



Fix our FRNSW leadership

The Fix Our Fire Service campaign continues to highlight the severe underfunding and lack of resources of our fire service and the impact that it is having on our safety and ability to protect the community.

Many of our appliances are unsafe and not fit for purpose, and our fire stations are outdated and lack vital health and safety infrastructure measures. In addition, access to any training is now almost non-existent resulting in significant shortages across ranks and specialist skills, and overtime is rife leading to fatigue and burnout.

None of this is news to us or, I dare say, the community of NSW.

I am proud of the work we have all done in getting our message out there to the public. Through our election campaign, *When time is not on your side, we are* and now through the Fix Our Fire Service industrial campaign. Just this week I appeared on Sky News talking about these issues, highlighting the real problems with our ageing fleet and missing aerials across the State which you can [watch here](#).

As we delve further into the goings-on of FRNSW leadership however, it is becoming increasingly obvious that we don't just need to Fix Our Fire Service, but fix our leadership along with it.

Many of you will have already seen the circular from FRNSW today titled 'FOR THE RECORD: CLARIFICATION OF FLEET STATUS'. The document addresses the 'myths' from Sky News and reassures members that everything in the fleet budget is as it should be. That includes an assurance that no FRNSW appliances other than tankers are beyond 23 years old. Unconvinced by that? Try this [fact check](#) to see one example of evidence to the contrary.

The [recent hostel fire in Wellington NZ](#) was a horrific example of what can occur when firefighting resources are allowed to decline, as FRNSW has been. We do our very best every day, every shift, in exceptionally difficult situations but we all know that when fire services are not properly resourced and funded, lives and property are at risk.

The incident in Wellington gives FBEU members something to reflect on. What FENZ are currently referring to as 'serious' inherited 'legacy issues' are the very issues you have been raising the alarm on.

If you haven't seen his media response from FENZ Chief Executive, Kerry Gregory, please follow [this link](#) to watch, I think it speaks for itself.

Let's hope Commissioner Baxter (who you might all recall was a previous FENZ National Commander and Chief Executive) does not have to one day stand up at a press conference like that although I'm not sure any of us would believe his message to the public would be the same as Mr. Gregory's

Both at FRNSW and at FENZ, the operational needs and realities of firefighters have been overlooked by the Commissioner for glossier elements of the job, specifically tax-payer-funded re-branding exercises costing millions. Over the coming months I hope to be in a position to shed some light on the legitimacy of that expenditure. A matter currently before the NSW Civil and Administrative



Tribunal will provide valuable insight into how one particular 'Plus Plan' consultant, used by both FENZ and FRNSW at the Commissioner's request, was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars without any paper trail whatsoever. No contract, no conflict-of-interest declaration, no procurement process.

Also, you might all recall that last year the FBEU commenced proceedings against FRNSW and Commissioner Baxter for contempt in the Industrial Relations Commission after we alleged FRNSW failed to adhere to an undertaking given to the Commission in an earlier proceeding. That matter was ultimately settled back in March, with part of that settlement involving our FRNSW Leadership being required to make a public statement to their workers acknowledging their deficiencies in this space. Don't remember seeing that public acknowledgement? Don't worry, you didn't miss an important email from our ELT, unsurprisingly this statement buried deep on the FRNSW intranet. If you haven't seen it, the link can be [found here](#).

What does all this tell us about our leadership? It's starting to paint a picture of a Commissioner and ELT who are not transparent or accountable to their workforce and/or the public and whose priorities are clearly misaligned with community expectations.

Yesterday we saw one of the biggest fires in the Sydney CBD we have seen in a long time, a 10th alarm structure fire in Surry Hills. Over 20 appliances and 100 firefighters responded to the incident. Watching that event unfold, I saw the dedication and work ethic of you all. Given the ferocity of the fire, the risks of the surrounding buildings and infrastructure and the number civilians in the vicinity with the fire occurring at 4pm just next to Central Station, I can only commend the work of you all who responded to that fire in ensuring that there were no fatalities or major damage to any neighbouring buildings.

Let's hope that next time we have a 10th alarm it's not in Coffs Harbour, or Hornsby or Umina, or Miranda, all of which are missing their aerial appliances and have been for months if not years. Let's hope too that the incident doesn't involve a building with flammable cladding because that press conference will be far more difficult to watch than the NZ one above.

Just as a side note, this week, FRNSW did make at least one good decision, discontinuing their case before the IRC to end our Fix Our Fire Service industrial campaign. This means our current Code Reds and industrial campaign will continue at this stage.

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary