



UNITED
FIRE
FIGHTERS
UNION
QUEENSLAND

Tuesday 19 November 2019

The Honourable Ms Annastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
Minister for Trade

&

The Honourable Ms Jackie Trad MP
Deputy Premier
Treasurer
Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

&

The Honourable Mr Craig Crawford MP
Minster for Fire and Emergency Services

Delivered via email: *thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au*
deputy.premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au
fireandemergencyservices@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms Palaszczuk

Re: Request for urgent meeting regarding professional fulltime firefighter staffing numbers

I write to you at a time of unprecedented demand on Queensland's professional and auxiliary firefighting resources.

It has become clear to the UFUQ (and it would seem from public comments made by senior officers during this current bushfire crisis that it has become apparent to QFES as well) that the current (and projected funded growth) number of professional firefighters does not meet the needs of communities across the state.

The numbers of professional firefighters on the fire ground are too thin, and this is resulting in (for example, but certainly not limited to) –

- Extremely long and unsafe hours of work, with multiple days of significant hours being worked in a row, well outside of both legal hours of work and workplace health and safety parameters, and

UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA UNION OF EMPLOYEES QUEENSLAND

Ground Floor, 286 Montague Rd. West End Qld 4101 www.ufuq.com.au ufu@ufuq.com.au ABN 97 709 271 604

PHONE 07 3844 0366 FAX 07 3844 0367

- A severely depleted response capability in many communities with no fire emergency, due to so many firefighters being deployed into emergency areas where fires require immediate response, and
- An unsustainable dependency on the dwindling auxiliary firefighter and rural bush brigade volunteers to provide response levels well beyond their capacity, and there can be no doubt that these firefighter and volunteer numbers will continue to reduce, rather than increase (further causing these groups to also have to perform unsafe work for incredibly long hours day after day), and
- An unprecedented requirement so early in the ‘fire season’ for interstate and overseas assistance from firefighters and volunteers (with my union colleagues across most Australian jurisdictions reporting they face similar critical shortages in numbers and increases in emergency response requirements, which will inevitably lead to there being a reduced interstate deployment capacity), and
- For what appears to be the first time in modern firefighting response methodologies in Queensland, a reliance on untrained army reservists to make up the numbers on the fire ground fighting fires.

This unprecedented early and disastrous start to the 2019/2020 Queensland ‘fire season’ is the subject of fierce and divisive public debate.

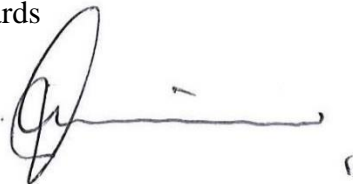
Our members are not facing the same desperate uncertainty nor are they debating the cause, they have accepted the reality and they are actively preparing for the ‘fire season’ to grow increasingly severe and further out of control in this and coming years.

I am not seeking to meet with you about the government’s policies on the climate emergency, however, I believe it is time you directly heard from the UFUQ about the circumstances our members are facing, and our perspective on solutions.

I therefore seek an urgent opportunity to meet with you directly, along with anyone you determine would assist in the discussions and I ask that you cause a meeting to be set as soon as possible.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss with you firsthand what is going on, and what we can do together to address the significant risk to the safety not only of firefighters but also Queensland communities (whether these communities are in the path of bushfires or not) due to the severe shortage of professional firefighter numbers to adequately respond to what it would appear is becoming the new normal for firefighting in Queensland.

Regards



John Oliver
General Secretary