



Happy Festive Season to all Members

As 2023 draws to a close I want to take this opportunity on behalf of our elected Officials and staff to wish you all an enjoyable, relaxing and safe festive season. For those still working through the Christmas period, stay safe.

2023 has been one of the biggest years for our Union in recent history and everything we have achieved has been on the back on your collective efforts and solidarity. We have an even bigger year coming in 2024 so take a break, rest up and get ready.

A reminder, the FBEU office will be closed from 21st December, at midday, and will reopen on Monday 8th January 2024. If you have any urgent matters during that time, please contact your SCOM rep.

Fleet Crisis

Last week, FRNSW were [once again in the media](#) for all the wrong reasons, with chronic underfunding and mismanagement of the agency hitting a very public, and critical juncture.

For more than 12 months, members have continued to take action on the state of FRNSW's ageing fleet, ensuring that the NSW public are well-aware of the significantly increased examples of fleet breakdown, and the negative impact this is having on our ability to protect life and property.

Last month, a freedom of information request (GIPA) provided the FBEU with documentation related to funding requests, business cases, and asset management plans for the FRNSW Fleet directorate. The internal documents note just how critical fit-for-purpose fleet assets are to ensure firefighters can rapidly attend the scene of an incident. The documents also encourage a strategic approach to fleet replacement, both in the decommissioning of fleet assets beyond their useable operational life, and the funding of proactive and periodic maintenance for ageing fleet. The opposite of which the Fleet directorate cite as a 'fix when fail' strategy which the agency states would '*...not be acceptable and would not align to the principles of emergency management*'.

Many of you will be unsurprised to hear that despite this, a 'fix when fail' strategy appears to be exactly what FRNSW have pursued over the past 5 years. Documents show that the budget for fleet capital replacement has been consistently cut due to 'agency capital constraints', causing a funding shortfall of \$27M, and leaving FBEU members to respond in unsafe and unreliable appliances which should have been decommissioned.

In the past two financial years, these circumstances have been compounded by additional cuts to the periodic maintenance budget which for 2023-2024 was decreased by 57% and



has led to several recent examples of breakdowns on the way to incidents. This is unacceptable.

Members will recall that FRNSW commissioned a report earlier this year titled 'FRNSW Adverse Structure Fire Outcomes', which highlighted response times as a critical determinant in whether a structure fire will have adverse outcomes. Members will also note the reducing fire fatalities was one of several priorities outlined by Commissioner Fewtrell in the recent 'Commissioner's Intent' communications from 14 November. But, documents obtained by the FBEU provide little assurance that FRNSW are taking this matter seriously.

Last week the FBEU met with Minister Dib to advocate for immediate intervention in this matter and will continue to keep you posted on the progress. In the mean time, members can view the segment on Channel 10 [here](#).

2024 Award Negotiation Update

On Monday we met with FRNSW for negotiations on the 2024 Award. Unfortunately, as per usual, FRNSW still does not have bargaining parameters or a formally endorsed Log of Claims, meaning negotiations at this point are very much one sided.

We have raised this concern with the Minister's office and are hopeful that in the new year they will be able to properly start negotiating with us.

In the meantime, however, the question of wage increases, and work value were the clear elephant in the room on Monday's meeting. On the back of the wages win of our Paramedic emergency services comrades it is becoming increasingly difficulty for FRNSW, and the State Government, to continue to offer sub-standard wage increases to firefighters which not only fail to recognise cost of living increases, but absolutely fails to value the work that we do.

As you all know, the Paramedics win was not because of any goodwill from government but required drastic action from the membership as a collective to achieve their goal. The wages increase they achieved ultimately now recognises the skills and qualifications of paramedics in our modern society.

There are obviously lessons for us all to take away from their win including what can be achieved when union members collectively act to hold their employer to account in delivering fair wages and conditions. But also, the need to ensure our work value increases, which were completely ignored for over a decade under the previous Liberal Government, are recognised, quantified, and ultimately paid for.

The FBEU will not countenance any wages offer from FRNSW which does not provide a method to fairly and reasonably recognise the work that we do.



As we are back in negotiations we will, in the new year, be reconvening our Bans Committee to discuss options for collective action by members in support of our Award claims. You'll hear more on this next year.

We will continue to update you all on the progress of negotiations through January.

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary