



# SitRep 12/2021

## Budget Estimates

Last Friday the Minister for Emergency Services and the Commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW fronted Budget Estimates. Having spoken with MPs across the political spectrum in the lead up to it, the hearing was an important opportunity to have questions answered and to keep the issues that matter to us and our communities on the agenda.

The transcript of the day is available [here](#) but I wanted to particularly draw your attention to a few of the key issues raised.

Commissioner Baxter was asked about response times, specifically in Metropolitan Sydney. While we are all familiar the Department's many 'aspirational goals', he said that "there is not a benchmark as such" for response times but that the Department aims for "as fast as possible".

The average response time in urban fire districts in 2019/20 was 11 minutes 58 seconds. After FRNSW's own 1994/95 annual report noted difficulties in maintaining a 7-minute response time due to Sydney's expansion, 10 new stations were then built and opened. And there is the crux of the issue; what is possible with additional fire stations and firefighters is very different to what is possible when a fire service is underfunded.

When asked about the proposed Oran Park fire station, Minister Elliott said that it would be built "in due course" and that the original commitment was just to purchase the land. The Government's many reannouncements over the years say otherwise but this does seem to be his new line. After all, he was heard yelling in Question Time not long ago, "We never said we'd build it!" While Commissioner Baxter assured the committee that Oran Park was "the next priority for building of a new station and staffing," he confirmed that there was still no budget for it.

Minister Elliott was asked why there would be proposals to shift tankers from Katoomba and Springwood to Wallerawang and Windsor if there was an adequate number of appliances. In his response, Elliott somehow invoked the increased budget of the RFS to argue that professional firefighters are "adequately resourced".

We are operating in a difficult environment where a continual lack of investment, even for the highest priority areas, has become the norm. Hearings like this highlight the critical importance of building our long-term Fix Our Fire Service campaign that will hold both the Government and Department to account with community support behind us.

## Health Checks

Last week we held a further meeting with FRNSW around the Health Check process at which we expressed our concern about how the external agency UHG:

- Is not communicating properly with members or in a timely manner
- Seems to have the default position of sending members for further testing
- Is making decisions regarding fitness for duty over matters that do not seem to pose an imminent risk to members' ability to perform their normal duties



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We'll be sending FRNSW examples of where we believe UHG is working outside of their scope. Members' confidentiality will be maintained and specific details will not be provided.

We've been considering draft guidelines put to us by FRNSW around how they will manage noncompliance of health checks by members. These draft guidelines include a stepped process in which members will receive reminders and other prompts throughout the 12-month window with an ability to seek an extension of time. The extensions would be considered on a case-by-case basis. These guidelines have not been designed to be punitive and we will make sure there is a mechanism for members to appeal or dispute any part of the process.

## Retained Working Group

In [Sitrep 40/2020](#), we put a call out for interested members to be part of a Retained Working Group.

This group has now had several meetings. They are currently focusing on the sad state of the GARTAN system and already have a win under their belt.

Members had told us that they were fed up with waiting 10 minutes or more for their timesheets to generate for drills, but the issue has been resolved. Drills should now be coming through almost instantly in the timesheet system which means less time spent, unpaid, at the station.

We're already seeing positive outcomes from this group and want to know what you think is fixable in the Retained system. Get in touch with your ideas [here](#). You can talk to your station delegate as a team and submit your ideas collectively through your delegate. If you don't have a delegate, you can also get in touch with us individually.

The group has more internal meetings planned and will also be meeting with the Department shortly to discuss issues in more depth.

## HFSV and "Medical" Risk Assessments

Following meetings and discussions, HSRs with the support of the FBEU have written to the PCBU (FRNSW) to propose the development of working groups and proper consultation processes for these two very significant issues. The FBEU also expects that we are consulted on these matters. We are currently awaiting a response.

The Health and Safety Committee has been a great development and we are working really hard to use it to focus on the big picture. HSRs are reminded that the FBEU is facilitating monthly meetings and you are all welcome and encouraged to attend. These meetings are usually led by Emily from our office and by HSR Health and Safety Committee Chairs. They're quick updates about what's happening in the Committee and the Union.

The next meetings are:

**1800hrs – 1830hrs Wednesday 14 April 2021** (held every second Wednesday of the month)

**1300hrs – 1330hrs Thursday 8 April 2021** (held every second Thursday of the month)

Put these dates in your calendar and HSRs will get Zoom links prior to the meetings.



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## April Delegate Zoom Meetings

The next round of delegate meetings has been set and organisers are now distributing the details. If you don't have the details of your meeting, please contact your organiser.

Max Murphy – **Regional West, Metro West, MS3** – [mmurphy@fbeu.net](mailto:mmurphy@fbeu.net) 0408 617 217

Georgie Slater – **Metro North, Regional North, ME3** – [gslater@fbeu.net](mailto:gslater@fbeu.net) 0417 924 151

Jonathon Wright – **Metro South (excl. MS3), Regional South, ME1 and ME2** – [jwright@fbeu.net](mailto:jwright@fbeu.net) 0419 753 305

We'll be giving a preliminary report on the State of the Stations project and talking about where to from here as well as updating members on other major matters across the state. I encourage all delegates to come along to get the updates so you can discuss them with the members in your station/workplace.

## State of the Stations Audits

Our audits continue to come in and we are now preparing a preliminary report to discuss with members in our April delegates meetings. At the time of writing, we have more than 140 audits from across the diversity of the stations in NSW. The organising team is working hard to support stations who have not yet completed their audit. Please check with your crews and if yours is not done, get in touch with your organiser for any assistance.

The State of the Stations project is the beginning of a huge piece of work to assist members to come together and demand better for our workplaces. The report will identify priorities and issues that are widely reported and allow us to work step-by-step to make things better. The more information we have from the beginning the better we are able to set priorities and decide on campaigns and actions together.

## FBEU State Committee Elections

Nominations for State Committee of Management closed Monday 15 March. The candidates will now be finalised this coming Monday 22 March and we'll publish the list once we have it from the NSW Electoral Commission.

I encourage all members to vote in this election as our democratic processes only serve to strengthen our union.

You can find the full election timetable [here](#). If you have any questions, please contact the NSW Electoral Commission at [ballots@elections.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ballots@elections.nsw.gov.au) or the Union Office at [office@fbeu.net](mailto:office@fbeu.net).

In Unity,

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

**Leighton Drury**  
State Secretary