



Emergency Services Minister announced

On April 4th, the new Labor Government announced the appointment of Jihad Dib as Emergency Services Minister. Previously the Shadow Minister for Emergency Services, Minister Dib is intimately aware of the priorities of FBEU members, and what professional firefighters need to get the job done safely.

Minister Dib is also aware of the successful campaign run by FBEU members to vote out the previous Liberal/National Government, having participated in our 2022 Delegates Conference and campaign planning, and having witnessed our impact on the ground in marginal electorates.

We met with Minister Dib last week ahead of his first formal meeting with Commissioner Baxter to congratulate him on his appointment. We will continue to work with the Minister to ensure our work is respected and valued.

FRNSW Fatalities report

We have been in discussions with FRNSW for some months concerning a peer-reviewed report commissioned by the department on fire fatalities within FRNSW jurisdictions.

Contrary to Commissioner Baxter's recent comments in budget estimates, the report is said to reveal a skyrocketing trend in fire fatalities with strong correlations to the growth in population and new dwellings in NSW, along with a plateauing of professional firefighter numbers and service expansion. Further, the report is said to re-ground the benchmark for an adequate response in fire science including the proximity of station locations to growing areas, weight of attack from appropriately trained firefighters, and response times considerate of the alarming survival rates in structural fires.

Obtaining the report from FRNSW continues to prove difficult as it appears to have been purposely buried prior to the State Election. Last week, the department responded to a GIPA (freedom of information) request on the matter requesting the FBEU front several hundred dollars in order for FRNSW to review the report first. In correspondence you can read [here](#), FRNSW goes so far as to identify the cost and time associated with GIPA staff reviewing individual pages of the report.

So why the secrecy? Well, according to Commissioner Baxter, firefighters don't actually save lives. It's a company line that has been run since the commencement of his employment in 2017. A line we have seen continually used in budget estimates:

- "When we look at that whole system year on year on year, we have continued to track down in terms of the amount of residential fires occurring, the amount of fatalities occurring and the amount of significant injuries occurring." ([p50, Sep 22](#))
- "The primary part of our job is community interaction" ([p75, Mar 21](#))
- Closing fire stations (TOLing) is "a last measure for us to do it, but it is a way of moving to a more modern application of our resourcing approach, rather than the old-fashioned approach was a fire truck sitting in a station to respond to its local area." ([p39, Oct 21](#))
- "We can't get to a structure fire ... in under the time it takes for a building to be fully engaged in fire ... we simply cant make that" ([p73, Mar 21](#))



- “Those [historic guarantee of service commitments] were quite outdated response time guarantees. My understanding was that they were removed some time ago. We do not hold the measure of 10 minutes today, no.” ([p44, Oct 21](#))

Proposed review of Plus Plan expenditure

Despite FRNSW management ignoring what must surely be a primary performance indicator for the agency – fire fatalities – and imposing unreasonable and dangerous budget restraints on front line firefighters, FRNSW appears also to have an ‘interesting’ relationship with external consultants. Under the leadership of Commissioner Baxter there has been a 137% increase in consultant costs within FRNSW, tabling more than \$11.8 million dollars.

Members will recall that a review of Plus Plan expenditure was called for in May 2022 as further escalation to FBEU members vote of no confidence. Correspondence to the then Minister for Emergency Services and Resilience can be found [here](#).

Through careful analysis of FRNSW Annual Reports and documents obtained through GIPA (freedom of information), our Union has begun to quantify the expenditure related merely to *consultants* involved in the creation of the Plus Plan re-brand and the validity of those relationships. This remains an unnecessarily difficult task with FRNSW unable to locate key contracts of significant value.

Spending in the public sector must be undertaken with transparency, accountability and value for money. For many years FBEU members have been very clear about the basic essentials that professional firefighters have gone without. With the community now also statistically worse off under the Plus Plan strategy, our Union will be actively campaigning for a forensic analysis of FRNSW accounts under a new NSW Government.

More to follow.

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary