



# SitRep 28/2020

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## **Wage freeze proceedings before the IRC**

As reported in the last few SitReps the Union has intervened in the wage freeze decision. The IRC dealt with the wage freeze case by considering the “threshold question” before moving onto the substantive Award determinations of the other Unions (including the PSA, the HSU and the Nurses).

The decision on the threshold question was brought down on Monday 22 June 2020. The Full Bench of the IRC decided that it has the power to order less than 2.5% pay, including zero increases.

The full decision can be found here:

<https://www.caselaw.nsw.gov.au/decision/172d9a9c2cfd5906bff9ddfd>

At the time of writing, the Unions, whose awards were expiring on 30 June 2020, were putting their case for a 2.5% pay increase. The government was arguing for a zero increase. A large component of the proceedings were taken up with the economic evidence put forward by the Unions about the importance of the increase to public servants for the stimulus of the NSW economy.

The case will come down to whether ordering a pay increase for public servants is the right kind of economic stimulus for the NSW economy.

Andrew Charlton, an economist, who was instrumental in the stimulus package during the Global Financial Crisis, gave evidence for the Unions that while there are many methods of providing stimulus to the NSW economy (including funding infrastructure projects) one of the most effective ways is to increase the wages of low to middle income earners, which is the case with public servants. His view was that providing the pay increases to public servants would be a more effective way of stimulating the NSW economy because of the propensity of these workers to spend almost all the increase, which has a multiplier effect on the economy.

The proceedings are due to continue on 24 July and possibly even 30-31 July 2020.

## **Armidale Driver Training Centre**



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The Armidale Advanced Driver Training program has been suspended since November 2019, with Fire & Rescue NSW providing a revolving door of reasons for this; first the drought, then the bushfires, and now COVID-19. At the same time, FRNSW has indicated that it is exploring other possible sites for the Centre, which is a process that has been largely shrouded in secrecy. Any member who has been trained at the Centre knows that the experience is essential in giving firefighters the skills they need to keep firefighters and our communities safe.

We wrote to the Department on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June demanding that there be an immediate resumption of this program at the Armidale Driver Training Centre, and for the Department to enter into meaningful consultation with Appliance Training in relation to any proposal to relocate the Centre. The Department responded and said that “all required consultation with relevant parties will occur in due course”. With now 8 months worth of recruits who have been unable to attend the Centre, and advanced discussions being had around proposed sites; the course is well and truly due.

This comes at a time when the Department has announced it’s intention to roll out “Simulation Training” for appliances. Our understanding is that this will involve members getting driving experience in Virtual Reality (let that sink in for a minute). Although so far they have indicated that they intend for this only to be supplementary training initially, I’m confident that members would share my concerns that this will set a worrying precedent for the delivery of the essential training we need to be able to fulfil our professional capability.

We as a Union, need to take every opportunity we can to advocate for the delivery of face-to-face training and to hold the Brigade accountable when it fails to do so. As such, we are asking you to support those impacted by this by signing onto a dispute calling for the immediate resumption of training and for the Department to consult with those impacted. To access the dispute letter click [\\*here\\*](#)

We are asking members to have as many people at their station sign as possible, and once this is completed to return it to [office@fbeu.net](mailto:office@fbeu.net) by Thursday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July so we can present it to the Department.

While I am aware that Retained Members do not attend the Centre, the FBEU believes that we should be aiming to include Retained in the delivery of this training and for this to even be a possibility we need to be pushing for the training to be run at all. As such, Retained are strongly encouraged to support this dispute.

## **Major Aerial Pumpers**

On Friday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, the FBEU was in the Industrial Relations Commission to talk about the new Major Aerial Pumpers, a never before seen appliance with a 25 metre platform and CAFS



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delivery. Members have indicated their concerns around poor consultation, disregard for their Workplace Health & Safety and a lack of adequate training for all those at Stations that will have the new appliances. While there is still work to be done to make sure we achieve these three things, at the IRC, significant progress was made in addressing these concerns. The Department have now said that they will complete a Risk Assessment with the impacted HSRs and to at the very least deliver some theoretical training for SOs, who they originally did not want to train at all.

As mentioned in SitRep 27/2020, there were over 30 members who submitted complaints to SafeWork NSW about this issue, in addition to an official complaint lodged by the FBEU. As a result of the influx of complaints, SafeWork have met with FRNSW and provided a list of things that the Department needs to address as they were failing to abide by the NSW Workplace Health & Safety Act 2011. It is fantastic to know that our members are that diligent on Workplace Health & Safety, that they are willing to raise it in a formal capacity in those numbers.

The FBEU will be continuing to advocate for the best possible outcome around training possible for these new appliances. If you have any updates about this issue please contact Organiser Max Murphy on 0408 617 217.

## **NIIENM Forms**

The Union has become aware of management taking action to discourage members from submitting NIIENM forms.

A reminder that submitting NIIENM forms are extremely important. This online tool records and manages reported incidents which affect your health and safety. Completing these forms assists in keeping records of workplace incidents, as well as providing an opportunity to prevent similar incidents from occurring again.

We encourage members to use this system proactivity to report injuries, illnesses, exposures, and near misses. This includes where an issue relating to safety occurs, no matter how minor it is. It helps to protect you, and hold the Department to account over safety issues.

If any members are being discouraged from submitting NIIENM forms, or needs help with submitting one, please contact us - [office@fbeu.net](mailto:office@fbeu.net).

## **Medical Work**

Today the FBEU attended the Industrial Relations Commission for a report back on the dispute concerning consultation of FRNSW's new medical work proposal. The Union reported on a



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number of concerning issues regarding the forthcoming nature of relevant information on this proposal along with the employers seeming inability to define how the proposal is different to previous iterations of medical work.

In particular, we remain concerned with the departments dismissive responses to well researched mental health and PTSD concerns which were prompted by the HSR network. Members are frequently reporting on the inadequacy in mental health support that FRNSW provides to assist those exposed to trauma. It is hard to see how FRNSW can justify increased exposure to traumatic events without a review of existing protocols, programs and funding without meaningful consultation with you on the front-line.

Anecdotal evidence from firefighters across the boarder in Victoria, supports the need for serious consideration of these parameters: *"It's really traumatic when you work on someone for 45 minutes, sometimes 10 minutes before the ambos turn up ... families stood beside you crying ... and you're just drained; I mean emotionally, physically, mentally"*.

Yet, when we formally put to FRNSW whether they considered the proposal have potentially adverse impact, FRNSW respond simply "No". Full stop. Rest assure that with this level of detailed response RSI is considered a low-moderate on the risk assessment for FRNSW management. More to follow.

## **Joint Consultative Committee returns**

This week saw the first JCC meeting since Commissioner Baxter started. It was a broad ranging discussion, but the committees for progression and promotion as well as retained issues were a main feature. Members would remember that these committees were committed to at the last award round. With the obvious setback of Covid 19 now on the decline these committees are being drawn up and feedback from the membership on these two issues will soon be sought. The structures of these committees will also soon be announced with member participation on those being a key component to your union's input. Watch upcoming SitReps for more information.

In Unity,

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