



**UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA**  
**WEST AUSTRALIAN BRANCH**

ABN: 31 367 577 278

PRESIDENT: Frank Martinelli

SECRETARY: Kevin Jolly

**CLIMATE CHANGE RALLY - PERTH**  
**17th November 2013**

Good morning to you all and I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and all the elders present, and who have gone before us – the custodians of this land.

I am a professional Firefighter and I am speaking to you on behalf of the members of my Union – the United Firefighters Union in Western Australia.

My members attend 80% of this State's fire incidents, and many of those fires are bush fires, or fires that start in bush land settings and then become catastrophic fires for our citizens and communities across Western Australia.

I am not here to discuss the science of climate change, I am here because Firefighters in WA and around our nation are seeing more regular catastrophic or "campaign" fires, and the frequency of these fires is increasing. These are facts.

In 97 years of my Union's history the most catastrophic fire was the Dwellingup Fire – which resulted in the loss of over 160 structures in 1961.

In the last 5 years Western Australia has witnessed many of these large "Campaign Fires".

We have seen the destruction that these "Campaign Fires" can inflict on our communities - in Toodyay, Brigadoon, Lake Clifton, Kelmscott – Roleystone and Margaret River which resulted in great losses, totalling more than 160 properties.

These fires were of such magnitude that every available resource was required to contain the fires and to protect life and property.

These statistics do not include the misery attached to the loss of personal possessions, live stock, farm land, pets and our bush.

These statistics do not include the ordeals that our fellow citizens experience as a result of fire, and the fears they have had for their safety and the well being of their families and neighbours.

And for my members – these statistics do not include the trauma and frustration triggered by the chronic under resourcing of Fire Services throughout WA because of decades of neglect by a series of governments and administrations.

When we were called the Fire Brigade – long before we had FESA and now the Department of Fire and Emergency Services we had approximately 850 Firefighters in operational Fire Defence and 40 administrators.

In 2013 – despite significant growth in the population of WA and the development of additional infrastructure in the last 10 years – we only have approximately 950 Firefighters in operational Fire Defence and we now have nearly 400 administrators.

My members do not blame our Commissioner or our Minister Joe Francis – they have inherited a system that has been chronically under resourced and one that is characterised by a funding model that appears to justify the lack of expansion and growth in WA. This is not brilliant administration or planning for our communities and our State.

So – I am here today to offer you an insight into the practical world of Fire Defence. No matter what decisions our governments and politicians make about how to stop or fix or indeed to manage climate change we need urgent intervention to increase fire and emergency services now. Climate change cannot be ignored - these fire, flood and storm events cannot be ignored.

My members – your Firefighters are protecting you not only for more catastrophic fires, during what appear to be longer duration fire seasons, but Firefighters are also protecting you during more frequent flood and storm events. Look at the recent flood and storm events in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. Look at the catastrophic NSW fires in October - the earliest start to the fire season in our experience.

As you lobby politicians at all levels of government about the impact of climate change on our State and our communities, I call on you to add this message to your discussions and demands.

WA needs to rebuild and increase our Fire and Emergency Services to match the risk for our communities, my Union estimates that WA needs at a minimum another 300 professional Firefighters and 100 additional officers – fully equipped, housed and kitted out. Regional and Metropolitan WA need more professional Fire Stations – the last professional Fire Station as you drive North is in Geraldton – and that is unbelievable given how many people live and work in our North West and Kimberley regions. Regions recognised nationally as our "economic engine rooms" and yet they do not have Professional Career Fire Stations!

My State Union believes that it is a disgrace that the GST which is collected from WA is not distributed back to our State fairly and in a fashion that takes into account the need for infrastructure – including Fire and Emergency Services for the entire State – between Esperance and Kununurra.

Finally,

We call on our Federal politicians to recognise the practical problems faced in our State made much worse by climate change, and the GST inequity for WA and the impact on our community resources – this flows onto the funding of the Public Sector and most importantly – our Fire and Emergency Services.

We have gathered here today to join our voices as Firefighters with you and together – we will be heard, we will not deter from these issues and we are not going away!

Thankyou.

Kevin Jolly  
Secretary  
United Firefighters Union of Australia - West Australian Branch

Contact:  
0427 772 913