



## **UFU ACT Branch Submission Concerning the A.C.T. 2019 – 20 Budget**

The UFU ACT Branch, representing the industrial and professional interests of career firefighters in the ACT, makes the following submission for consideration of the ACT Government.

As a registered organisation established pursuant to the Fair Work Registered Organisations Act, our objects include:

- To improve the working conditions and general welfare of our members; and
- To advance the efficiency of the services of fire prevention, suppression and extinguishment.

Consistent with those objects, we are pleased to offer the proposals contained herein.

Should the reader require further information or clarification of any matters we have raised please contact the writer.

Greg McConville  
Secretary  
UFU ACT Branch  
[secretary@ufuact.asn.au](mailto:secretary@ufuact.asn.au)  
0488 000 465  
October 2017

**BRANCH PRESIDENT**  
Mate Peric

**BRANCH SECRETARY**  
Greg McConville

**OFFICE**  
PO Box 120  
Dickson ACT 2602

**PHONE**  
0488 000 465

**EMAIL**  
[secretary@ufuact.asn.au](mailto:secretary@ufuact.asn.au)  
[accounts@ufuact.asn.au](mailto:accounts@ufuact.asn.au)

**WEB**  
[www.ufuact.asn.au](http://www.ufuact.asn.au)

**ABN**  
90 662 922 325

## **Part A: Delivering the ACT Government's election commitments.**

ACT Labor made a number of important commitments in the interest of community safety during the 2016 election for the Legislative Assembly. Now re-elected, those commitments properly take place as commitments of Government, particularly insofar as the "Parliamentary Agreement for the 9th Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory" commits to:

***"Progress jointly- committed investment in fire-fighting equipment, personnel and facilities"***  
***(Part 11, Item 1, page 8)***

The commitments relevant to this submission, and the measures necessary to give them effect, are as follows:

### ***Commitment:***

***"Recruit additional firefighters and run additional recruit colleges to address current staff shortages and replace staff likely to leave the service"***

ACT Fire & Rescue (ACTF&R) is currently understaffed, and remains likely to experience significant staff turnover in coming years. While the funded establishment of ACTF&R is 348, of which 4 are administrative and support staff, there are currently only approximately 330 firefighters employed by ACTF&R, with a number of those on long term leave and unlikely to return to the service.

### **Recommendation**

That the ACT Government commit to funding an additional 2 recruit colleges in 2019 – 2020, to maintain firefighter numbers at current funded establishment levels.

Cost: \$800,000 would fully meet the cost of 2 recruit colleges. In recent years recruit colleges have been only partially funded, meaning that significant training costs have been met by ACTF&R from within their own operating budget.

### ***Commitment:***

***"Expand the fleet with an additional pumper-aerial appliance to complement our existing appliances"***

In the 2018 19 budget, and allocation was made to acquire an additional aerial pumper specialist appliance. This is a long overdue commitment.

The aerial pumper will require a crew of four firefighters per shift, and a relief factor which is currently 0.5 of the staffing complement. This would result in the first increase in firefighter numbers since the Platform on Demand ("POD") truck was commissioned in 2014, resulting in the employment of one additional firefighter per operational shift. Prior to that, firefighter numbers per shift had not increased since 2004/05 when the Hazmat appliance was crewed full time. There has not been an increase in pumper crews since 1997 when Gungahlin fire station was opened.

### **Recommendation**

"That the Act Government recruit and train additional firefighters to crew the new aerial pumper.

Cost: Approximately \$3.1million recurrent from 019/20. Approximately \$500,000 in training costs

In addition, in recent years the ESA has expended significant resources in modelling likely response times for a city fire station and a fire station in the Molonglo area.. The UFU has been informed that for this to occur, an additional site will need to be chosen and a separate fire station built.

Building a new city fire station will create an appropriate long term location for an aerial pumper, with the possibility of further crews as existing infrastructure requires replacement. An indicative cost would be in the vicinity of that allocated for the rebuild of Belconnen fire station.

