

Transcript

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Compere: **SIMON ROGERS** Summary ID: **M00065791626**
Item: **INTERVIEW WITH JOHN PEBERDY, ACTING CHAIR, CFA, DISCUSSING THE PROGRESS OF THE CFA EBA NEGOTIATIONS.**
INTERVIEWEE: JOHN PEBERDY, ACTING CHAIR, CFA

Audience:	Male 16+ N/A	Female 16+ N/A	All people N/A
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SIMON ROGERS: The CFA would have to be one of the most beloved country institutions; it saves us, it protects us, it permeates our societies, we're part of it in many cases, and there's been an ongoing dispute which I'm sure we've been following with great interest as the new pay deal is organised. Well today we're joined by the acting chair of the CFA, John Peberdy. He's going to explain the latest situation.

Good afternoon, John.

JOHN PEBERDY: Good afternoon.

SIMON ROGERS: Thanks very much for joining us today. How was the first of all, I gather it was not necessarily an extraordinary meeting but it was slightly out of the normal timescale, was it?

JOHN PEBERDY: That's correct. It was a special board meeting that we called simply to receive an update from our chief executive officer, Lucinda Nolan, on where things

actually sit at the present time. We really are at the pointy end of the negotiations now, and when I say we, there's a process that's being undertaken here. The board is not directly involved in those, that's being done through our negotiating team, and obviously there are other people from government involved. The government set up a team, Industrial Relations Victoria, that's in the room as well, and of course the UFU. And so this is the stage when we're really going through the courses in a lot of detail, but that's not something where the board is in the room, therefore we need Lucinda to be keeping us up to date with what's actually happening.

SIMON ROGERS: So it's more of an information session than ...

JOHN PEBERDY: [Talks over] It was totally information.

SIMON ROGERS: ... an emergency board meeting called with people flying in from all over the country in panic to meet.

JOHN PEBERDY: Not at all, it was a meeting that was planned earlier this week. In fact we're all Victorians, so the board, a number of us, live in parts of Melbourne and others live in other parts of the state. Those that were remote rang into the board meeting and the rest of us were actually at headquarters, but it was a meeting that we planned earlier in the week, and it was simply to update us on what progress has been made at this point in time. Clearly the board has a responsibility to all of the CFA; we're not there for one group or another, we are there for the whole of CFA and so we

want to see an outcome that's in the interests of the CFA and of course the communities of Victoria.

SIMON ROGERS: Okay, fair enough. Now there was a lot of press reporting of course about this message today. Were they overstating the proceedings?

JOHN PEBERDY: Absolutely, totally overstating it.

SIMON ROGERS: Okie-dokie. Now look, in terms of the situation then, you haven't at this stage obviously decided to either ratify or reject the pay offer that's on the table. Do you have a timescale of when you think this will be resolved?

JOHN PEBERDY: We're totally in the court with everyone else – the sooner the better. I mean the timescale- there are meetings taking place almost on a daily basis at the moment, but there is no agreement at this point of time and we would stress that, that it is still a negotiation at this point of time and there are points that basically have to be agreed by all parties before the agreement can actually become an agreement.

SIMON ROGERS: Well that's fair enough, that's standard negotiating practice I suppose, John. Can you be a bit more specific and tell us which particular sticking points are the main problems between you and the UFU at this stage?

JOHN PEBERDY: Not really, simply because I don't think they're the appropriate things to be talking about at this point of time. We've just had a board meeting; we'll get some

minutes in a few days. I mean, the media's been covering particular issues, but I don't want to go to them in detail because it's not helpful to the negotiations. There are good faith negotiations going at the moment, we have a particular view on a few issues that are different to the UFU, and that's normally the case. And even when the agreement is signed we'll probably still have different views, but we will find a point at which we can agree to make an agreement so that we've got a piece to move forward with, and that's as much as I really want to say on the individual parts of the agreement.

SIMON ROGERS:

No that's fair enough; I understand you can't comment on specifics at this stage. But generally then, how has the relationship been with the UFU during these negotiations? Has there been goodwill sitting around the table, or writing messages on bits of paper and throwing them at each other? How is the relationship been?

