



# SitRep 32/2020

## **Covid Relieving Restrictions update**

A Code Red was put out last Friday to restrict relieving. This was done as part of reducing the ongoing risk of Covid 19 to firefighters and their communities with last weeks reported increase of hotspots. We will keep monitoring the situation and loosen or further restrict the Code Red as required depending on where the hot spots arise and how many people have been infected.

Following last Friday's Code Red, a message was sent out from Deputy Commissioner Fewtrell for "*the FBEU notice should not be put into effect by FRNSW staff*". It outlined FRNSW's disappointment in an instruction which only further protects firefighters from Covid 19. We were also made aware that members were told that disciplinary action may be taken against them if they followed the Code Red. To our knowledge, no member relieved outside the Code Red and no (nor should there be) disciplinary action has been taken.

On hearing of these threats, the FBEU listed a dispute in the Industrial Relations Commission which was heard on Tuesday. It involved multiple meetings with and without the assistance of the IRC. The Commission did not recommend we lift the Code Red. The Relieving restrictions remain in place until we go before the Commission. In the meantime, the Department has given an undertaking that no disciplinary action will be taken against members following the Union instruction.

I would like to thank those members who participated in providing evidence in the IRC. I would also like to thank those who met with us and the Department in the subsequent meetings.

With the increase of cases and spread over the weekend, members have shown overwhelming support for the Code Red.

The Code Red is predominately about keeping firefighters within "bubbles" and minimising how many stations, towns and areas they visit. For us, this is about trying to contribute to reduce the risks to firefighters, our communities, our close contacts and families.

As stated previously we will watch and assess. Each further outbreak means we must treat this seriously and a proactive response will always be better than a reactive one. Further to follow.

## **Thankyou, the one and only Greg Matthews.**

It is with great sadness that we say farewell to our Senior Organiser Greg Matthews, as he officially retires at the end of this week.

Greg has been a member of our Union since 1987 was a Retained Firefighter's representative on our State Committee of Management and been employed full time as the FBEU Country Organiser since January 2000, based in the Union's regional office at Temora.

Greg has been instrumental in increasing retained membership of the union to 2739, which equates to a density rate of 89%. This is an outstanding achievement. He has worked tirelessly on campaigns to improve



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retained wages and conditions over the last twenty years. Greg always made himself available to country members, to the point where he had to be directed to turn off his mobile phone after hours and on weekends - such directions were promptly ignored.

From all the rank and file members, State Committee and staff of the FBEU, Thank you Greg for your tremendous and tireless work for us all, you will be dearly missed – enjoy your retirement – NOW TURN OFF YOUR PHONE!

## Medical Certificates

Members have recently been asked by the Department to provide more specific details after submitting a medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner as supporting evidence for time off on sick leave.

Your Union has consistently been of the opinion that it is entirely unreasonable for the employer to know the specifics of any and every reason an employee uses sick leave.

It is our position that a medical practitioner is the judge of what needs to be written to outline to the employer that you are cleared to return to work. It is not the Department's role to question a medical practitioner, or cast doubt on a medical practitioner's integrity.

Your medical information should only be provided to the Department if it has an impact on your ability to perform your duties, and it is up to your medical practitioner to make that determination.

We are supporting our members where they are refusing to provide additional information. If you go on sick leave and you are told that your medical certificate is insufficient, we ask that you get in touch with us immediately so we can deal directly with the Department.

Fire & Rescue NSW is not listed on the list of medical practitioners provided by the Medical Board of Australia. We will not accept the Department taking this line with our members.

You can find a copy of the letter sent to us by Fire & Rescue [here](#), and our response [here](#).

## HSR Elections

Elections for HSRs are currently underway in Work Groups where there are more nominees than HSRs spots. We encourage members to vote for FBEU member HSRs and be active in the process of deciding your WHS Representatives.

We congratulate all those elected unopposed. The FBEU is organising across many WHS issues and we look forward to supporting HSRs in their important roles. As we get information about the new HSRs we will be in touch with all of you to talk through how we can support you and assist you in working together. For more information about our WHS organising get in touch with Emily Mayo – [emayo@fbeu.net](mailto:emayo@fbeu.net)



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## New Cancer Support Group

The FBEU has received the following information about a new peer based Cancer Support Group:

*The Cancer Support Group is a group of people touched by cancer who are united in their quest to help each other through their shared cancer journey.*

*This confidential support group will provide a safe place for FBEU & FRNSW members AND THEIR FAMILIES affected by cancer to come together to support each other in an emotionally supportive environment, develop friendships, share ideas and thoughts, obtain information from health professionals and each other, and learn coping skills in a non-judgmental and caring environment.*

*Through the experience of speaking with peers, it is hoped you will be empowered to seek the information and support you need, and will feel less alone and isolated.*

*If you would like to help or you would like someone to contact you for help, please email [cancersupportgroup@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cancersupportgroup@fire.nsw.gov.au) and one of the founders will be in touch.*

We also highly recommend you contact the FBEU via [office@fbeu.net](mailto:office@fbeu.net) for advice on your entitlements including legal assistance.

In Unity,

**Leighton Drury**  
**State Secretary**