

UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA
TASMANIAN BRANCH

ANNUAL REPORT

9 December 2005

Introduction

2005 has been a steady year for the union. It is reasonable to say that the negotiation of Certified Agreements on a three-year basis (rather than every two years) is preferred by the membership. Three-year agreements allow members a couple of years where things settle down and attention can be given to getting on with the job.

Nevertheless issues always arise and 2005 has been no exception.

Branch Committee of Management

The Branch Committee of Management met on six occasions during the 2004/2005 financial year and attended to a host of issues. There is a high degree of cohesion and camaraderie amongst committee members and this assists greatly with getting the job done.

Amongst other things the BCOM resolved that an attendance sheet should be circulated to members as an attachment to this report.

Certified Agreement implementation

FireComm

FireComm was a major area of work during 2005 and a particularly pleasing set of outcomes was achieved. The Working Party arising out of the Certified Agreement met on about 9 occasions and in the end resolved the long standing question of three operators per shift. This had been a major source of consternation since the inception of FireComm in late 1996.

A host of smaller but nonetheless significant issues have also been resolved along the way. Congratulations go to Bill Perry, Nicole O'Donnell, Michael D'Alton and all members employed in FireComm for their hard work and determination.

A full Working Party report is pending.

123% for Station Officers

The TFS has finally been persuaded to put a position on the table regarding the implementation of this provision. It is unfortunate that this has taken well over twelve months and it is even more unfortunate that many members reached a point of doubting the motives of the TFS in putting this clause in the agreement in the first place. Details on what the TFS is proposing will be circulated shortly.

Providing advice in relation to planning and development applications

Members should be aware that the work value clause of the current Certified Agreement specifies that employees are being compensated for this activity. It became clearer through the year that the TFS intends that on shift Firefighters and Officers will be responsible for this activity during the course of their normal work.

This will involve physical inspections of proposed housing developments and providing advice to authorities on the suitability of these developments from a fire protection and firefighting point of view.

6.5% and 3.5% pay rises

At the time of writing these pay rises are imminent (3.5% for TasFire Equipment).

These pay rises more than compensate for the current rate of inflation and will be repeated this time next year.

Superannuation

Superannuation has been a very significant area of work during the course of the year.

Transfer of SFCSS to RBF

Faced with the prospect of either putting in place a recovery plan or being closed by the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority (APRA) the Trustees of the SFCSS decided to transfer the administration of the fund to RBF.

Members have met this decision with a mature and reasoned response.

After a great deal of research, I am personally convinced that this decision was the best option available. Apart from anything else, it will take the fund out of the jurisdiction of APRA since RBF is “exempt” from Commonwealth regulation. This means that APRA will no longer be able to threaten us with closure of the fund.

Future employees’ entitlements

Not all is well, however, on the Superannuation front. New employees under our award from 1 July this year will only receive 9% superannuation guarantee payments from the employer.

This looms as a major issue for our next Certified Agreement and the Premier has been advised that he is in for a fight if he thinks he can claim to have provided us comparable wages with the mainland while at the same time he has slashed superannuation for new members.

Salary sacrifice of employee compulsory contributions

The Minister for Finance has advised that this benefit will be made available to members but is being held up at the moment by the fact that the trust deed for the fund is being redrafted to accommodate the transfer to RBF.

Death and Disability

This remains an area of contention, particularly since the disability benefits of the existing policy are poor. The union office is continuing to negotiate with the State Government so that the new trust deed can at least provide some latitude to deal with this issue in the future.

Expanding response areas

The Branch has made a significant number of representations to the TFS and to the Minister on this matter during the course of the year. For those who didn't read it, the Chief Officer wrote in his editorial for the winter 2005 issue of Fireground that:

"I believe that there is potential for career brigades to respond further in the urban fringe areas to assist, when volunteer brigades don't have sufficient firefighters available."

At a meeting with the Minister and the UFU on 15 November 2005 the Chief Officer gave a commitment to put in place automatic career responses to Kingston in appropriate circumstances. Work has also been done on Burnie and Devonport backing each other up and eventually responding to volunteer brigade centres in between.

Road Accident Rescue

Much debate and correspondence and many representations have been made on this matter during the year.

On 15 November 2005 the Minister advised us that he had not yet received the report from the review team being led by Dr. John Sparrow. It is likely though, that he will have received it by now. He will need to refer it to his cabinet colleagues before any steps are taken.

