



UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA
UNION OF EMPLOYEES QUEENSLAND

24 March 2016

Ms Bernice Watson
Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Delivered via email: lacsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms Watson

Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016

On 23 February 2016, the Hon Bill Byrne MP, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services introduced the *Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016* into the Queensland Parliament.

The Bill now stands referred to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee and that the Committee report to the Parliament by 23 May 2016.

UFUQ note that the Committee have been directed to consider this Bill in conjunction with the *Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2015*, introduced by the Member for Kawana in December 2015.

However, we have lodged this submission primarily in relation to the *Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016*.

We trust our information is of assistance to the Committee and we will be pleased to provide further information and attend any scheduled committee hearings upon invitation.

STRENGTH

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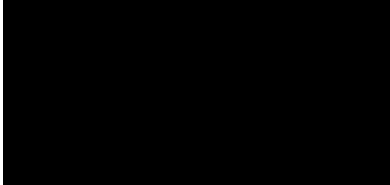
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Regards



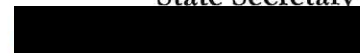
John Oliver
State Secretary

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

Submission regarding the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016

**United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Union of Employees, Queensland (UFUQ)
24 March 2016.**

**Contact: John Oliver
State Secretary**



Submissions regarding the “Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016”.

1. Request for permission to publish this submission

UFUQ requests permission from the Legal Affairs and Community Safety 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 (both professional firefighters and auxiliary firefighters) employed by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) and also to scientific officers and communication officers.

UFUQ is bound by Awards of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (the QIRC) and is also party to a number of Certified Agreements made and registered under the IR Act. UFUQ has a proud history of representing our members.

UFUQ members, due to their roles in preventing, suppressing, and assisting in recovery from emergency situations, are among the most highly regarded people in their communities.

The services provided by firefighters, scientific officers and communication officers during emergency and other situations across Queensland, Australia, and overseas as required, frequently exposes them to high risk occupational health and safety situations.

UFUQ supports our members with occupational health and safety matters and provides legal and industrial representation where required.

We examine legal issues affecting our members and provide information and submissions to promote and protect the safety of our members, and in turn, that of the Queensland community.

3. Consultation about the Bill

UFUQ is pleased to be able to provide this brief submission about the Bill and would request the opportunity to appear before the committee at any scheduled public hearing.

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 explanatory notes to the Bill set out the policy objectives, in particular –

“The objective of the Bill is to improve personal safety in domestic dwellings by requiring the installation of photoelectric smoke alarms in all dwellings thereby reducing the loss of life or injury.”

UFUQ submits that the policy objectives of the Bill are sound and in the public interest.

5. Benefit to Queenslanders of the bill passing

The Bill proposes the compulsory installation of photoelectric smoke alarms in every residential premises in Queensland. It also requires these alarms be installed in every bedroom and that they be interconnected and powered by an enduring power source.

UFUQ submits that these proposed laws satisfy the policy objective because they will result in quicker and more accurate detection of residential fires.

Currently in Queensland, the smoke alarm market is dominated by two technical models, photoelectric and ionisation. Photoelectric smoke alarms are designed to detect and respond to the early, smouldering stage of a fire, as opposed to ionisation alarms which are only suitable for detecting fast flaming flares.

A typical residential, night-time fire tends to begin in a smouldering stage, where the smoke produced is visible, but cooler and less dense than the smoke produced from a flaming fire. Ionisation alarms take significantly longer, even up to an hour more, to detect fire at the smouldering stage. By the time a fire of this type is in the flaming stage, the level of smoke in the air makes escape considerably more difficult.

In addition to this, ionisation devices are five times more likely give off a false alarm. In practice, this means that residents are significantly more likely to disconnect their device to avoid the annoyance and inconvenience of a false alarm. This is clearly contrary to the public interest because it leaves residents with no protection whatsoever against night-time fires.

It is UFUQ’s position that photoelectric smoke alarms are superior for the early detection of residential fires.

Furthermore, quicker and more accurate detection of residential fires will allow firefighters to respond to incidents much earlier. This will further improve community safety.

The bill also requires that smoke alarms be installed in each bedroom, and that alarms within residences are hardwired or otherwise interconnected. UFUQ refers to the benefits of interconnected alarms as outlined by the QFES Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner at the committee hearing for this bill held on 16 March 2016.

6. Benefit to our members

One of the UFUQ’s principle roles is to advocate for the occupational health and safety and wellbeing of our members, so that they in turn, can provide a life-saving service to Queenslanders.

Early detection of fires is crucial to the safety of our members. Where a fire is detected earlier, residents will be able to alert the QFES and potentially leave the premises. The risk to our members is dramatically reduced if they are not required to enter the premises to perform a rescue operation. Additionally, the fire itself will likely be less dangerous the earlier it is attended to.

Recent tragic house fires are only examples of the regular emergencies our members are required to attend.

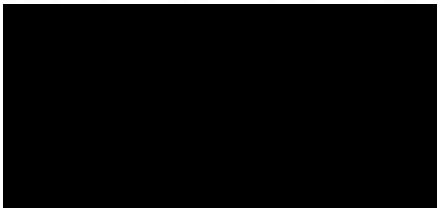
UFUQ is also concerned about the psychological damage caused to our members where firefighters are called too late into an incident, and are unable to perform a successful rescue.

The stated objective of this bill, to improve the personal safety of Queenslanders, will likely also reduce the psychological impact on firefighters in attending to emergency situations.

7. Timeframe for implementation

UFUQ also acknowledges the proposed timeframe for implementation as 10 years for domestic dwellings, and 5 years for leased or sold properties and government-owned housing. While it is in the best interests of our members to have photoelectric smoke alarms installed as soon as possible, UFUQ acknowledges the wide scale of the implementation process and the fact that the onus of installation is on the property owner. In consideration of this, UFUQ deems the stated implementation timeframe as reasonable in the circumstances.

UFUQ thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide feedback on this Bill.



John Oliver
State Secretary
United Firefighters' Union Australia, Union of Employees Queensland
24 March 2016