



The Plus Plan is no plan at all

On Wednesday the FBEU gave evidence before the inquiry into the NSW Government's use and management of consulting services, coordinated by the Public Accountability and Works Committee. As referenced in [Sitrep 37](#), a submission by the Union had been provided to the inquiry which examined the appropriateness of public money spent by FRNSW on 'Plus Plan' consultants. A copy of the submission can be found [here](#).

Acting Commissioner Fewtrell also fronted the inquiry to give evidence on behalf of FRNSW. Members can find a video recording of both sessions on the following links: [FRNSW session](#) [FBEU session](#)

This comes just days after the parties were before the NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal concerning FRNSW's inability to locate the contract of a particular Plus Plan consultant who was engaged for almost half a million dollars during the 2017-2018 financial year. It was those circumstances which had the agency in the media this week for all the wrong reasons. In [ABC news coverage](#) on Wednesday, consultant and strategist Dr Marc Stigter, referred to as a 'friend' of outgoing Commissioner Paul Baxter, was cited as earning \$6000 a day during a four year engagement with FRNSW which commenced in 2017. For the record, the suggestions that the two were 'friends' derives from a public interest disclosure provided to ICAC in 2021, made available to the FBEU through freedom of information. That correspondence is available [here](#). The FBEU make no comment on the matter.

However, as Mr Stigter clarifies to the inquiry Committee in this [public letter](#) dated 4th August 2023, the two have little more than a long-standing professional relationship spanning more than a decade, documented in contractual relationships across two countries involving organisations led by the outgoing Commissioner. The letter also provides important clarity to FBEU members regarding exactly what value for money the Plus Plan provided firefighters. Notably, improvements to training, health and safety, and enhanced response capabilities. Bang for buck? I will leave that for you to judge.

The inquiry has been an important platform for the Union to voice your concerns about the agency's recent leadership and apparent inability to prioritise the operational needs of professional firefighters. Or, as coined in the [FBEU's report](#) commissioned by the Centre of Full Employment and Equity earlier this year, '*optics*' rather than *actually improving situations on the ground*.

As I said in the inquiry, the Plus Plan was no plan at all. The exercise has been a tragic and expensive distraction from providing FBEU members with the tools and the support we need to get the job done safely. On that note, I want to thank all of you who stood by the Union and the profession during this period. Particularly, those who bucked the trend and raised the alarm with the direction of the Plus Plan, but especially those who supported the 2022 [vote of no confidence](#).

As you will no doubt agree, there is much more to be done in order to re-prioritise the agency's support for you, FBEU members, on the front-line, the next steps of which are currently being progressed by the FBEU in Award bargaining. Stay tuned for an update on that matter next week.



FBEU and FRNSW meet with Minister Dib

In brief, the FBEU President and I, along with FRNSW, met with Minister Dib this late this afternoon to outline our concerns regarding current resourcing and staffing of FRNSW.

As you know these concerns are significant and will require ongoing discussion between us to find solutions.

More to follow.

Rates of pay for Retained members acting up

This week, the Department resolved a long-running dispute about whether Retained staff are able to act-up to higher positions for less than 7 days at a time. The Award says that the higher retainer is only payable if the acting up period is for 7 days or more, but does not say that staff acting up will be ineligible for hourly rate pay increases if it is less than 7 days at a time.

Initially the Department said that the higher retainer 7 day limit was to apply to hourly rate of pay too, but have conceded that the Award does not actually say this. Going forward, Retained staff will be paid the proper hourly rate of pay for acting up for any period of time if that acting up is approved by the Zone. Keep in mind that the retainer for that higher rank will not be provided unless you act up for 7 days or more. We have secured backpay for several staff who had reached out to us regarding this issue and have requested an audit as well as a fix to the payment system going forward.

Any Retained staff who have acted up for less than 7 days over the past 6 years, please check your payslips for the acting up period. If you have not been paid the higher rate of pay for that period, get in touch with Industrial Officer Giacomo Arnott at garnott@fbeu.net with a copy of your payslip for that time period, as well as a screenshot of your ESS SAP Portal showing the higher duties period under "personnel data".

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary

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