



WORD BACK

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A B C D Day Retained

SA BUSHFIRE REVIEW – KEELTY REVIEW REPORT RELEASED

The Report of the Independent Review into the SA 2019-20 Bushfire Season conducted by Mr Mick Keelty (“**the Keelty Review**”) was released on 12 July 2020 and you can access that Report [here](#). For your convenience, our two (2) written UFUSA Submissions provided to the Review can be accessed [here](#); as previously reported, these UFUSA Submissions were supported by appearances before Mr Keelty by UFUSA Representatives.

As we know, the 2019-20 bushfire season was one of the longest and most intense series of fire events in the history of South Australia and Australia alike.

UFUSA members responded to bushfires not just in South Australia but also Queensland and New South Wales, working professionally and flexibly alongside Country Fire Service and Department for Environment & Water crews.

The large volume of requests for MFS assistance reflects the reality that bushfires have become a “core business” of the MFS; unfortunately, this changed reality is *not reflected* in the fleet of MFS appliances or the training and support members receive.

The majority of MFS appliances lack essential bushfire protections, such as Burn Over Protection Systems (BOPS), and several were deployed without chainsaws and thermal imaging cameras; bushfire training for members is also piecemeal and subject to competing funding pressures.

Our Union submitted that funding *must* be made available as a matter of priority to ensure all resourcing and training requirements of the sector are addressed ahead of the next bushfire season. In fact, the resourcing of the MFS just to carry out our everyday work in metro operations is a disgrace and looking at regional operations the situation is even worse.

The MFS is increasingly unable to maintain fleet reserves of at least two spare appliances, which is vital to ensuring coverage is maintained in case of break downs. Whereas in 2014-15 the MFS maintained fleet reserves of at least 2 appliances 90% of the time, this has consistently dropped to the low of 16.53% in 2018-19, *well* below the Treasurer’s target of 80%.

So while the government has now announced \$11m for MFS appliances, this is over *4 years* and represents a fraction of what is needed. The rate of replacement of the MFS fleet is too slow and the MFS needs an immediate investment to purchase 12 new urban interface pumpers now and recurrent funding provided for the building of 6 per year thereafter.

Why are such drastic measures required? Over the last 10 years funding to the sector has suffered successive cuts and is consistently below per capita funding to fire service organisations Australia-wide. Productivity Commission statistics show per capita funding to the MFS and CFS was cut, in real terms, in 4 out of the last 10 budgets.

In 2018/19 the Government reduced funding to the sector, cutting the Emergency Services Levy (ESL) by a forecast \$90m (or 28%), which had provided 93.4% of funding to the MFS and CFS.

In 2018/19 funding to the MFS and CFS combined was almost \$30 per person *less than* the equivalent per capita funding to all fire service organisations across Australia.

Over the last 10 years South Australia has suffered persistent cuts to the number of paid firefighters and support personnel in both the MFS and CFS and is now consistently below per capita numbers of paid firefighters in fire service organisations Australia-wide. Productivity Commission statistics show the number of firefighting and support personnel in the MFS and CFS was cut in 4 out of the last 10 budgets.

Nevertheless, over the last 10 years the MFS and CFS have become more efficient and productive with the funding that they have, with labour and capital costs consistently less than equivalent per capita costs in fire service organisations Australia-wide.

Productivity Commission statistics show that capital and labour costs in the MFS and CFS dropped, in real terms, in two out of the last ten budgets. In 2018/19 MFS and CFS labour and capital costs were \$25.44 per person *less than* equivalent per capita labour and capital costs in fire service organisations Australia-wide.

So the UFUSA endorses the key findings and recommendations of the Keelty Review that there be greater investment in resourcing and training of MFS and CFS, especially:

- “[s]ignificant investment to modernise or replace” existing MFS and CFS fleet, including investment in “*appropriate vehicle fleets for bushfire conditions ... at the peri-urban interface*”;
- urgent prioritisation of “*fitting safety systems to ensure vehicles are fit for purpose ahead of the next fire season*”, including Burnover protection systems (BOPS), Automatic Vehicle Locators (AVLs) and Thermal Imaging Cameras (TICS);
- investment in training, including in “*fireground leadership and incident management*”, as well as “*clear and comprehensive induction for personnel operating unfamiliar equipment and vehicles*”;
- investment in ensuring standards of equipment across agencies is “*interoperable*”, including provision of VHF to all MFS appliances and personnel; and
- development of a formal policy “*between the agencies, union or volunteer associations in relation to interstate deployments*”.

So our union is determined to continue to fight collectively for proper funding in our sector, for all firefighters, and certainly on behalf of UFUSA members who continue to *make ends meet* on a day-to-day basis in the interests of protecting our community.

Oh and our union also welcomes Mr Keelty’s findings and recommendations in relation to SAFECOM but more of *that* in future WordBacks!

DIESEL PARTICULATE MATTER.

An out of session meeting of the MFS WHS Committee is being convened on 23 July 2020 for a presentation and consideration of the UFUSA Report on diesel emissions in the MFS.

Members will be kept informed of developments.

UNION FEES 2019/2020 ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Members busy filing tax returns are urged to remember that our union subscriptions are tax deductible. To assist you in preparing your return, the annual UFUSA subscription for different membership categories are listed below:

MFS	Firefighters	\$969.53
MFS	Engineering/BATA	\$590.77
MFS	Retained	\$222.33
Broadspectrum	Firefighters	\$869.74

COMMONWEALTH BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Bushfire Royal Commission) continues, with the Commission hearing this week from SAPOL and CFS about how they prepare for, and respond to, natural disasters.

The Commission is also gradually making publicly available the over 1,300 submissions to it on its website [here](#), and has now made available the UFUSA submission, which was a joint effort with UFU WA, Qld and NSW. We have uploaded our submission to our website which can be accessed [here](#).

Thank you again for your support and commitment to your union; together we are stronger.

In solidarity

Max Adlam

Secretary