



United Firefighters Union

Victorian Branch ABN 74 030 569 265 EEJSC Submission No.51

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Who are we?

The United Firefighters' Union represent 98 percent of professional Firefighters' in the Country Fire Authority and Metropolitan Fire Brigade. The UFU also represent significant numbers of private sector firefighters engaged on defence bases as well as other white collar and blue collar fire services employees.

The nature of the Firefighting Industry

Leave is extremely important in the Fire Services Industry as it provides an opportunity to recover mentally and physically from the unique demands of the industry. These demands include shift work and regular night shift in particular as well as the intrinsically physically and emotionally demanding nature of the work.

Firefighting was recently found to be one of the ten most dangerous occupations in Australia. Firefighters' suffer from much greater rates of physical and psychological injury than other occupations.

Whilst some fire fighters enjoy long careers, the physical demands of firefighting itself mean that injuries, be they physical or mental, can lead to the careers of firefighters being brought to a premature end.

The Purpose of Long Service Leave

Today, long service leave is seen as much as a needed break from the demands and stresses of work, to encourage rest and recovery before again returning to work. Long service leave is not a 'reward' for years of service to a particular employer, it is an earned entitlement.

Currently, firefighters, who are forced to leave the fire services or decide to leave of their own accord prior to achieving 7 years of service are unfairly penalised by losing their accrued entitlement to long service leave.

Whilst unfit for fire fighting, fire fighters will frequently resume in the workforce immediately, often in blue collar, physically demanding occupations immediately following their exit from the fire services.

In some cases, this will mean that a former fire services may work in excess of 15 years continuously without the opportunity to take long service leave. This might mean that a former fire services employee is not allowed sufficient time to recover from stress of injury that might have lead to them exiting the Fire Services.

Fire Services employees are also frequently drawn from other occupations. In many cases, Fire Services employees will have worked for a number of years in another career. It is therefore possible that employees may work for a period of time as a fire fighter that would not see them become eligible for LSL, but in reality have working continuously for 15 years or more.

A loss of long service leave means workers are not able to take extended breaks, for rest and recovery. Workers are not able to spend extended periods of time with their families or to take extended, meaningful leave.

Portable long service leave would mean workers were able to access leave entitlements after a sustained period in the workforce. It would encourage workers to take holidays or breaks to spend more time with their families. In addition, portable long service leave would provide substantial benefits to employers including the retention and increased productivity of staff.

Recommendations

Whilst the Fire Services Industry has characteristics that mean portable long service leave would be of particular benefit to employees within it as well as those who leave the service earlier than expected, it is the position of United Firefighters Union that there should be a portable long service leave for all Victorian workers. The scheme should be legislated; and the relevant authority should report to government, plus have a board representative of worker and employer groups. Regular contributions should be made by the employer, and the scheme should be easy and simple for workers to understand.

The UFU recommend that a portable long service leave scheme should include minimum standards such as:

- A compulsory system for Victorian workers, regardless of employment status;
- At least 8.67 weeks leave after 10 years of service (pro-rata at 7 years) plus payout on retirement; and
- Guarantee no loss of entitlements for workers already able to access a long service leave scheme.

United Firefighters' Union of Australia - Victorian Branch