



SITREP 35/2022

FBEU Provides Feedback to FRNSW - COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT V.4

As previously advised to members, FRNSW circulated their proposed updated Covid-19 risk assessment (version 4) seeking feedback from the FBEU. The FBEU have provided a response which can be found [here](#).

The feedback provided takes into account the current risk environment and member feedback provided in relation to this matter and makes clear that we do not support extending the COVID-19 vaccination mandate to include a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccination.

The FBEU has also provided feedback seeking that FRNSW review their risk assessment to allow the return of unvaccinated employees to the workplace, with particular control measures including the use of daily RAT testing and relevant PPE, in particular P2 masks when interacting with members of the public. We have also reviewed the position of other comparable fire services, including Queensland Fire and Emergency Service and the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service, and note that neither service currently has a mandate in place.

Over recent months, FRNSW have themselves reconsidered their concerns regarding the risk of interaction with unvaccinated members of the public via events, including open day and other community safety and engagement activities.

The FBEU has put this position forward noting that the current risk environment, and what is known about it, has changed since the original risk assessment which was undertaken some months ago. Given the current level of immunity amongst the population through either vaccination and/or infection and the current lack of restrictions in the general community, we see little utility in continuing to require that employees of FRNSW are double vaccinated in order to return to work.

Likewise, the FBEU have taken this position considering the risk the mandate poses to employees, including psychological and potential physical impacts, along with the concerns regarding workload and fatigue associated with the sustained period of time of having some 200 employees taken from the workforce who cannot simply be replaced.

The FBEU's first priority is the health and safety of its members and should the risk environment change in relation to COVID-19, the FBEU will reconsider our position in line with the changing risk.

We have requested that FRNSW meet to discuss our proposed feedback and will inform members further of the outcome following that meeting.

Station Audits Dispute – FRNSW Plays Politics with Members Safety

After an initial conciliation on 27 May, the FBEU was again forced to return to the IRC last week, re-listing our dispute regarding consultation over Annual Workplace Inspections and Audits.

Following conciliation on 27 May, FRNSW agreed to meet the following week, to establish a process for consultation with the FBEU. This meeting was derailed by FRNSW who refused to submit key information to inform discussions, citing that gathering data from inspections would take a period of 5 weeks. Conveniently, that date exceeded the state budget process, thus denying members the opportunity for any genuine transparency in understanding whether FRNSW are truly advocating for prioritised capital expenditure for worksites.



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In last week's relisting of the matter in the IRC, FRNSW representatives were unable to articulate any specific reason as to why the information couldn't be provided, other than there being no central location for inspection data. On firm recommendations from the IRC, the FBEU are now in possession of this information with FRNSW turning '5 weeks' of work into an expedited hour or two.

As previously advised, these inspections/audits are designed to ensure compliance with legislation, including the WHS Act. In particular, FRNSW is tasked with remedying hazards and non-compliance, such as stations without appropriate extraction systems, and then producing an 'annual report' for the Commissioner.

According to FRNSW IR, an annual report hasn't been produced in years.

As members are well aware, the FBEU's 2021 State of the Stations survey process highlighted significant shortcomings in safe working conditions compared to brigade's interstate, as well as a deep frustration concerning FRNSW's long-standing approach of 'crying poor' when it came to workplace safety.

It is important for members to understand the magnitude of disrespect and negligence in this sorry state of affairs.

FRNSW agree that your worksites aren't 'fit-for-purpose'. Through an annual audit process, they receive information from you and your crews about the extent of the specific risk and hazards associated with these shortcomings. And then, they do absolutely nothing with it.

FRNSW don't ask for money. They don't fix anything. They then turn around and argue that things are difficult and expensive and that they are dealing with 'other priorities'.

FRNSW have been issued with six [Provisonal Improvement Notices \(PINs\)](#) this week, but we're going to need a lot more action to turn things around.

Interested in getting involved in the HSR space? [Get in touch here.](#)

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary