

# IPA MEDIA RELEASE

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## FAIR WORK ACT ENTRENCHES UNION POWER OVER EMERGENCY SERVICES INSTITUTIONS

The Fair Work Act must be reformed to stop the march of union power through our emergency services bodies, according to a research paper released today by free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

The paper, *Code Red: Fair work and the long march of the unions through our emergency services institutions*, which was written by IPA Adjunct Fellow Gideon Rozner and IPA Legal Fellow Aaron Lane, uses the ongoing dispute between the Country Fire Authority and the United Firefighters' Union to highlight flaws in the enterprise bargaining framework under the *Fair Work Act 2009*.

“So called ‘consult and agree’ provisions included in public sector EBAs are so general in scope that unions are able to exercise an effective veto over a wide range of operational matters,” says IPA Adjunct Fellow Gideon Rozner.

“This often results in expensive and time-consuming disputes with the union over trivial matters, often completely unrelated to workers’ pay and conditions.’

Mr Rozner cited evidence given to the Fair Work Commission in 2014 of absurd matters about which ‘consultation’ was required between the MFB and the UFU, like migration of the Metropolitan Fire Board’s (MFB) computer operating system to Windows 7 and proposed changes to the type of pencils used by firefighters.

“No wonder senior managers of emergency services bodies are throwing up their hands in frustration. Unions’ ability to effectively veto routine management decisions in order to pursue their own interest, is dangerously compromising public safety.”

“The resources of our emergency services bodies are also under strain. Legal costs for the CFA have more than doubled since the introduction of the Fair Work Act, and have more than tripled for the MFB.”

“The Turnbull Government’s changes are a positive step and would succeed in protecting volunteers, but more is needed. The government should further limit permitted matters in enterprise bargaining agreements, removing the power of unions to frustrate and delay the decision making process.”

“We don’t want to see similar disputes within organisations like Ambulance Victoria or the State Emergency Service.” Mr Rozner said.

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