



United Firefighters Union of Australia

Tasmania Branch

Protecting Professional Firefighters since 1943

www.ufutas.asn.au

265 Macquarie St, Hobart Tas 7000
ABN: 82 168 561 663

Phone: 0455 038 009

Email: ufutas@ufutas.com

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Branch Secretary: John Holloway

Norn File Name: Wild Fire Response

08 January 2019

The Hon, Michael Ferguson MP
Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management
Level 5, Parliament Square, 4 Salamanca Pl
Hobart TAS 7000

Via email only:

Dear Minister,

TASMANIAN WILD FIRES

I write to you regarding the recent media around Tasmanian Wild Fires, namely the Gell River fire in the World Heritage Area and your subsequent comments, "There was an immediate and comprehensive multi-agency response to the Gell River fire. To have unions and others criticising these efforts is beyond pathetic,"

I believe you missed the point of what was being said or choose to redirect the issue. "Unions" in particular the UFU have not criticised the efforts of those responding to this or any other Wild Fire.

The UFU wishes to advise that what is being pointed out is issues around resourcing and mismanagement, and we also would like to make you aware of these issues. Tasmanian Fire Service has mismanaged or failed to put the process in place and or implement many of the recommendations from various reports since 2013.

By way of an example in 2017 Firefighters developed a proposal that dealt with Initial Attacks (IA) of Wild Fires Response Capability in remote area's. The basis of this proposal is to have available Remote Access Team pre-identified to hit such a fire early. In September 2018 the UFU and our members desperately attempted to have a trial of this proposal in place for the 2018/2019 fire seasons. UFU offered compromises and an MOU to alleviate any concerns TFS management had, TFS failed to have the trial in place by the start of the fire season. Running this proposal would achieve or validated:

1. TFS being better organised for response to wildfire
2. It would be cost neutral program for the organisation to implement.
3. The MOU would have alleviated any industrial concerns.

3. Recall expenses go to a wildfire cost centre, not out of TFS operational budget.
4. The program has the potential to save the government/taxpayers millions on large sustained campaign fires if they can get on top of remote fires early.
5. TFS was always likely going to send firefighters to these types of fires anyway, with an IA programme it will be better organised and a faster response.

There has been little to no change at the operational level from all the reviews that have occurred after the 2013 – 2016 reports, manning and structural numbers have remained relatively the same since 1997, except for the increases to Fire Reduction Unit. Since 1997 career firefighters have picked up many additional responsibilities. TFS career firefighters are extremely short staffed, numbers have dropped in volunteer brigade, or they are unable to respond to many incidents. Career brigades are having to respond further out of their area's of responsibility for Structural Fires. Operational members have been pushing for improved process and resources for a considerable amount of time.

Resourcing and management are not issues that we raise off the back of incidents such as the Gell River Fire; they are issues that the UFU and our members continually raise with TFS and the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management to improve the service delivery that the community requires.

I have attached a copy of the Wild Fires Response Capability and subsequent proposal for your information.

Kind regards



Leigh Hills
Vice President and Senior Industrial Officer
UFUA - Tasmania Branch