HACSU officers have indicated that they are philosophical about what the report will contain, although they are committed to fighting the transfer of RAR to the TFS.

The central question now will be what the real issues are from the point of view of TAS employees and how they can be resolved.

Non-attendance of TFS personnel at motor vehicle accidents

The UFU made two very strong representations to the Minister on this issue during the course of the year. After the earlier meeting a formal agreement was drawn up on response protocols between the TFS and TAS. Most recently, we advised the Minister

that this agreement continues to be observed mainly in the breach. To illustrate the point we showed him recent press coverage of the succession of events that led to a police car being ripped in half on the Victoria Bridge in Devonport (which we were not called to). This was just one of many major MVA's that the TFS was not called to during the course of the year.

The UFU put the view to the Minister that employees of emergency service organisations who repeatedly put members of the public at risk by not observing SOP's should be subject to disciplinary action.

Uniform, clothing and Personal Protective Clothing (PPC)

The uniform that was issued during the course of the year can only be described as having been a disaster, based as it was largely on plastic masquerading as clothing. It should be understood by all that the UFU didn't ever endorse this uniform. Rather, the TFS took it on themselves to issue the uniform as a trial.

It is pleasing that a number of rank and file members organised to have a further issue of this uniform stopped. The Uniform Committee has agreed on a compromise issue of uniform for this year. Further work will be done next year on finding a proper uniform and work dress combination that meets the needs of employees in the job in the current work environment.

Occupational Health and Safety

Much work has been done this year on the OH&S front, both at a State and National front. It is particularly pleasing that the TFS has at last started to embrace a risk assessment approach to all new equipment and work practices. Of course there were a number of examples where the organisation had to be embarrassed into doing the right thing (hose couplings in particular).

Hearing tests will be conducted for all employees either this year or early next year.

On a national level I am pleased to be able to report (as National OH&S convenor) that we will have a new national OH&S policy next year.

Training

It is far less pleasing to report that training continued to be a problem throughout the course of the year. In particular the issue of gap training for the new PSTP has been difficult and remains unresolved.

This will need to be a priority issue for 2006

National Union

The appointment of a National Executive Officer has been an outstanding success. Leigh Hubbard is an accomplished and talented union leader and members will see the benefits of his appointment in the years to come.

Your Rights at work campaign

This campaign has been a major area of work during the course of the year. The campaign has been highly successful so far but it will have to continue strongly up until the next federal election in 2007.

The successful rallies and other activities that have been held this year don't just happen. They take a lot of work and require a high degree of cooperation between unions and union officers. This has included regular campaign committee meetings every week during the course of the year.

Now the "workchoices" legislation is all but in place we have strategic decisions to make. The question of whether we should return to the state industrial jurisdiction is an important one of them.

The more important decision before us, however, is what approach we should take for the state government election due next year.

More than at any time in the past, the members of the UFU will have to consider becoming politically involved in the state government election process. The State Government is our employer. The outcome of the next state election may determine whether we have collective rights and entitlements in the job or whether members will all be employed on individual contracts.

Other

There were many other matters dealt with during the course of the year including:

- The ongoing issue of the unfair pay rates and conditions applying to the "CFS five". That is, the five members of the UFU who work in Community Fire Safety but are not employed under the firefighters award.
- The preparation of a submission in relation to staffing and other matters in the area of fire investigation.
- A number of individual classification issues.
- North West Coast trucks.
- A very difficult morale problem in TFE North.
- The further development of TFS grievance processes.
- Consultation with state service commissioner on the State Service employee survey and other matters.
- A particularly significant member/manager clash in CFS.
- Workers compensation cases.

In addition, shift meetings were held around the State earlier in the year and a raft of smaller issues arose from these meetings and were dealt with.

Conclusion

I wish to thank Wayne Seabrook and the members of the Branch Committee of Management for their direction, support and effort this year. Leon Dewhurst and

Jeremy Smith also deserve special mention as State Fire Commission representative and Returning Officer respectively.

I would also like to thank those members who took on responsibility as either a Union Workplace Representative or Employee Safety Representative over the last period. Your role is central to our success

Most importantly, however, I wish to thank Kae Jones for her outstanding work and professionalism as Office Manager and for being an all round terrific human being.

Richard Warwick
Secretary