



## FRNSW Push for Arbitration of Fix our Fire Service Industrial Campaign

FBEU and FRNSW were back in the Commission on Monday for conciliation on FRNSW's dispute application regarding our Fix Our Fire Service industrial campaign.

Despite no communication since our last time before the IRC with any specific concerns about the campaign, FRNSW advised us at conciliation that they were pushing forward to arbitration of their dispute to seek to have the Code Reds cease.

Interestingly, FRNSW however didn't push for an urgent hearing on this matter (which would be the usual course employers would take in these circumstances) but instead just asked for the IRC to provide a timetable for the exchange of material.

Despite the FBEU being fully prepared to head straight into a hearing then and there, the Commission has set an extended timetable for the parties to file their material over the next 7 weeks with a hearing shortly thereafter.

In the meantime the campaign and [code reds](#) as notified continue, including chalking up of trucks and wearing campaign shirts.

## In the media this week

In Sitrep 23 we reported on the peer-reviewed 'Adverse Structure Fire Outcomes 2016-2021' report which has exposed the increasing fire fatalities over this period. Three stories ran in The Australian this week revealing deep concerns regarding the priorities of the current FRNSW leadership. Citing the Adverse Outcomes report, The Australia revealed that fire fatalities have doubled in FRNSW districts, contradicting Commissioner Baxter in Budget Estimates in 2022 where [he stated](#) 'year on year, we have continued to track down on ... the amount of fatalities occurring'.

With a fire science perspective, the report reinforces the importance of skilled professional firefighters and the expansion of our resources in-line with population growth and community needs. This is an opportunity for FRNSW to advocate for our work. And yet, FRNSW were in the papers just this week describing response times as 'antiquated'.

## So, why aren't FRNSW getting their story straight?

This report flies in the face of the Commissioners exorbitant tax-payer funded 'Plus Plan' rebrand, which has diverted millions of dollars away from firefighters and the things we need to get the job done safely. This week I [spoke to ABC Radio Sydney](#) about the state of firefighting numbers and our concerns with FRNSW's priorities. Firefighters are worse off under the Plus Plan and so are communities.

To devise the Plus Plan FRNSW spent some \$11.8 million on branding and strategy consultants, including one contractor that, according to The Australian, was earning \$7,500 a day. The Union has been investigating the use of contractors through freedom of information (GIPA). Concerningly, in response to these requests FRNSW have been unable to provide a full account of expenditure and appear to be missing key contracts, are unable to demonstrate a procurement process, and have



significant unexplained overruns for the contracts that are made public via the annual report. A document bundle [here](#) will provide members with some sense of the issue.

The Information Privacy Commission has written to FRNSW for a second time this week requesting they respond to FBEU requests under GIPA legislation. In the name of transparency, these concerns must be answered.

As you can see from [this video from ICAC](#), these are all deeply concerning 'red flags'.

## Disconnect with management detailed in CofFEE Report

The third report in The Australian cited a report commissioned by the FBEU from the Centre of Full Employment and Equity (CofFEE) at The University of Newcastle. This report included interviews conducted with FRNSW firefighters and highlights the disconnect between personnel and FRNSW leadership as the new major contributor to negative outcomes for firefighters.

The report identifies a '*growing sense of dislocation and distrust of the FRNSW management, who were characterised as careerists obsessed with achieving their own KPIs to advance their own fortunes while neglecting the needs and concerns of the operational firefighters.*'

Firefighters were quoted as saying:

*The disconnect with management and the people at fire stations on ground who actually do the work is just growing. Really year on year when I joined the job we had a Commissioner who knew people's name. You know he'd get out the stations ... I feel like there's been a push now with everything's about their KPI's. Now everything's about what's good for them? ... I think that's one of the major things that's creating a disconnect between you know the people at the coalface let's say and the people who sit up in the ivory tower in management.*

The report links the change in management attitudes to the focus on the monetary cost of firefighting and corporatisation of the fire brigade:

*... the disconnect has been commensurate with that reduction in money. And basically the structure started to change at the management level, where from a firefighters viewpoint in the station things that have been identified that required to be done just have never got done.*

You can find a copy of the report [here](#).

## FBEU calls for an independent inquiry

This week we met with the Minister's Office calling for an independent inquiry into these matters. Beyond the issue of accountability and the transparent use of public money, these issues negatively portray our industry and cannot be tolerated.



# SITREP 25/2023

The public respect our work and a Minns Government needs to demonstrate that our budget support the core operational needs of our work and service to the community. The things we need to get the job done.

#FixOurFireService

In Unity,

Leighton Drury  
State Secretary