



Wednesday 12 August 2020

Mr Stephen Smith
Assistant Commissioner
Human Capital Management
Fire and Rescue Service

*Delivered via email: StephenA.Smith@qfes.qld.gov.au
QFES.WLU@qfes.qld.gov.au*

Dear Assistant Commissioner

Re: Notification of dispute regarding contracting out of recruitment process

I refer to the recent meetings and email conversations between QFES HCM and UFUQ regarding the state-wide recruitment process for station officers (SO) and standing order station officers (SOSO) that is currently on foot.

We are aware that this state-wide process is the first of its kind, and is being trialled as an alternative to the normal region based SO and SOSO recruitment process.

The UFUQ was consulted on the implementation of this trial, and we provided extensive feedback, which was considered and (for the most part) addressed.

The UFUQ was never consulted regarding any change to the provision of recruitment and selection services, or any proposal for Fire and Rescue to abdicate some of their responsibility with regard to the recruitment and selection of SOs and SOSOs to a contracted, external third party.

We have recently been made aware (from our members, not through consultation) that a range of recruitment services normally performed by the vast number of public servants employed by QFES for this purpose, have been outsourced to Hudson Specialist Recruitment Agency.

The UFUQ disputes this decision to outsource recruitment and selection services on three distinct grounds, each expanded upon in turn below.

Until this dispute is resolved, we require the immediate cessation of involvement of any external recruitment consultant engaged to provide services to Fire and Rescue as part of the ongoing SO and SOSO recruitment and selection processes.

All involvement of Hudson, current or planned, should cease, including but not limited to the use of any Hudson-developed interview guides, prompts, score sheets or any planned attendances of Hudson employees in interviews.

Ground 1 – Breach of “Contracting out policy”

We refer to the Queensland Government Policy on the Contracting-out of Services (the policy), released on 16 January 2016, and that applies to all government agencies and all tenured employees of these agencies (attached).

The policy defines “contracting-out” as “a contractual arrangement to deliver a service to government or the provision of a government service by a non-government service provider”.

Clause 3.1 states that “there will be no contracting-out of services currently provided in-house other than in circumstances where:

- Actual shortages exist in appropriately skilled in-house staff;
- There is a lack of available infrastructure capital or funds to meet the cost of providing new technology; or
- It can be clearly demonstrated that it is in the public interest that services should be contracted out.”

The policy also states that “where the government agrees to contract-out services, employees and the relevant unions will be consulted as soon as possible”.

Further, the policy conveys the clear intent of government to allow the contracting out of services only as a very last resort, though the following line: “Except in exceptional circumstances, in-house work units should be afforded sufficient opportunity and support, over a reasonable time, to achieve an acceptable level of performance, efficiency and effectiveness, before alternative service provision options are considered”.

It appears that Fire and Rescue have repeatedly breached this policy in electing to contract out elements of recruitment and selection services to an external agency.

It would be untenable for Fire and Rescue to argue that it genuinely lacks the public servant capacity to complete a simple recruitment process, considering these services have always been provided by QFES staff at a state and regional level.

Additionally, the UFUQ is of the view that the decision to contract out these services is absolutely against the public interest.

Queensland is in the midst of a global pandemic and an economic recession. All government employees have had their wages frozen, as hundreds of thousands of newly unemployed Queenslanders are more reliant than ever on financial assistance and services provided by the government.

Fire and Rescue’s decision to engage an external consultancy firm in this way is an inexcusable waste of taxpayer resources and leaves the vast number of non-operational public servants on the public payroll with nothing to do.

Ground 2 – Failure to consult in accordance with CA19

As stated previously, the UFUQ was never consulted regarding the decision of Fire and Rescue to ‘contract out’ certain recruitment and selection services formerly provided internally by QFES employees.

In accordance with clause 14 of the *Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Certified Agreement 2019* (CA19), Fire and Rescue has an obligation to invite the UFUQ “to engage in the formulation and implementation of policies, plans and strategies that are likely to affect the working conditions of members”. Consultation must take place at the very early stages and involve the “full, meaningful and candid discussion of issues and proposals with genuine consideration of each party’s views”.

In failing to consult with the UFUQ on a major change to the recruitment and selection process that affects the employment progression of UFUQ members, Fire and Rescue is in breach of clause 14 of CA19.

Ground 3 – Contempt for operational advice and expertise in recruitment decisions

The UFUQ strongly objects to Fire and Rescue’s recent departure from our traditional and dependable process of recruitment and selection of recruits, officers and senior officers within the fire service.

Through the current process, we are aware that the opinions of the regional operational panel members have been overridden by a state decision maker based on the advice of an external recruitment consultant.

The recruitment consultants are not firefighters, they’ve never formed part of a crew and they’ve never taken orders from a station officer on the fireground.

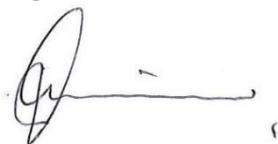
Preferring advice that comes from hyper-generalised and pseudo-scientific ‘data-based’ methods to screen potential officers, with undue regard for irrelevant factors such as writing style and academic vocabulary.

Fire and Rescue appear to be favouring the advice of the consultant over that of the operational experts in region. This may result in an absurd situation in which Senior Firefighters are being judged as more qualified to fill a Station Officer vacancy than Leading Firefighters, who also applied.

The UFUQ condemns this reliance on external recruitment consultants as wasteful, inappropriate and potentially dangerous, and we demand to have recruitment and selection returned to operational control.

The contact person for this matter is UFUQ industrial officer Ms Courtney Trevascus. She can be contacted by email at courtneyt@ufuq.com.au or by phone on 07 3844 0366.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Oliver', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

John Oliver
General Secretary