



**UFUA Aviation Branch**  
PO Box 187  
Greenacres, SA 5086  
Phone: 0428 553 859  
Email: [admin@ufuav.asn.au](mailto:admin@ufuav.asn.au)  
Web: [ufuav.asn.au](http://ufuav.asn.au)  
ABN: 96 533 521 914

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **NORFOLK ISLAND FIREFIGHTERS FORCED TO TAKE INDUSTRIAL ACTION OVER UNDERPAYMENT**

Firefighters employed by Norfolk Island Regional Council will today begin protected industrial action to end years of underpayment.

The members of the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFUA) have been negotiating with the Council since February 2023, seeking pay parity with firefighters in the rest of Australia. They have joint responsibilities for aviation fire fighting and rescue at Norfolk Island Airport and community fire fighting duties right across Norfolk Island.

Currently they are paid 59% of the salary of all other airport firefighters in the rest of Australia, and their pay does not even meet the minimum requirements of the national fire fighting award.

The industrial action will begin with a series of bans and limitations as well as wearing of UFUA clothing to work in place of council uniforms. The workers have the option of expanding their actions if council continues to refuse to negotiate over their claims.

UFUA Aviation Branch Secretary Wes Garrett stresses the action has not been entered into lightly and community safety will not be compromised during the dispute.

“Industrial action is pretty rare on Norfolk Island but we feel our members have been left no choice if they are to get the respect and recognition their work deserves. We have been talking for over a year, trying to get council’s senior management to realise you can’t pay such low wages to highly trained first responders who put their safety on the line,” says Garrett. “Our members won’t be treated as second class Australian workers just because they’re out on Norfolk Island.”

“Council’s own reports admit they can’t get people to the island to do these jobs because the wages are so far behind the industry standard. Our members shouldn’t be forced to take industrial action to get wages up to a decent level.”

“We can assure the community that there will be a response in the case of a fire or emergency in the community. Our dispute is with council management and industrial action will be targeted at council operations and the running of the airport.”

Garrett says UFUA members are not perturbed by recent council chatter about ownership of the airport.

“Talk of unloading or privatising the airport is just that - talk. The council’s own report says the airport, including the fire service, operates at a profit, so why would you want to give it away or sell it off?”

“Also, nowhere does the report mention the community fire service. As long as Norfolk Island exists, there will be aviation and community fire services, and the first responders who staff them will have to be paid properly.”

“For too long this hasn’t been the case and our members have had enough”

**Media contact: Dan Murphy 0427 975 714**