

United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Union of Employees, Queensland



Submission regarding the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Bill 2016

United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Union of Employees, Queensland (UFUQ)

12 December 2016

Contact:

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General Secretary



1. Request for permission to publish this submission

UFUQ requests permission from the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee (the committee) to publish this submission, particularly for the information of our members, interstate firefighter unions, and Queensland unions affiliated with the Queensland Council of Unions (the QCU).

We authorise the publication of this submission by the committee.

2. United Firefighters' Union Australia, Union of Employees Queensland (UFUQ)

The UFUQ is an industrial organisation of employees registered under the *Industrial Relations Act 1999* (the IR Act), providing representation and coverage to urban firefighters (professional and auxiliary) and scientific and communications centre officers employed by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) and also to firefighters employed by private providers outside of QFES.

UFUQ has over 2,500 members across the state, employed in both full time and part time capacities. Our members respond to almost every emergency situation in Queensland and also attend incidents interstate and internationally as required. Our members are extremely dedicated to all facets of firefighting and rescue and are held in high regard by the Queensland community.

3. Consultation about the Bill

UFUQ is pleased to be able to provide this submission about the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Bill (the Bill).

We are satisfied that the timetable for consultation about this Bill provides adequate time to consider and provide submissions to the committee.

4. Policy objectives

The object of this Bill is set out in clause 3: *“to ensure that residents of communities in the vicinity of large resource projects benefit from the operation of the projects”*.

The Bill seeks to ensure that proposed large resource projects can establish a social licence to operate by requiring them to conduct a rigorous ‘social impact assessment’ (SIA) prior to approval.

The Bill also introduces a series of safeguards for workers and communities who live in close proximity to proposed large resource projects, and will further regulate the use of fly in fly out working arrangements.

UFUQ notes that this Bill’s objective is positive for workers and communities and serves the public interest.

5. Social Impact Assessment Process

The Bill seeks to require proponents of new large resource projects to prepare a social impact assessment (SIA) for the project as part of the approval process. The requirements for an SIA are provided for in the Coordinator-General's Draft Social Impact Assessment Guideline, tabled in Queensland Parliament on 8 November 2016. Any new assessment process will be monitored by the office of the Coordinator-General.

UFUQ notes that the social baseline study requires the proponent to assess the scope of the impact of the resource project and identify key stakeholders.

Resource projects of the kind indicated in this Bill come with inherent high risk activity, and require significant risk mitigation and emergency planning and preparedness, and potentially emergency response.

UFUQ would therefore recommend that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services be listed automatically as a key stakeholder for the purposes of all social baseline studies.

UFUQ also notes that the SIA Guidelines require the development of a Health and Community Wellbeing Management Plan, which includes consideration of emergency response management.

Proponents are required to develop arrangements and mitigation strategies in conjunction with emergency service providers.

In addition to this, section 3.3.2 of the Guidelines requires state agencies to assess potential impacts on state government services and make a submission to the coordinator-general or relevant department.

6. Impact on members

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) owns and maintains urban, auxiliary and rural fire stations to service rural and regional communities across Queensland. UFUQ members are employed at many such stations (although typically, not at rural bush fire brigade stations).

These stations are typically sparsely staffed and equipped only to respond to common risks, such as grass fires and occasional structural fires.

UFUQ seeks to ensure that all fire stations located within a 100km radius of any large resource project are staffed with permanent, professional firefighters who are trained and equipped to effectively manage the increased risks associated with the project.

It is common for larger resource projects to arrange their own emergency response safeguards, sometimes including private fire and rescue teams. UFUQ acknowledges that these private emergency response teams may be sufficient to prevent and contain incidents.

However, where a fire or other emergency incidents are unable to be contained by the private response team, QFES fire and emergency response from nearby stations is required to assist.

It then becomes necessary for those QFES firefighters to possess the required skill level to safely manage the emergency incident.

UFUQ submits that this basic level of emergency response can only be achieved through a full time staffing model, with relevant training offered to the professional firefighters employed.

In addition to this, large resource projects typically have a significant effect on local communities in terms of population, infrastructure and transport. Permanent staff at nearby fire stations will be necessary to properly respond to the increased activity and manage the associated risk.

UFUQ also submits that an examination as to how the extra funding needed to properly equip these QFES stations would be supplied is required, with the potential for the proponents of the large resource projects, rather than by Queensland taxpayers, assisting with funding the emergency response capability. The funding allocated to ensure the readiness of the fire service could perhaps be calculated as a percentage of the financial output from each large resource project.

7. Conclusion

UFUQ is generally supportive of the policy changes proposed by the Minister for State Development in this Bill, particularly as they relate to rigorous social impact assessments.

However, UFUQ also seeks to ensure that our members are equipped with safe staffing levels and the appropriate technical expertise if required to attend incidents associated with a large resource project. We therefore request that our recommendations contained in this submission be considered by the committee.