completed, and funded by government from additional funds with no reduction in existing staffing profile within 12 months of the date of this motion to ensure that FBEU members have the best and safest vehicles to work with, noting our increasingly aged, decrepit or inadequate fleet.

Commissioner Baxter failed to communicate, as sought by the motion, with FRNSW firefighters.

As such, I am writing today to advise you that Commissioner Baxter no longer holds the confidence of his frontline personnel, FRNSW professional firefighters both permanent and retained, to advocate on behalf of firefighters and the communities they serve.

We therefore call on you, as the Minister for Emergency Services and Resilience to commit to finding a replacement FRNSW Commissioner who will act in the best interests of NSW residents and firefighters and advocate for the fire service NSW needs and deserves.

As you are no doubt aware, firefighters in NSW have been on the front line of consistent major emergencies in recent years from the Black Summer bushfires, to the COVID-19 pandemic and through to the major flooding events of this year. Throughout this time, they have been asked to keep doing more with less and with a Commissioner who is not prepared to advocate for their needs.

Our professional firefighters and the community of NSW deserves better.

Should you wish to discuss the content of this correspondence please do not hesitate to contact me directly via email, ldrury@fbeu.net and I would be happy to arrange a meeting to discuss.

Kind regards,



Leighton Drury

State Secretary