In relation to Molonglo, assuming that it is to be a Fire and Rescue Station not co-located with Ambulance, the cost would be significantly lower than a city station, We have estimated this to be in the realm of \$10 million.

### **Recommendation**

“That the ACT Government fund the cost of a new city fire station”  
Indicative cost: \$18 million.

“That the ACT Government fund the cost of a fire station in the Molonglo area”.  
Indicative cost: \$10 million.

## **Part B: Investing in Firefighter safety.**

Workers compensation legislation recognises the inherent dangers of firefighting insofar as occupational cancers are concerned. The passage of presumptive legislation in the Commonwealth jurisdiction (and which applies to the ACT) was based on the knowledge that over the course of a firefighters’ career, he or she will attend many incidents and be exposed to thousands of carcinogens.

Presumptive legislation was an important improvement to firefighter welfare which means that if a firefighter suffers from a cancer which is listed in the legislation, he or she will not have to prove that a particular chemical exposure was the cause: it is presumed that the cancer was a result of their employment.

Important as it is, we would prefer that firefighters not need to avail themselves of their rights under presumptive legislation: we would prefer that firefighters live long and healthy lives from recruitment to retirement.

For firefighters, the last line of defence against carcinogens is their personal protective clothing and equipment, and an integral part of this is the structural firefighting ensemble (structural ppc). While all PPC is required to meet Australian Standards for use in Australia, there are variances between the design and construction of different brands of PPC.

Consistent with the commitment contained in the ACT Public Sector ACT Fire and Rescue Enterprise Agreement 2013 – 2017 to “promoting, achieving and maintaining the highest levels of health and safety for employees”, firefighter PPC should be of the highest available standard. This is aimed at minimising exposure to carcinogens, reducing the risks of burns as a result of flashover, and reducing exposure to radiant heat.

A rollout of new personal protective clothing should take place in as short a possible timeframe to ensure that all firefighters receive the same level of protection: it is unsatisfactory for some firefighters to receive lower levels of protection than others. A staged rollout of PPC would lead to differing standards of protection based on factors as random as a firefighter’s name being further down a list than another firefighter, and hence still using

outdated or a lower standard of PPC.

The ACT Government declined to allocate funds to this purpose in the previous budget. The result is that ACT Firefighters continue to use PPC made of inferior fabrics to those used by many other services. The link below shows a video which demonstrates the inferiority of the fabric used in the ACT. When exposed to an 8 second flame test at 1000 degrees Celsius, the met amid fabric is scorched and becomes brittle. This is projected to result in 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns to 14% of a firefighter's body, and 5.3% 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns, as compared to 3.5% and 2.6% respectively for the standard of fabric sought by the UFU, and as used in services such as the MFB and CFA in Victoria.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs8Pj5kUQIY>

### **Recommendation**

That the ACT Government fund a complete replacement of firefighter structural firefighting personal protective equipment, to the highest available standard.

Cost: A complete PPC rollout would cost in the vicinity of \$1.4 Million.

### **Upgrade to Training Facilities**

Until very recently, recruit firefighters at the Hume training complex were using a temporary demountable structure as a "transition area" between "dirty" activities such as fire training, and "clean" activities such as classroom based teaching and assessment. Numerous work health safety issues resulted in a decision to remove the temporary facility. The concerns included a sewerage overflow and extreme temperatures causing freezing of washing water and toilets. This facility urgently requires replacement.

These concerns highlighted the need for a purpose built facility resembling a fire station, for recruits to become accustomed to the work practices and procedures of a fire station. This would include a purpose built transition area.

### **Recommendation**

That the ACT Government fund an upgrade to purpose built firefighter training facilities at Hume, including the building of a designated transition area.

Cost: We estimate that \$5 million would provide for a significant upgrade to firefighter training facilities.

### **Conclusion**

The matters we raise are ultimately matters for government decision, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet and elaborate upon our proposals.