



SitRep 24

It's on: Budget Cuts Bite as Department Bends and the Bush Burns.

Earlier today, as professional firefighters join volunteers assessing the impact of the fires which are devastating towns and communities in northern NSW, Fire and Rescue NSW rescinded In Order 22/08.

In Order 22/08 came about as part of a big dispute about through an Award round and when the Department was looking to TOL stations and spread resources. Sound familiar?

The In Order, while not entirely welcomed by the FBEU in 2008, contains very important rules and restrictions about staffing, safety, resource allocation, and what stations and firefighters can be moved to deal with shortages, as example. The In Order was settled in a dispute before the Full Bench of the Industrial Relations Commission.

The FBEU is extremely concerned about the potential impact of the decision to rescind the In Order and the Department's failure to adequately consult on a decision that will have serious impacts on us, our jobs and the way fire services are delivered in NSW.

The FBEU has filed a dispute in the Industrial Relations Commission. We advise members that we expect the status quo remain in place – In Order 22/08 is not rescinded - while we seek the assistance of the Commission to resolve this dispute.

Particularly concerning for us is that the Department has made this move the day before we agreed to meet with them to begin discussions about your Award.

There's more to this, the Department knows it, and we know it.

In the lead up to the last election the FBEU made it clear that we believed we needed more professional firefighters and more fire services in NSW. Our regional communities are growing, development in in Western Sydney is off the hook, our fire seasons are getting longer and longer and we are seeing more and more fires and emergencies in regional and rural areas threaten both people and property, including houses and structural fires.

The Liberal Government made no commitments to increase the number of professional firefighters or fire fighting services in the State but they did say that there would be no reductions in frontline fire fighting services. Then, in May, they cut the budgets – both in operations and in capital expenditure.

We said can not do more with less. We maintain this position. Shuffling inadequate resources around and calling it risk mitigation is simply a tactic our Department is using to try to meet the budget cuts, rather than take them on.



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If the Department won't take on these budget cuts we have to. It's not okay to say you are prepared for anything when you simply can't be.

Our Department is running a huge overtime bill, it's a problem that can not be addressed without a genuine commitment to understanding the issues, part of which is, we simply don't have enough firefighters when and where we need them.

The FBEU will not accept that it is possible to meet the budget cuts AND reduce the overtime, without tackling the overarching issue – we have less firefighters in NSW now than we did in 2008.

Recently, the FRNSW Commissioner (who is currently on leave) when facing budget estimates in the Parliament said that he had made no requests for additional funding for more firefighters or fire services in NSW – facing staffing shortfalls resulting in big overtime bills and operational challenges including planning to change the way we organise resources, this really isn't good enough.

The Minister said, in budget estimates, that there would be no cuts to the frontline of emergency services as a result of the budget cuts. Rescinding In Order 22/08 to meet budget cuts and to bring down overtime bills is not an answer to the serious problem faced in NSW by residents who rely on us in an emergency.

Our thoughts are with our members who have worked so hard in Northern NSW this week – and to all our members who want our community to be safe and for us to be as best prepared as we can be for the next emergency we attend, no matter where and no matter when.

It's not only the fire that is burning today, threatening a regional community or a inner-city building covered in combustible cladding, firefighters are most worried about it.

We worry about the next one, and the next one... that's our job. We want to be prepared for anything – Should the Department and the Government penny pinch instead of working with us on the big issues the fact is we will be prepared for some things, in some places, some times. Firefighters and our communities deserve better.

While FBEU members across NSW await the next fire call, we are left with no choice but to file in the Commission about 22/08 today (BREAKING: This is listed for tomorrow before Commission Sloan) meet with the Department about your Award tomorrow, and ask that you stand by to take action to protect our jobs, our safety and our communities.

Leighton Drury
State Secretary