



STATEMENT

Fair Work Act 2009
s.240—Bargaining dispute

Fire Rescue Victoria

v

United Firefighters' Union of Australia
(B2022/1676)

COMMISSIONER WILSON

MELBOURNE, 19 JUNE 2023

Statement

[1] Bargaining for a replacement to the *Fire Rescue Victoria Operational Employees Interim Enterprise Agreement 2020* (the 2020 Agreement) has been underway for some time now. Bargaining has mainly taken place outside of the Fair Work Commission with claims and responses being discussed and resolved between the parties in an orderly and constructive manner. There have also been 11 conferences chaired by the Commission since an application for assistance with a bargaining dispute was lodged by Fire Rescue Victoria on 4 November 2022.

[2] Bargaining has progressed very well to the point that the UFU and FRV now report that since the last conciliation conference held on 27 April 2023 all outstanding matters have been resolved, save for the matter of an offer for increases to wages and related monetary allowances.

[3] The constructive flow of bargaining has been assisted by mutual commitments between the main actors in the negotiations, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and the UFU to constructively facilitate the formation of the FRV in July 2020 after the merger of the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services with the professional firefighting operations of the Country Fire Authority. The constructive industrial relations climate since 2020 has allowed, so I have been informed in the conciliation conferences held, for significant organisational and operational changes to be made faster than otherwise may be the case and with potentially greater effect, including financial effect. The UFU points to these matters as not only a justification for its wages and allowance claims but also as a reminder that continued constructive cooperation cannot be taken for granted. The UFU also points to the fact that cooperation in negotiations has taken place against the fact that the relevant parts of the 2020 Agreement all passed their nominal expiry date no later than 1 July 2019.

[4] Shortly before the last conciliation conference, held on 27 April 2023, the Victorian Government announced details of its updated Wages Policy and Enterprise Agreement Framework. Until the new policy was announced in April 2023 and then later documented bargaining on the matter of the union's monetary claims had been unable to progress as there

was both a lack of clarity about the quantum of increase that could be considered by FRV as well as that FRV had no authority to put forward a wages proposal for the UFU's consideration.

[5] It is no understatement to record that the whole 8-month life of this file has been featured by statements throughout that a comprehensive wages and allowance offer from FRV to the UFU is "imminent". The file started that way, and it remains so now.

[6] There is a need for FRV and those who instruct them to take the imminence of a wages proposal beyond rhetoric and make a proposal to the UFU and other employee bargaining representatives in the near future which properly responds to their claims. The publication of the Victorian Government's Wages Policy and Enterprise Agreement Framework clears the way for such an offer to be made and it behoves FRV to ensure an offer is communicated in the very near future.



COMMISSIONER

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