



Governmental review of ESL

Yesterday the Minns Labor Government announced its intention to review the Emergency Services Levy, a move which has been celebrated by the Insurance Council of Australia, as you can read in their [press release](#).

Many of you would recall our successful 2017 campaign to prevent the last attack on the funding model, which as you know provides the majority of FRNSW's funding.

While we welcome any review into the way funding is proportioned across all emergency service agencies, particularly in the fast-moving disaster situations we have managed in recent times, the FBEU will be advocating for the Minns Government to address the ongoing state of neglect of FRNSW, both in terms of fleet and equipment, our access to training, and the significant shortfall in professional firefighter numbers to address the growing risks in NSW communities.

It is imperative that any review into the ESL must prioritise the operational requirements of Professional Firefighters. Our safety, and that of the community depends on it.

For those who aren't aware, the insurance industry and professional firefighters are intrinsically linked, with the first brigades being employed by insurance companies. As the most acutely trained rescue professionals in NSW, our expertise minimises risks to lives and property, which in turn minimises the financial risks of insurance providers. It is crucial that any review of the ESL is not conducted with the goal of enabling the insurance industry to withdraw from that responsibility.

We are eager to review the terms of reference for the review when they become available, and will be seeking input from our members for our submission which will put forward the concerns of our members and our communities.

I will update you as the situation develops.

The numbers don't lie

The "People Matters" survey results have been released for 2023, and to say they fall short of expectations is an understatement. With results far poorer than other public service agencies both within our sector and across the board, the numbers in the report tell a story of a toxic culture, and a seismic rift between rank and file firefighters and senior management.

Disrespect for firefighters by the upper echelons is not a new thing for our members, in fact it was the Board's disrespect towards us that forced the formation of the FBEU in 1910. Although much has changed within the Brigade since then, the "born to rule" mentality of some in senior leadership still seems to linger.

The "People Matters" survey tells a story of unity and solidarity at the station level, but a sense of disconnection from and mistrust of senior management. In all the metrics that measure our experiences in our stations, the numbers reflect the way FBEU members stand up for one another, support each other, and keep each other safe. In our job more than almost any other, having each others' backs is crucial – and this is something that FBEU members have always excelled at.



The survey results tell a very different story about senior management, however. When it comes to listening to us, managing change, providing direction, supporting our career progression or responding to feedback, the results are clear that senior management is just not on our side. These results confirm what FBEU members have been saying for years, that despite the rhetoric about respect that gets repeated every time we respond to a natural disaster, when the news cameras and microphones go away, the respect disappears too.

I am aware that this survey was conducted before the current Commissioner's appointment, and that these survey results reflect the culture fostered under the previous Commissioner. But the lack of respect towards rank and file members was never contained to one member of the ELT, and if he is to change FRNSW for the better, it's a culture that Commissioner Fewtrell will have to tackle head on.

If he does take on this challenge, it won't be an easy one. Organisational culture is never an easy thing to change – especially one that's been around for 140 years.

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Drury'.

Leighton Drury
State Secretary

