

**SUBMISSION  
TO THE SENATE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO  
THE ROLE OF COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS  
IN ADDRESSING THE HIGH RATES OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS  
EXPERIENCED BY FIRST RESPONDERS, EMERGENCY SERVICE WORKERS  
AND VOLUNTEERS.**

**ROSS FUSCA  
WELFARE OFFICER  
UFUA VICTORIA BRANCH  
c/- 410 Brunswick Street  
Fitzroy, VIC 3065**

1. My full name is Rosario (Ross) Fusca and I am a retired member of the Australian Federal Police.
2. I have had 30 years' experience in law enforcement with the Australian Federal Police, attaining the rank of Detective Sergeant. In this role, I held the position of Welfare Officer (Victoria and Tasmania), encompassing portfolios including Return to Work Coordinators, Equal Opportunities Officer, Sexual Harassment Contact Officer, Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Regional Mediator.
3. I have been awarded a number of '*Police Commendations*' and '*Letters of Appreciation*' which is reflective of my work ethic and ability to interact and communicate with people at all levels. Attached to this submission is an outline of the highlights of my career with the Australian Federal Police which includes the commendations and awards I have received.
4. In 2016 the United Firefighters Union of Australia Victoria Branch Secretary Peter Marshall contacted me and asked me whether I could assist with UFU member welfare issues. I had known Peter for many years and he knew of my background and roles in the Australian Federal Police including the welfare roles I had held.
5. Mental health and wellbeing issues were increasingly prominent for the UFU Victorian Branch at that time due to recent suicides and the demoralisation of Victoria's career firefighters due to an ongoing industrial dispute. The dispute had been under significant media and public scrutiny and career firefighters were publicly being labelled thugs and bullies.
6. The UFU was cognisant of the toll these circumstances were taking on the welfare of its membership and the Branch had decided that additional assistance was necessary.

#### **UFU WELFARE OFFICER**

7. Since my appointment as UFU Victoria Welfare Officer in February 2016, the bulk of my work with firefighters has been to address mental health issues emanating from the continual exposure to trauma, the poor administration of firefighters professional and personal wellbeing and the vilification of firefighters via the media and the subsequent lack of rebuttals by their respective employers.
8. These issues coupled with the fear that if a firefighter who is suffering from a mental health exposes their condition to their employer, that their career within the organisation will be adversely affected.

9. Victoria has two fire agencies – the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and the Country Fire Brigade (CFA). The UFU represents the operational staff (firefighters), administration and corporate staff in both fire agencies. In addition, the UFU represents firefighters at defence bases, and the 000 dispatch centre.
10. The MFB and CFA both have support services for their employees.
  - For MFB personnel there is 24-hour access to a dedicated counselling service with psychologists with immediate access to a psychologist via telephone or alternatively to make an appointment. This service is also available for family members.
  - Additionally, for MFB personnel there is an extensive peer support programme where a clinician can be accessed by calling a Peer Support Person or the Peer Coordinator.
  - CFA members can access Critical Incident Stress Peer Support by calling either the CFA Chaplain Service or CFA Welfare Support.
11. The UFU Welfare Officer was a new role established in 2016 and it has developed over the past couple of years. The UFU Victoria Branch had determined it was necessary to provide an additional service that was independent of the employers and was available to all members and their families.
12. The UFU Branch officials, delegates and staff notify me of any situation that they think may benefit from my involvement. This can be anything from a dispute affecting members, or an issue on a station/workplace.
13. All UFU members are regularly provided with my contacts and some directly contact me if they need assistance.
14. Often, I am notified of someone that may have a workplace or personal issue and I touch base with them to see if we can help in any way.
15. I make contact with the person and discuss any current issues, how they are coping, whether they or their family needs any assistance.
16. Often it is a case of me visiting and having a cup of tea with them to talk through the issues they are facing. Often having someone independent of the employer and not there for any purpose other than to listen and assist is hugely beneficial.

