



United Firefighters Union

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The Hon Louise Asher
Chair
Electoral Matters Committee
Parliament of Victoria
East Melbourne
Victoria 3000

Dear Chair

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE 2014 VICTORIAN STATE ELECTION

Background

1. The United Firefighters Union of Australia (“the UFUA”) is a registered organisation/federal union with a membership of career professional firefighters and other non-operational employees employed by public and private fire services in Australia.
2. The UFUA has branches in Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, ACT, New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and an Aviation sector branch. Each branch has a very high level of union membership with the majority of branches averaging around 95 percent membership of the relevant workforce.
3. The UFUA represents professional career professional firefighters employed on a permanent full time basis, permanent part time basis and on a casual basis by fire services including aviation and defence.
4. In addition, the UFUA also represents other non-operational employees of fire services including, but not limited to, emergency call centres, fire safety officers, mechanics, administrative support and technical support, and hospitality.

Victoria State Election

5. The United Firefighters Union, Victorian Branch members voluntarily participated in the Victoria State election informing voters about fire service issues and highlighting the Victorian government's policies and its impact on firefighter safety, and their ability to protect the community which they serve.
6. UFU Victoria Branch members voluntarily conducted a public-political awareness campaign which included door-knocking residential areas, face to face conversations, attending public transport stations to disseminate information.
7. UFU members historically had never before involved themselves in such an extensive public-political awareness campaign which illustrates the level of concern that career professional firefighters held in relation to their own safety and their ability to protect the community.
8. The vast majority of career professional firefighters who participated in the public-political awareness campaign received an overwhelmingly positive response from the community both in the lead up to the state election and on Election Day itself.
9. The UFU's material and public comments were based on factual documentation including information from public comment by relevant ministers confirming that there were substantial budget cuts to the fire services. Such information can be provided to the inquiry if requested.
10. Additionally career professional firefighters were concerned at the fire service levy money being utilised for the purpose of litigation by the fire services. This amounted to the wastage of approximately \$21 million over 4 years. (References to such expenditure can be found in both the MFB and CFA's annual reports)
11. It should be noted the Fire Services Property Levy is to be used to fund vital services provided by the Country Fire Authority and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This includes personnel, training, infrastructure and equipment. The Fire Service Property Levy is not collected for the use of extensive litigation against firefighters.

12. Despite the message to the community being communicated by career professional firefighters being based on factual evidence, and despite the overwhelming community support, a small number of misleading allegations were made in the lead up to the election and in the days after about the United Firefighters Union involvement in the public-political awareness campaign. The following allegations which we would like to address occurred verbally at polling centres, on talk back radio, in print media and on social media:

I. **Allegation that career professional firefighters were participating in the public-political awareness campaign whilst on duty:**

No career professional firefighter participated in the public-political awareness campaign whilst rostered on shift or on duty.

Career professional firefighters who participated in the UFU public-political awareness campaign did so either on rostered days off or whilst on leave.

II. **Allegation that career professional firefighters were wearing Country Fire Authority or Metropolitan Fire Brigade uniforms while campaigning:**

The UFU has its own firefighter uniforms that are not, and have never been, CFA or MFB uniforms. The UFU distributed the UFU's public-political awareness campaign uniforms of yellow pants, red braces and a campaign t-shirt to all those participating in the campaign. Career professional firefighters did not wear CFA or MFB uniforms while doorknocking residential areas, handing out public-political awareness campaign material or how to vote cards at public areas or events.

III. **Allegation that firefighters wearing UFU public-political awareness campaign uniforms were not real career professional firefighters:**

Only career professional firefighters were issued with the UFU public-political awareness campaign uniforms of yellow pants and red braces. Non-operational members and those supporting the UFU public-political awareness campaign wore campaign t-shirts without the yellow pants and red braces.

The public political awareness campaign uniforms and material were not made available outside the strict parameters as specified above.

IV. Allegation that the UFU used an operational fire appliance on Election Day.

This again is a blatant untruth. Career professional firefighters at their own expense via the UFU hired a de-commissioned fire appliance from a private provider for the public-political awareness campaign. This appliance was not operational and was not owned or operated by any fire service agency.

V. Allegation that career professional firefighters were intimidating state election candidates or volunteers.

The genesis and objectives of the UFU public-political awareness campaign were in part to inform the public of the state government's budget cuts to the fire service, failure to employ critically needed additional career professional firefighters and the wastage of fire service levy money resulting in an excessive litigious environment over the past four years.

At all times the career professional firefighters conducted themselves in an appropriate manner while campaigning.

However, in a few isolated instances the career professional firefighters were the target of abuse and hostility from others that took exception to the UFU message. The UFU can provide specific information in regards to these incidents if the committee requests such information.

It should be noted that overwhelmingly the firefighters were warmly received and the public were supportive.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Peter Marshall.

Peter Marshall
Secretary