



OPERATIONAL AWARENESS AND 8 ON THE FIREGROUND UPDATE

The FBEU has consistently pushed for boundary reviews and broader sector reform because of longstanding concerns about the capacity of the RFS and other volunteer agencies to provide the community with an adequate and reliable emergency response.

That concern is based on several well-established issues:

- Unlike FRNSW, volunteer agencies cannot guarantee a response to incidents;
- Recent reporting demonstrates that active volunteer numbers are significantly lower than publicly claimed;
- GIPA material has confirmed that only a small proportion of volunteers hold the qualifications necessary for complex incident response, particularly structural firefighting; and
- This creates a direct safety risk for FBEU members who rely on properly trained and appropriately staffed backup crews to safely perform firefighting operations and protect the community.

This is precisely why the Union has pursued reforms such as the 8 on the fireground standard. On this point, **we are pleased to announce that this is being rolled out statewide, with work finishing on this process any day now.**

I recently became aware of serious concerns bouncing around the Rural Fire Service regarding the safety of their appliances statewide, and the resulting impact on its ability to respond to incidents.

The issue, which has seen around 60 vehicles taken offline and which may affect up to 1,700 vehicles statewide, relates to excess weight on appliances through incorrect stowage/excess stowage above recommended practice and possibly incorrect engineering, which is putting unsafe strain on axles and putting their vehicles at risk of catastrophic damage.

The impact of this is that the RFS are mandating the number of crew members allowed to respond on each appliance, and even how much those crew members can weigh. For example, certain Cat 9 appliances are limited to one crew member not exceeding 90kg in weight.

The latest issues surrounding RFS appliances and operational capability is simply the most recent example of why urgent structural reform is required. The current arrangements are not sustainable and are increasingly exposing both firefighters and the community to unacceptable risk.

Members are being placed in situations where they are expected to compensate for capability gaps elsewhere in the system while still maintaining safe systems of work and appropriate emergency response standards.

My understanding is that the Department has offered to assist the RFS to fill the gaps in their response network through the standing up of FRNSW appliances in strategic locations, but as of today it appears this offer to help has yet to be accepted.

I have sent letters to the Minister for Emergency Services Jihad Dib, as well as Commissioner Fewtrell and the RFS Commissioner Trent Curtin, asking them to urgently deal with this issue. [You can view the letter to the Minister here.](#)

Every week, we see the impacts on community safety brought about by historic failures from Governments to reform our sector and reduce duplication of services and reliance on flawed service delivery models.



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Officers in charge are asked to add the above possible failure or delay in response, more than usual, to their considerations when responding to incidents with the RFS, and reflect on what other resources may also be required to protect Firefighters and the community.

Members are also advised that they should not enter an RFS vehicle under any circumstances until this matter is resolved.

In Unity

Leighton Drury
State Secretary