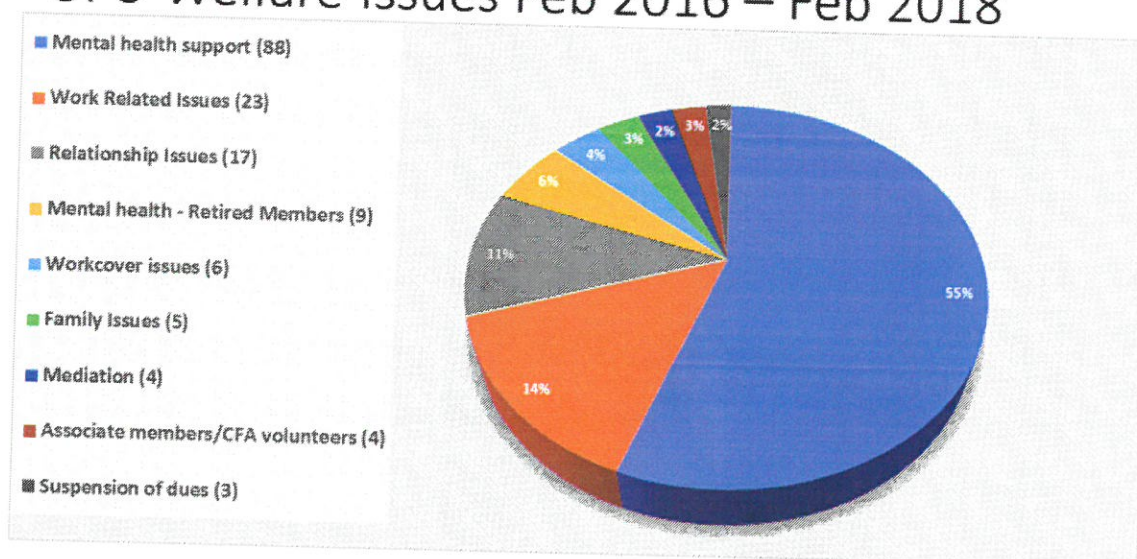
17. My role is to listen, provide the options for assistance and if requested to refer that member on for assistance if necessary.
18. I follow up regularly with numerous people/members I have come across in this role just to see how they are travelling and whether they need any further assistance.
19. In addition to the personal issues, I have attended workplaces where there is an ongoing dispute particularly to that workplace, or where there has been a recent history of issues.

### **Snapshot**

20. Below is a snapshot of the contacts I have had since 2016 until February 2018. Mental health is the predominate issue by far for the UFU members during this period.

21. From 2016-February 2018 I had made 159 contacts with UFU members
- 9 Retired members assistance with mental health issues - 2 are ongoing
  - 23 Work related issues - 3 are ongoing
  - 4 Mediations between 8 contacts
  - 17 Relationship issues - 5 are ongoing
  - 5 Family issues - 1 is ongoing
  - 3 financial issues
  - 6 WorkCover issues
  - 88 Mental health support issues of varying degrees

### UFU Welfare Issues Feb 2016 – Feb 2018



I appreciate the opportunity to provide this evidence to this important Senate Inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can assist further.

19 June 2018/

Rosario Fusca

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS WITHIN THE AFP**

1977	Joined the Commonwealth Police Force and later the AFP.
1983	Awarded Chief Commissioner' Certificate (Victoria Police).
1986	Awarded Commissioner's Certificate (AFP).
1986	Promoted to Detective Sergeant – Drug Unit, Melbourne Office.
1991	Transferred to Officer-in-Charge Melbourne Airport.
1992	Awarded National Medal.
2002	Rejoined the AFP.
2003	Transferred to Team Leader – Multi-agency Task Force.
2005	Managed Operation Quantum which lead to the seizure of approximately 1300kg of MDMA.
2005	Seconded on two occasions to Operation CAWDOR as Commander, Forward Command Post, Phuket, Thailand. (Tsunami Victim Identification)
2006	Awarded an Conspicuous Award for leadership and investigations which resulted in the largest recorded seizure of MDMA in the world.
2006	Seconded to Operation Stringybark, Solomon Islands to manage the investigation into the April 2006 riots.
2010	Resigned from AFP
2014	Police Service Medal