



## Update on Award Negotiations

FRNSW and the FBEU were in the IRC for conciliation on the Awards yesterday but before I update you, I think it's important we remind ourselves of some relevant context.

As you all would be aware, the Government has announced an offer of a 4% wage increase for NSW public sector workers, plus an 0.5% increase to your superannuation.

This 4% wage increase was offered on the be established. The taskforce has been given the role of implementing an interest-based approach to industrial negotiations, overseen by the IRC, which should in future allow us to translate efficiencies and productivity into real pay increases and remove the old process of effectively selling off our conditions in return for wage increases.

While the above wages offer was announced by Government over 10 days ago, FRNSW had not formally offered or provided any formal communication in relation to the 4%. Given there were no formal discussions or offer from FRNSW, we have been continuing discussions with relevant Government representatives including the Minister for Emergency Services and the IR Minister since that announcement, seeking to clarify the issue of back pay and also to make clear to Government that any offer will require resolution of other key claims including changes to health checks, promotional structures, staffing and consultation. As per our last Sitrep we wrote to the IR Minister, Sophie Cotsis, effectively stating that.

We have also continued informal discussions with FRNSW over the last couple of weeks despite having no formal offer on the table from them to ensure they were clearly aware of our position should they formalise the 4% offer.

Despite this, on Wednesday afternoon, [FRNSW sent us this letter](#) which makes incorrect assertions regarding the status of bargaining, but more importantly, stated that they intend to press forward and seek the Awards to be listed for arbitration.

To be clear, when they sent this letter to us on Wednesday afternoon we had no formal wages offer on the table and they had no bargaining parameters. We therefore had no idea even of what position they wanted arbitrated and whether they were seeking to have their application from [February this year heard](#) which offered a 3% wage increase (minus superannuation) and a roll over.

Obviously Wednesday's letter came as a surprise to us, and, it seems, to the Government who were not made aware by FRNSW that they were intending to send this letter, that is clearly outside of the Government's position on public sector wages.

Yesterday in the IRC we put on the record that if FRNSW maintained this position that we would consider a potential escalation of industrial action/activity. This is an option we haven't ruled out, however following our statements FRNSW did formally confirm before the IRC the offer of 4% pay increase with 0.5% superannuation, backdated to 26 February 2023, and today [provided us with a second letter](#), however they would not withdraw their



push to have the matter arbitrated. With help from the Commission, they did agree to a process to see if we can reach resolution quickly on other key items and reach a final position regarding consent awards. We are therefore going to meet for two full days of negotiations on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of June with the aim of attempting to reach a consent position.

I will update you after those two meetings, but I want to assure you all that should any consent position be reached, we will be making clear to FRNSW that this position will be presented to you for your consideration. Also, any position reached will be for a one-year deal only and we have made clear to FRNSW and Government that it is our expectation that bargaining will recommence immediately following the making of these Awards where we fully intend to continue to press all the other claims (and perhaps others) as endorsed by members for this round of negotiations.

It's been a long road for us all in getting to this point, with members standing up and participating in some activities many of us never even considered before, so I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you all for standing behind our Union, the State Committee and maintaining solidarity with your comrades to bring us to this point.

We are not there yet, so our Fix Our Fire Service Campaign and associated Code Reds will continue until further notice.

## When is an AP not an AP?

We [posted on our Facebook page](#) two weeks ago about our stations' absent aerials, and unfortunately, the status hasn't changed much since then. Although Albury Central's AP has been returned, Coffs Harbour's AP, which disappeared around August 2021, still hasn't been delivered, and Coffs members still haven't been trained in the appliance. Those members who were stationed at Coffs before August 2021 also need refresher training, as their qualifications have lapsed during its absence. This recent visit to a pre-school (photo at right) was the closest our Coffs Harbour members have been to an aerial appliance in almost 2 years, and currently, there is no aerial appliance north of Newcastle to protect the state's growing coastal and regional communities.



Likewise, members at Miranda have lost their AP again due to breakdown, and members don't have current qualifications for the Class 3 AP SEV that's been supplied. Like the situation at Coffs, it's another example of FRNSW mismanagement resulting in communities having reduced fire and rescue protection. We understand that the presence of an appliance at a station doesn't guarantee it can be used, but the community doesn't. It may be slightly cynical, but it does appear that the delivery of aerial appliances to stations that can't use them is nothing more than a PR exercise and photo op. If we're wrong about that, we'll happily stand corrected, but if FRNSW management are going to correct us on that point, we'd like them to also explain why training is so far behind where it



should be. The budget cuts that FRNSW have made to training over the last decade are starting to have real, detrimental effects to both firefighters and the communities we serve.

It seems the Deputy Commissioner's pants-on-fire moment [we referred to recently](#) is bigger than we thought, and is being upgraded to a second alarm.

We were also told of a recent incident at the ESA where a member had to diagnose and fix the hydraulics on the AP before the group could be trained on it. We're not sure if FRNSW see the irony in this situation, or their very good fortune that a member was on hand with that specific set of skills, but we certainly do.

We continue to highlight the very real problems in our aging fleet, because the public need to know that the shiny face of FRNSW's PR machine doesn't represent the realities of our job. We know appliances are expensive, but we also know they're essential to properly protect our communities. The failure of FRNSW management to properly forecast and budget for essential equipment is a dereliction of duty. It's a failure that potentially puts both community members and firefighters at risk at every incident we are called to.

## Pink tagging

We would encourage all members to quarantine broken equipment by pink tagging it, and following FRNSW's procedure which is [outlined here](#). We also encourage members to email us a photo of any equipment you've tagged so we can continue to bring attention to the issue and keep FRNSW accountable to the communities who fund our organisation.

In Unity,

Leighton Drury  
State Secretary