

Commission of Inquiry into the CFMEU and Misconduct in the Construction Industry

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SOANE TAUKALAU

I, Soane Taukalau, labourer, affirm:

Background

1. I make this statement in response to a notice issued by Stuart John Wood AM KC, the Commissioner appointed pursuant to the *Commissions of Inquiry Order (No. 2) 2025*.
2. I am a labourer employed by Matrix Unlimited (**Matrix**). I have been working in the construction industry for about six years.
3. I am working as a subcontracted skilled labourer on the Cross River Rail Project (**the Project**). I started work on the Project in 2023 at the Dutton Park site. My work includes general skilled labouring associated with rail, steel and concrete work.
4. My supervisor is currently Ben Millard, of CPB Contractors Pty Ltd (**CPB**). Previously, I have been supervised by Raoul Van Aardt, of CPB.

Relations with the CFMEU

5. I joined the CFMEU as a member in late 2023.
6. I was recruited to become a member of the union by Liam Crow at the Rocklea Station site.
7. Mr Crow came around the worksite at Rocklea with pamphlets and spoke to workers about joining the CFMEU. He said that joining the CFMEU would help workers get higher pay, better working conditions, and shorter working days. That appealed to me, and I joined.
8. I completed paperwork and my union dues were about \$70 per week, paid by direct debit.
9. I was still a CFMEU member on 1 May 2024.

Dutton Park Incident

10. On 1 May 2024, I arrived at the Dutton Park site between 5:30am and 6:00am, for a 6:30am start.
11. I had heard discussion that there was likely to be picketing that morning by the CFMEU.
12. I did not know the reason the CFMEU intended to picket Dutton Park. I was a casual worker and wanted to work that day because if I did not work, I would not be paid.
13. When I arrived, there were a bunch of CFMEU members hanging around each of the site entrances.
14. Mr Raoul Van Aardt suggested we conduct the pre-start meeting in the demountable office across the road and then approach the site together. That's what we did.

15. After the pre-start meeting, a group of us started to walk towards the site together. The group included Damien Keeley, a Unity Alliance (**Unity**) leading hand, Marty Johnston, Fou Ah Lam, Tyson Langdon, Kane McDonald, Sky Lewis and Mr Raoul Van Aardt.
16. We planned to use the entrance near the overpass on Nobel Street. This was a relatively new entrance, and it did not initially appear to have picketers standing at it.
17. As we approached the Nobel Street entrance, the picketers saw us and a group of about 20 ran towards the entrance. They were all male, physically large, and wearing CFMEU clothing. Some had balaclavas, jumpers or other clothing covering part of their faces. I recognised a few faces as workers I had previously seen around the Project.
18. When they reached us, they started abusing and swearing at us and they also yelled "*Don't cross the picket line.*" I did not initially appreciate how serious the situation was going to become.
19. The CFMEU workers were trying to block the Nobel Street entrance and were taunting us. The atmosphere changed once the CFMEU started to become physical. The first worker who tried to pass through the entrance was physically pushed back by CFMEU workers which prevented him from getting through.
20. Up until this point, the CFMEU picketers were just standing around the gate and shouting at us, which allowed some people to get through the entrance. When they saw this, the picketers formed a human chain across the entrance. This left some workers, including women, outside the site and unable to move through.
21. Around this time, I saw Ms Lewis being pushed. I remember her crying and saying that she was scared. I then saw Mr Langdon involved in a physical confrontation and I moved towards him because I intended to help break up the fight.
22. One of the CFMEU workers then began arguing with me and calling me names, including "*dog*". I argued back and said words to the effect of, "*Come here*" or "*Give it a go*". He then punched me once to the head, hard. I had to defend myself and punched him back. I became very angry and focused on him. We struggled and I dragged or carried him out towards the road before other workers calmed me down and told me to let him go.
23. The man who punched me was wearing a grey CFMEU hoodie or jumper with camouflage-coloured sleeves and a CFMEU beanie. His face had been partly covered earlier. I don't know who he is.
24. I have been shown footage of the day:
 - (a) Video 1 shows us approaching the site entrance.
 - (b) In Video 2, I can identify myself in the blue cap.
 - (c) In Video 5, Mr Langdon's shirt is torn and the man in the camouflage-coloured sleeved jumper can be seen fighting with me; and
 - (d) In Video 6, the fight between me and the man in the camouflage-coloured sleeved jumper spills onto the road.
25. There were no police around at this time.

26. After the fight died down, the workers in our group who had entered the site gathered in the area under the train station overpass. We remained together while the situation outside continued.
27. While we were gathered inside the site, about ten additional vehicles arrived and groups of men got out and joined the picketers who were already outside the site. They spread around the perimeter fence.
28. I saw two or three of these people outside the fence holding box-cutter or Stanley-type knives. I saw them use these knives to cut the mesh on the site fence. Mr McDonald was operating or sitting in a piece of plant inside the site, and I saw rocks being thrown over or through the fence towards him and the machine.
29. People outside the fence yelled racial and other abuse at us. I remember hearing words including "*black cunts*", "*scabs*" and "*coconuts*". I also heard threats to the effect, "*wait until you get out*" and "*we will stab you*". I was shocked by this conduct.
30. Police eventually attended and escorted us from the site. This was about 30 minutes after the confrontation at the Nobel Street gate. I did not see police arrest anyone from the CFMEU group and the police did not take a statement from me at the site.

Aftermath

31. Unity supported us after the incident. We were told not to attend work for two days while things settled down and those days were paid.
32. When I returned to work, I attended a meeting with senior Unity personnel, including James Donaghey and Paul Elliott. They thanked the workers who had attended on 1 May for supporting their colleagues and trying to work.
33. While we were in that office meeting, a group of about 20 people associated with the CFMEU gathered inside the front office area. They were not wearing face coverings on that occasion. We were sitting in a smaller room with glass doors or windows, and I could see members of the group looking in at us. I felt that they were trying to intimidate us.
34. One member of the group had a large camera mounted on his head. Mr Donaghey and another Unity superintendent stood near the entry and told the group that they were not entitled simply to enter the premises without complying with the relevant entry requirements.
35. For a few weeks after the incident, Ms Lewis did not feel safe walking into or out of the site by herself. One of us would meet her at her car, walk into the site with her and later walk her back to her car.
36. In the weeks after the incident, I felt hunted by the CFMEU. Workers involved in standing up to the picket, particularly Mr Ah Lam, Mr Langdon and me, were being identified and sought out by people associated with the CFMEU. I was told by co-workers that CFMEU delegates were asking people on Project sites who we were and trying to identify the workers involved in the Dutton Park confrontation.
37. Before the Dutton Park incident, I had spoken casually with CFMEU delegates around the site in the same way I would speak to other workers. After the incident, those interactions changed. Ordinary conversation stopped and I felt tension when we passed one another.

38. Approximately two or three weeks after the incident, I was at a laydown area at Dutton Park with Fou Ah Lam when we were approached by Tim Maguire, the Health and Safety Representative.
39. Mr Maguire told us words to the effect, "*We are about to do another picket line. I hope you boys are ready.*" He also said words to the effect that we might have to be moved somewhere else so that the CFMEU could do the picket without us interfering with it. He said that they had our faces or pictures of us and knew who we were.

I affirm that the contents of this statement are true.



Signature of deponent

Place: Brisbane Date: 10 / 09 / 2025



Before me (signature of witness)

EMMA JANE ELISABETH WEST
Full name of witness (please print)

☐ Justice of the Peace (JP No. _____)

☐ Notary public

☒ Lawyer

☐ Other authorised person (specify): _____