

19 August 2015

Greg Cooper
Branch Secretary
United Firefighters Union, Tasmania Branch
379 Elizabeth Street
North Hobart 7000

Dear Sir

Re: Forestry Tasmania Fire Suppression Capability

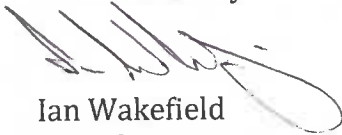
Further to your enquiry regarding the above I confirm the Union's verbal advice as follows:

- (a) From 1998 until 2011 Forestry Tasmania employed approximately 240 permanent field based employees who were required as a part of their duties to participate in fuel reduction burns and fire suppression activities.
- (b) As part of their fire suppression responsibilities those employees were also required to participate in a Standby roster during the summer period. The commencement and cessation of the roster varied depending on the region of the state and the prevailing weather conditions each season.
- (c) In September 2011 Forestry Tasmania largest customer which equated to over 45% of its sales, Gunn's Ltd, announced it would exit logging in Tasmania's native Forests in return for a Tasmania Government payment of approximately 23 million dollars.
- (d) At about that time representatives of the timber Industry and Environmentalists and the CFMEU held discussions about a so called peace deal in Tasmania's Forests, ultimately leading to the disastrous Tasmanian Forests Agreement.
- (e) As a consequence of the drop in sales Forestry Tasmania adopted a strategy of natural attrition not replacing employees as they ceased employment with the corporation by resignation, retirement and so on. In addition Forestry Tasmania implemented an involuntary redundancy process in Northern Tasmania (approximately 40 field based employees) and a further 40 field based employees were transferred to Parks and wildlife as part of the former Government's response to the Tasmanian Forests Agreement and the URS report into Forestry Tasmania.

- (f) By September 2012 the Field based workforce had been reduced to 110 employees. At that time in a position paper responding to the URS report the AWU warned of the dire consequence in any further reduction of the Field based Workforce. In particular the active management of fuel loads and effective fire suppression capacity. A copy of that report was provided to The Minister for Resources Paul Harris at a meeting with the AWU on Thursday 25th June 2015
- (g) A fundamental aspect of the Union's report was the science surrounding mega fire events, which usually happen every 40 years, it now being 48 years since the devastating 1967 fires.
- (h) Ultimately in June this year the remainder of the field based employees below supervisor level were made redundant. The permanent field based workers who performed the fuel reduction burns as part of active forest management and undertook the fire suppression duties (including participation in the Standby roster) no longer exist.
- (i) In such circumstances the AWU is deeply concerned ,given the forecast of an El Nino weather event this summer, about Forestry Tasmania's capacity to provide any safe, meaningful contribution to fire suppression activities (other than Incident controllers).

I have attached a copy of the Union's response to the URS report which detailed our concerns at that time for your information.

Yours faithfully



Ian Wakefield
Branch Secretary