

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PFAS Sub-committee**

**Inquiry into the remediation of PFAS related impacts in and around Defence bases
Public hearing – Monday 24 August 2020
via teleconference**

UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA

Oral Question on Notice

Senator Faruqi, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2020, p. 3

Senator FARUQI: The Department of Defence contracts out fire and rescue on Defence bases to private contractors that employ firefighters represented by your union. I'm just wondering if you have, through those contractors, discussed some of those concerns in this deployment?

Mr Tisbury: Yes, we have. We've got a national PFAS policy, which I am happy to send to you. I am the junior vice president of the Victorian branch. Everything we do here, we share with all other branches including the private sector. Like I said, this is a joint initiative between the senior management of Fire Rescue Victoria and the United Firefighters Union. Everything we're doing, all the solutions based initiatives we are employing, we are not making a quid out of it. We're sharing it not only with the Australian fire services but also with international fire services. There's been a lot of interest, especially coming out of North America at the moment, not only from the fire services but also from the government regulators. So we're happy to share that with everyone because there's no point reinventing the wheel. Like I said earlier, we don't care what bag you have on the side of your tunic, a firefighter is a firefighter and whether you are a member of the Australian community or American community, your life is just as valuable. So we're happy to share everything free of charge.

Senator FARUQI: It will be really appreciated. Thank you so much, Mr Tisbury.

Written Questions On Notice

1. The UFUA states that the contamination found at Fiskville fire training ground in Victoria, and its ongoing impacts, are equivalent to those experienced by PFAS affected communities in and around Defence bases.
 - What support is currently offered to PFAS affected communities near fire-training grounds that are not Defence-owned? Can you indicate the extent of the problem and provide examples?
 - What national response do you consider is required to address the needs of both firefighters and communities in particular?

- A number of major PFAS-related financial compensation cases are now before the courts. You recommend for a redress scheme which provides physical and mental health compensation. Can you expand on your proposal and the urgency of need?
2. This inquiry has heard that Defence is reluctant to accept independent blood results as evidence of PFAS impacts on communities near Defence bases (HEN, *Submission 3*). Has the UFUA any comment on this?
 3. The UFUA has had success in promoting introduction of presumptive legislation at Federal, state and territory levels in Australia to protect firefighters. What are the protections offered and what methods did you deploy to gain support for them?
 4. The UFUA cites the establishment Safe PFAS Threshold Exposure Limits thresholds for portable and not potable water in firefighting, as the catalyst to MFB work to clear firefighting appliances of PFAS contamination below acceptable levels.
 - What approaches were taken to achieve this result? Do firefighters deployed by Defence under contract also have the benefit of the decontaminated equipment?
 - What has been the impact of the thresholds on safety standards nationally, and how are the standards enforced? To what extent is the use of non-potable water still prevalent by firefighting services?
 5. The Department of Defence contracts out fire and rescue on defence bases to a private contractor that employs the career firefighters who are represented by the UFUA. At the hearing you mentioned the ongoing use of fluorine based foams. Are there other concerns you wish to raise in relation to contractors, or fire-fighter management under Defence deployment?
 6. The Sub-committee notes problems associated with increased exposure to a cocktail of toxins in addition to PFAS in modern firefighting. Absorption of these toxic chemicals occurs dermally, due to the breathability of firefighting suits, rather than by respiration (Sub, p. 7). Is the UFUA aware of, or support the need for, research to improve the safety of firefighting suits and equipment?
 7. Your submission cites UFUA's role in supporting the Macquarie University PFAS Clinical Blood Study, with the MFB. Would you provide an update on your current involvement and the nature of your collaboration with Fire Rescue Victoria in consultations over the Study and its results (Sub, p. 19)?