

BULLETIN

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To All UFU MEMBERS

UNION CALLS FOR 1000 MORE FIREFIGHTERS *University Report Backs Up UFU Claim*

Members are advised that the UFU commissioned research by the University of Sydney regarding the implications of climate change and Victoria's population growth. The aim of the research was to assist the UFU in making an assessment of whether the current staffing levels will service fire risk while achieving benchmark performance levels in the foreseeable future (2009 to 2026) as a result of population increase and climate change.

The research although preliminary is of great concern. It predicts a significant increase in the number of days of very high fire danger with the largest changes occurring in Northern Victoria. Under a high global warming scenario, an area like Mildura could have up to 90 days a year of very high or greater fire danger.

The research calculates that Victoria will need from 30 to 44 per cent more firefighters by 2026 to handle this threat. That represents up to an extra 1000 professional firefighters on our current numbers, most of them in rural areas.

Victoria's population is projected to increase from 5.3 million in 2009 to 6.7 million in 2026, representing an almost 25% increase. A similar relative increase in firefighter numbers will be necessary to maintain the existing ratio of 1 Firefighter to every 2465 Victorians.

The University of Sydney Report has been receiving extensive media coverage on:

- Channel 7 News;
- ABC Radio (see transcript below);
- Regional Radio; and
- The Age (See Letter to the Editor below)

Union calls for more firefighters in Victoria

Samantha Donovan reported this story on [Friday, February 5, 2010](#) 08:04:00

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SHANE MCLEOD: Victoria will need to dramatically boost the ranks of its firefighters to cope with population growth and increasing fire risk according to a new study. The University of Sydney research was commissioned by the firefighters' union. It will be submitted to the Bushfires Royal Commission next week.

The research accounts for a projected decline in the number of volunteer firefighters over the next 15 years.

Samantha Donovan reports.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: Since the Black Saturday disaster Victoria's United Firefighters Union has repeatedly called on the State Government to employ more paid firefighters. It commissioned this report from the University of Sydney's Workplace Research Centre to bolster its campaign.

Sally Wright is a senior researcher at the centre.

SALLY WRIGHT: Speaking conservatively, if we take the population growth, the estimated decline in CFA (Country Fire Authority) active volunteers and a low climate change scenario we'd need about an increase from 2,500 paid firefighters in 2009 to over 3,300 in 2026. That's about a 31 per cent increase.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: And Sally Wright says if the climate changes more dramatically the required increase would be about 45 per cent. The study relied on climate change projections prepared by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO.

SALLY WRIGHT: It could mean that there's a longer fire season, and or a combination of more extreme fire days.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: The research looked at the needs of both metropolitan and country areas but didn't factor in the professional firefighters who fight blazes on public land. The role of volunteers was taken into account.

Sally Wright says Australia has a strong tradition of volunteer firefighting but that is being challenged.

SALLY WRIGHT: So for the CFA they have a combination of full time paid firefighters and then people who volunteer, and it's about the difficulties of getting that mix right. There's been a sort of reduction in rural populations, there's a lot of people moving off the land into different jobs so there's a loss of bushfire related skills and knowledge in those CFA areas.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: And Sally Wright also found that Melbourne's urban sprawl is influencing the demand for firefighters.

SALLY WRIGHT: A lot of people are commuting quite long distances to work each day, they're not physically near the places where they live, so if there are fire activity, they're working somewhere quite a distance away.

SHANE MCLEOD: Sally Wright, a senior researcher at the University of Sydney's Workplace Research Centre ending Samantha Donovan's report.

Listen to the interview online at <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2010/s2810913.htm>

THE AGE Friday 5 February 2010, Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Whilst better support for volunteers is needed, as a Labor Party adviser writes, this is no substitute for properly funding our fire services (Opinion, 4/2).

Last year, an independent Board of Reference, using CFA's own data found that much of Victoria's fire services in rural areas and outer-Melbourne growth corridors was understaffed. The Board ordered the CFA to upgrade staffing by immediately employing an additional 372 firefighters in 24 locations, 6 of which are in areas touched by the 2009 Bushfires. To date, the CFA and the Victorian Government have refused to comply with this legally binding directive.

In metropolitan Melbourne, the Productivity Commission has found that residents have some of the best fire protection in the country. However, the MFB is now proposing to reduce this minimum level of cover by removing the guaranteed number of firefighters on shift at any time.

Research recently conducted by Sydney University found that on current climate change forecasts, Victoria will need between 31% and 44% more paid firefighters by 2026. That's almost 1000 extra firefighters, with most of those being in non-metropolitan areas. To keep up Victorians' high standard of protection and to meet future challenges, we're going to need more funds and more firefighters, not less.

The UFU is submitting the Report to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission as a preliminary piece of research based on existing available information. The UFU is emphasizing that the Report is a first step and further research needs to be conducted. The UFU is requesting the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission to conduct further more detailed research to address the issues expressed in the Report.

Authorised by:
Peter Marshall,
Branch Secretary

Strength in Unity
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