JOHN PEBERDY:

[Interrupts] Look, too, I don't really want to get into that detail either, because there is a process that takes place about any EBA negotiation, and there are various times when both sides will come in quite hard, and that will cause annoyance to the other side. But at the end of the day, the Premier is quite right on this: this has been going on for a long time, it's time there was an agreement. And we need to get our heads together with the UFU, and with the other people that are involved in negotiation and get an agreement done, and that's where our main focus is at this point of time.

SIMON ROGERS:

That's fair enough John, well put. But one thing it would particularly be nice to get clarified, there's been a lot of different reports about one particular angle of the agreement, and that is the suggestion there must be seven paid firefighters. And there's some confusion as to whether they're- you know, the CFA might be standing around the truck in the small village and ready to race off and fight a small grass fire, but they can't go anywhere because they're waiting for seven paid firefighters to turn up. Is that the situation as it's been put to you in the agreement?

JOHN PEBERDY:

No, it's not quite that- what would I say, black and white, the seven firefighters. I mean, there are points in particularly the areas where we have integrated stations where quite often the first responders to the fire will be the paid firefighters; they're full-time employees and operate on a shift basis. But obviously if we're talking about a small community out in a rural area, as is rightly being said that would be totally impractical. And so the question that sits there is is there justification for seven people to turn up, seven firefighters, whether they be career or volunteer, to turn up for a, let's say, a rubbish bin that's on fire in a metropolitan area, for example. Do you need to send two trucks to each event? Because seven means two trucks basically, and so that's where that issue sits. But it's a very provocative one because it raises the question of first response and the role of volunteers, of course, and that's where it's become a very- one that's of high interest, and it's particularly interesting from the point of view of the way CFA is structured, where we have both career firefighters and volunteers.

SIMON ROGERS: Yes, it's a unique organisational set up [indistinct].

JOHN PEBERDY: Absolutely, and it makes it a little bit different to a lot of other firefighting services, certainly around the world. So we certainly keep in touch with what would be considered best practice, and before we could agree to something like that we'd want to make sure that there's a justification, even for seven to turn up to any drop basically. As standard practice, basically it's not necessary in a lot of cases that we send two trucks out to every job.

SIMON ROGERS: All right, and I also can't imagine any of the CFA people I've ever met in a small country town, they get the message, the alarm bell has gone off, they're sitting there on the truck and they think well we've got to wait for the other two blokes to turn up [indistinct]. I don't think that would go down very well with the local CFA boys that I know, would yours?

JOHN PEBERDY: No, that's absolutely right. So as I say, I think the statement's been taken as a very bland, black and white thing – that for everything that CFA does there'll need to be seven career firefighters. That's not how it's intended in my understanding.

SIMON ROGERS: Well that's- I think that was a good point to clear up.

JOHN PEBERDY: [Talks over] And we'll hopefully get something out- like there's some work being done on putting some words together to clarify some of these clauses that are thrown into the media where it can be misinterpreted

and people can be taking a position on them without having the true implication of what's being discussed.

SIMON ROGERS:

Well that's why it's great that you had time to talk to us today, John; we can clear some of these things up. Look generally just to wrap up, there are a lot of volunteer firefighters of course from across regional Victoria who are really quite concerned about what they've been hearing the last week or two. What would your message to them be as the acting chair?

JOHN PEBERDY:

My message to them is, one, firstly, they do a great job, we know that. And from the point of view of where we sit as a board, there is some legislation that we are very conscious of in the CFA Act about making sure that decisions that are made around everything that takes place in the CFA, we must consider how that impacts on volunteers, and so that's one of the points we're actually putting into the discussion. But we just can't agree to everything that UFU would like us to agree to because it would have negative implications on our volunteers. And the other thing is we use the word career firefighter, and our career firefighters do a fantastic job – they are CFA members as well – but I don't like the term professional firefighters with the implication volunteers are not, because our volunteers are incredibly professional as well. And so we, as the CFA board, talk about one CFA, and I think there's a little bit too much separation of the different roles and that's not something we think is helpful to the discussion. In fact the Premier's involvement I think is quite helpful because, I mean, he's basically saying what we've just discussed, that this has been going on

for a long time, it's time it was resolved. He's, I think, helped this situation considerably by actually making that point, that this is something that does need to be resolved.

SIMON ROGERS:

John Peberdy there, who is the acting chair of the CFA board, giving us the lowdown on their meeting today.

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