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TO ALL UFUA MEMBERS

UFUA'S UNIFIED APPROACH ADVANCES MEMBERS' INTERESTS EVIDENCE OUTWEIGHS RHETORIC

The UFUA today appeared before the Australian Senate Environment and Communications Committee inquiring into "*Recent Trends In And Preparedness For Extreme Weather Events*".

Prior to the Senate hearing, the UFUA submission and the reports the UFUA commissioned that demonstrate the need for a significant increase in operational firefighter numbers, received media interest.

The ability for the UFUA to respond to federal inquiries with comprehensive submissions that advance the overall interests of the community and our members, is just one example of the highly functional and credible unified national union.

Actions speak louder than words.

Members may have received today propaganda distributed to fire stations by the FBEU, the NSW state union. This was an attempt to undermine the achievements of the UFUA. It was particularly in poor taste as it ridiculed the dedication and commitment of retiring National President Mick Farrell.

The UFUA has refrained from discussing the dispute with the NSW Branch but it is time to put the facts on record once and for all. The UFUA will not be responding in this manner again as it is not in the interests of members to do so:

- NSW Branch officials lost a national election and so then withdrew from participating within the UFUA;

- The NSW Branch then actively encouraged members to resign and only remain as members of the FBEU;
- The NSW Branch has significant fees outstanding to the UFUA – estimated in excess of \$200,000.

It is time for petty politics to be put aside. We are in challenging times. The UFUA is successfully advancing the interests of its members. The following branches clearly do not share the NSW view – Western Australia, Queensland, ACT, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and Aviation.

It is time for all branches to put their energies into the best interests of the union.

Attached is the news story which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald and the Melbourne Age this morning detailing the UFUA's report it had commissioned into the number of firefighters needed when population growth and climate change were taken into account.

A final report commissioned by the UFUA forecasting the required number of firefighters throughout Australia is due to be released at the end of February.

Strength in Unity
READ OUT AT MUSTER AND PIN ON NOTICE BOARD
Authorised by National Secretary Peter Marshall

New suburbs, warming climate to lift fire risk, report finds

Peter Hannam

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Much of fire-prone south-eastern Australia is poorly served by fire services and the shortfall is likely to worsen as cities sprawl and a warming climate increases risk, according to research commissioned by the United Firefighters Union.

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Using census and other data, the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research found that 284 local government areas around the country, with a total population of almost 2 million people and \$500 billion in assets, had few or no paid firefighters.

“This means assets and people roughly equivalent to Brisbane are without professional firefighters and totally dependent on volunteers,” the report found.

Using a service benchmark derived from the standards operating in the region of Hume, north of Melbourne, and Mildura, on the Murray River, the study identified a further 12 million people with assets of \$2.5 trillion underserved by paid fire crews.

“For most [local government areas] that have professional firefighters, there are [fewer] than three for every billion dollars of replacement asset value and less than 60 for every 100,000 resident population,” the report said.

The release of the report comes after fire crews in Victoria contained a large grassfire on the northern fringe of Melbourne and as a major bushfire burned in the Grampians in the state's west. The study is also being released as the Senate inquiry into recent trends in, and preparedness for, extreme weather holds its first public hearings in Melbourne later today.

CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology research has indicated the fire season will lengthen over much of south-eastern Australia, as temperatures rise and conditions dry out.

“We do see strongly significant trends in spring, in the south-east, and then we also see them in the autumn,” said Chris Lucas, a researcher with the Centre for Australian Weather and Climate Research. “Those facts together do suggest the fire season is lengthening.”

Urban sprawl

Michael Spencer, a National Institute of Economic and Industry Research associate and one of the report's authors, said the need for more fire services would rise as populations grew, particularly in western Sydney and around Melbourne.

“All those urban fringes are the areas where people are moving into,” Mr Spencer said.

Those areas have in past been served largely by volunteers, numbers of whom have been reducing nationally.

The Productivity Commission noted in 2012 that national volunteer firefighter numbers eased from 221,442 in 2006-07 to 219,765 in 2010-11, a decline made worse when rising population and wealth are taken into account.

Among the regions deemed to be most exposed to a combination of increased fire risk and limited fire services compared with population and asset were the Northern Rivers, Central West and South Coast regions of NSW, the Loddon Mallee, Grampians and Gippsland regions of Victoria, and the Outer North and Outer South of Perth, the report found.

"It is critical when assessing the level of funding for fire services, that the cost of fire – direct and indirect – is a key consideration," United Firefighters Union national secretary Peter Marshall said.

"Funding should be determined at a national policy level with an empirical basis for resourcing fire protection and suppression capabilities."

A spokesman for Deputy Premier and Police and Emergency Services Minister Peter Ryan said the Victorian government was taking the necessary steps to protect the community.

"The Country Fire Authority already has a project that involves the hiring of 342 new firefighters and upgrading 10 peri-urban stations to meet demand in growth areas, at a cost of more than \$100 million," the spokesman said.

"Decisions on locations of fire stations and equipment are made independent of government by fire chiefs, based on operational needs," he said.

The New South Wales government is yet to respond to the report.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/new-suburbs-warming-climate-to-lift-fire-risk-report-finds-20130220-2eqb7.html>