



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

I wish all members a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year; I hope you manage to have some relaxation with friends, families and loved ones.
2012 heralded many changes and foreshadows a challenging 2013 ahead.

Perhaps it is fitting that 2012 marked the centenary anniversary of the 1912 Brisbane general strike where Queensland unionists united to defend their rights. This year, 100 years later all unions united against mass sackings and attacks on employment conditions.

In March a new government swept to power with a massive majority and wasted no time in legislating a challenging new industrial environment for firefighters and other workers.

New laws included fetters on industrial action, diluted QIRC independence, invalidation of job security entitlements, and power for the government to force employee ballots of agreements without consent of their union.

The government also commenced a review of our workers' compensation entitlements.

The century long tradition of Queenslanders having a Labour Day public holiday in May was abolished in deference to the Queen's birthday holiday and the workers' day was shoved to October. The Labour Day celebrations will now occur on the May weekend but without a public holiday.

Our new minister Jack Dempsey evaded UFUQ all year but found time to collude with QFRS Commissioner Lee Johnson and DG Kelvin Anderson and sign a charter committing to ongoing consultation with the Rural Fire Brigades Association. All three refused to sign a similar charter for full time and auxiliary firefighters or discuss the issue with your union.

We faced radical bargaining demands, including the abolition of consultation, award and agreement stripping, casualised employment, and aggregated wages including the incorporation of 5 pre-paid overtime shifts at time and a half pay.

We undertook protected industrial action, embarked upon a comprehensive media campaign, launched TV ads, a website, petitions; lobbied MP's and forged an unprecedented alliance with the ambulance union to fight common attacks on our employment conditions.

QFRS and the government spent months persuading QIRC to cease bargaining conciliation and force our negotiations to arbitration so your employer can seek orders implementing their demands without your agreement. At the end of the year QIRC finally referred our enterprise bargaining to arbitration against the will and desires of firefighters and your union.

After continuing and persistent refusals of QFRS and the government to agree with union claims for basic entitlements for auxiliaries, your union applied to QIRC for the making of a first award for auxiliary firefighters. We will push to have this matter heard, determined and finalised in 2013.

The federal parliament is conducting a review into state government employees' rights at work. We hope that some federal laws might be introduced to override some of the new unfair Queensland laws.

As the year closed the government announced the Keelty review into police, corrections and emergency services. This review will report next year and potentially can have a considerable effect on us.

I have received much positive feedback from other unions about the firefighters' campaigning during the latter part of 2012. Our example has inspired other workers as well as defended our own particular rights. We have shown that we are not an easy target.

I have been extremely proud to be part of this union during 2012, and I congratulate all members on your efforts, resolve and campaigning during the year.

Next year we will need to demonstrate that we will not be silenced just because we have been forced into bargaining arbitration against our will. I am confident that members will become even stronger, louder and more public. QFRS and the government must be shown that pushing their demands behind closed doors in the QIRC does not absolve them from public condemnation for attacking firefighters.

Both QFRS management and the government must take full responsibility for attacking firefighters as it has become obvious that they are all in on it together.

I am very positive about our capacity to match the challenges thrown at us next year and I look forward to our unified front as proud UFUQ members.

All the very best to you and your loved ones and my compliments of the season.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you!

John Oliver
State Secretary
United Firefighters' Union Queensland
December 2012.

***The UFUQ State Office is closed for the Christmas break from
Friday 21 December 2012 to Monday 7 January 2013.***

Authorised by John Oliver, State Secretary United Firefighters' Union Australia, Union of Employees Queensland