

Received 5 July 2015

4 July 2015

The Executive Officer
Electoral Matters Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Sir,

Inquiry Into the 2014 State Election

I refer to an advertisement in the Herald Sun on Saturday 30 May 2015 inviting submissions to the above Inquiry.

I am writing because I am very concerned about activities conducted by members of the United Firefighters Union (UFU) which were dishonest, misleading to voters, and in stark contrast to the democratic way that elections are normally conducted in Victoria. I am particularly concerned about threats and intimidatory behaviour demonstrated by members of this union towards the general public, and CFA volunteer firefighters in particular – of which I am one.

I would like to make the following submissions in support of my concerns:

- On more than one occasion when commuting prior to the election, I alighted from the train at Frankston and, along with other commuters, was met with a wall of UFU members across the only exit path. They were dressed as volunteer firefighters, and made misleading statements including:
 - “The Napthine Government slashes while you burn”. This UFU propaganda statement was designed to create fear in the community, and was dishonest – my understanding was that at the time, the fire services had never received better funding.
 - “If you don’t sign our petition, then fire stations in this area will have to close”. This was also dishonest – all CFA fire brigades have volunteer members, who are committed to providing 24/7 coverage to the community. Some stations also have career firefighters as part of an integrated model of service. However if staff are not available, the volunteers will still be there to provide coverage.
- While campaigning for the Labor Party, the UFU members dressed in a manner that sought to depict themselves as volunteer firefighters. The “lime green” Nomex trousers that they wore are exclusively worn by CFA volunteers, ironically because the UFU forbade its members to wear the Nomex product as their work protective clothing. It was only upon closer inspection that I saw a small UFU logo on their blue tee shirts (also typical of volunteer firefighter clothing – apart from the logo). In my opinion, the union members were trying to mislead the Victorian public by manipulating public goodwill towards CFA volunteer firefighters.

- I refer to the attached election advertisement from the Midland Express. I believe that this advertisement also appeared in other newspapers around Victoria. In my opinion, the Labor Party and the UFU colluded to create fear in the Victorian community about the potential for bushfires caused by “Naphthine Government Cuts”. There was no evidence of cuts to back this up. Neither was there any evidence to suggest that the fire services were not ready for the fire season. Victoria’s CFA volunteer firefighters were certainly ready and prepared and, as always, would form the great majority of Victoria’s response to bushfires.

Further, I’m advised that the “fire fighter” in the advertisement is Peter Marshall, an office-bearer of the UFU and not an active firefighter. If this is correct, the advert should have carried a statement that actors were used to depict real firefighters. In addition, should the advertisement have carried an “authorised by ..” statement?

This advertisement was dishonest, misleading and deceptive, and is an unfortunate indictment on both the Labor Party and the UFU.

- As a CFA volunteer firefighter, I am a member of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria. As a consequence of an email to other CFA volunteer members which fell into UFU hands, I received telephone calls and text messages designed to intimidate me. One particular text message was intended to imply that I may lose my job as a consequence. I can provide copies of these text messages if the Inquiry so desires, subject to my request for confidentiality below.

In general, I am proud to live in a democracy where people have the right to express their opinion, and can vote as they choose. Equally, I have no problem with unions acting appropriately in the best interests of their members.

However, when the Victorian community is subjected to dishonest and misleading propaganda during the election process, including the impersonation and intimidation of CFA volunteer firefighters in pursuit of industrial and political aims, then I must object in the most strenuous terms.

I recommend that the Inquiry:

- Develop laws to prevent the public from being harassed and misled by the dishonest statements and actions of any industrial body, and that severe penalties apply to those who breach these standards.
- Protect the brand of the CFA volunteer firefighter from being mis-used in the manner that it was during the election campaign.

I request that my submission be considered, but that my identity and personal details be redacted and my anonymity preserved, as it is now clear that CFA volunteer firefighter “whistle-blowers” can expect intimidatory behaviours from UFU members in pursuit of the Union’s political activities.

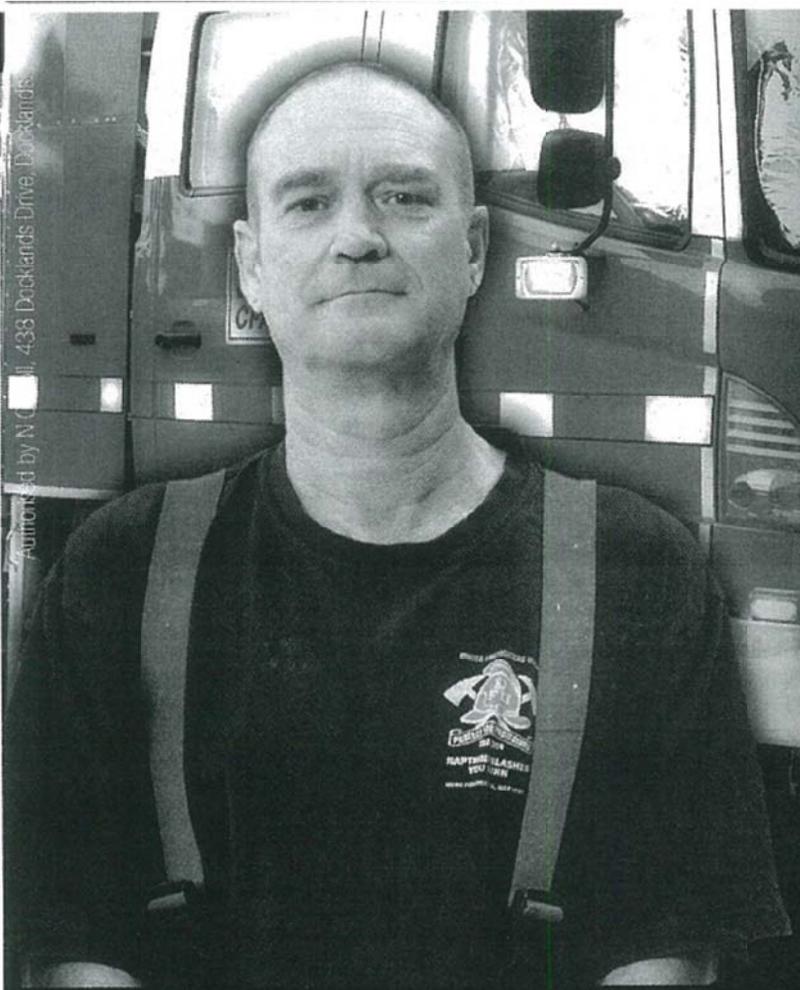
I am happy to discuss my submission further with the Inquiry should that be required.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature block]

MIDLAND EXPRESS Nov 18 2014

Authorised by N.C. 438 Docklands Drive, Docklands.



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