

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

WITNESS STATEMENT OF KURT NEUMANN

I, Kurt Neumann say on oath:

Introduction

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 have been employed by the AWU from about September 2015.
3. I am currently a Senior Organiser at the Australian Workers Union (**AWU**). I was appointed to this role in 2024.
4. I have also served in the positions of Organiser, District Secretary for the Southern area of Queensland, and Vice President of the Queensland Branch. I have sat on the State Executive and National Executive of the Union.
5. My work as an organiser has spanned the AWU's coverage areas, including civil construction, councils, health, disability services and manufacturing.

Relations with CFMEU – Civil Construction

6. Generally, through my work with the AWU, my interactions with the CFMEU prior to 2021 have been mild and often respectful.
7. This changed when I moved into civil construction in late 2021. Around this time, I was asked by our State Secretary, Steve Baker, to shadow Jamie McQueen (**Mr McQueen**) and learn about the civil construction sector.
8. For most of my time learning the ropes with Mr McQueen, things with the CFMEU were heated, but manageable. However, hostility escalated significantly from September 2022, when Mr McQueen took a sabbatical.
9. At that time, I was tasked with maintaining the AWU's presence across civil construction sites from the Tweed Border to the Gympie Bypass, including major projects such as Cross River Rail. We were particularly focused on ensuring the AWU had a regular presence on the Cross River Rail Project.
10. The AWU was a party to two EBAs covering the Cross River Rail Project. These EBAs had been negotiated in 2019, before my switch to the civil construction sector. However, I understood from my colleagues in the AWU that the CFMEU was not happy that it was not a party to an EBA on the Project.
11. The EBAs that had been negotiated by the AWU made provision for:
 - (a) the payment of redundancy contributions for employees to the Australian Construction Industry Redundancy Trust (**ACIRT**);

- (b) the maintenance of income protection insurance for employees to be provided by Chifley Services Limited (**Chifley**); and
 - (c) the nomination of the Construction and Building Unions Superannuation Scheme (**CBUS**) as the default superannuation fund for employees.
12. By contrast, the form of EBAs preferred by the CFMEU made provision for:
- (a) the payment of redundancy contributions for employees to the Building Employee Redundancy Trust (**BERT**);
 - (b) maintenance of income protection insurance for employees to be provided by Construction Income Protection Queensland (**CIPQ**);
 - (c) the nomination of the Building Unions Superannuation Scheme (Queensland) (**BUSSQ**) as the default superannuation fund for employees; and
 - (d) the making of payments to the Building Employees Welfare Trust (**BEWT**).
13. From my observations, the CFMEU appeared particularly frustrated with the fact that:
- (a) there was a considerable increase in civil construction work throughout Queensland, while building construction work appeared to be slowing down;
 - (b) the AWU had greater coverage of workers performing civil construction work than the CFMEU; and
 - (c) the EBAs negotiated by the AWU directed payments to one set of funds (ACIRT, Chifley and CBUS) rather than the CFMEU's preferred set of funds (BERT, CIPQ, BUSSQ and BEWT).
14. From what I could see, the CFMEU was aggressively pursuing civil construction EBAs, and its behaviour was far more aggressive and hostile than any other union I have dealt with. It was clear to me that civil construction organisers from the CFMEU adopted an "us versus them" mentality, which often escalated into intimidation and harassment of AWU delegates by the CFMEU.

Cross River Rail Incidents

15. On 28 February 2023, I attended the Gabba Station precinct of the Cross River Rail Project to have a meeting with AWU members. I was accompanied by James Downie (**Mr Downie**) and Scott Bowman (**Mr Bowman**) (both fellow organisers with the AWU) and Barry Barnam (an ACRIT coordinator).
16. During our meeting with members, a CFMEU delegate who I now know as Richie Atutolu (**Mr Atutolu**) barged into the meeting without invitation or explanation. He started going on about silicosis and asserted that the CFMEU did all the heavy lifting and AWU did nothing. Jessica Allam (**Ms Allam**), who was escorting us around site, asked Mr Atutolu to leave the meeting, but he refused.
17. When I tried to help get Mr Atutolu to leave, he said to me "*If you want trouble, let's go outside.*" I decided to leave the site at this point because I did not want any trouble. However, Mr Atutolu followed me off site and down Stanley Street, continuing to harass me and hurl verbal abuse at me.

18. In my experience, there has never been another time where anyone, including from another union, has barged into an onsite meeting between the AWU and its members, seeking to disrupt the meeting by hurling abuse at union organisers. This incident appeared to be evidence of a significant escalation in the CFMEU's hostility towards the AWU. It demonstrated a level of aggression beyond anything I had seen before.
19. About a week or so later, I attended the Albert Street site with Mr Downie and Mr Bowman. It is a locked off facility, so we needed access from Ms Allam, which we received.
20. Before we arrived, Ms Allam warned us that there was a CFMEU "welcoming party" for us. I told Mr Downie and Mr Bowman not to react in the hope that the CFMEU representatives would get bored and leave us alone.
21. When we arrived, the CFMEU representatives came up to us and started sledging: "You only talk to bosses," and "have you ever worked construction?" They then proceeded to chant "Australia's Weakest Union" through the café strip. They were wearing green t-shirts, which I later identified as being CFMEU Youth Crew t-shirts.
22. Members of the public could hear and see the interaction. They seemed alarmed.

Brisbane Metro Incidents

23. On 23 March 2023, Mr Downie and I arranged for two site visits in the same day to Brisbane Metro sites.
24. The first incident occurred during a morning team meeting arranged at Roma Street Station. I had coordinated with Steve Ingham (**Mr Ingham**), HR at Brisbane Metro, to facilitate our entry. There were three of us: Mr Downie, Jade Campbell (**Ms Campbell**), and me. As we approached the site, Mr Ingham called me to warn me there was a "CFMEU welcoming party" waiting for us at site.
25. When we arrived at the train station car park, CFMEU personnel blocked our vehicle, physically rocking it back and forth and preventing us from exiting.
26. Mr Ingham advised us to attempt entry via a side gate, so we drove around to the Convention Centre and began walking down towards the alternative entrance. On the way, we encountered CFMEU delegate Dean Rielly, who exchanged a brief exchange with Mr Downie (as they knew each other).
27. As we approached the site, the same group of CFMEU delegates who rocked our car, ran to the side gate to block our access to the site. There were about 10 individuals blocking our entrance, shouting abuse at us. Mr Downie and Ms Campbell managed to slip through the gate, but I was unable to.
28. The entire situation was very intimidating and I felt concerned for my safety.
29. The second incident occurred later that day during a lunchtime meeting near the W Hotel. As we approached the site, a group of approximately 20 to 30 CFMEU personnel surrounded us. They shouted abuse at us for around 20 minutes.
30. I felt particularly threatened during this incident and was worried that if one of these men lost control, the situation could escalate into physical violence. It was a very aggressive and threatening encounter.

31. The conclusion I reached was that the CFMEU was deliberately targeting AWU officials to deter us from exercising lawful rights of entry. Their ability to anticipate our movements indicated to me that they are tipped off, I think likely by subcontractors, but I cannot confirm. The situation was overwhelming.
32. I understand that when we gave a site notification that we would be attending on a particular day, this would be raised onsite during the morning toolbox meeting. I was advised that workers at the toolbox meeting would inform the CFMEU that the AWU would be attending that day. After I received this advice, we stopped providing advance notice of our visits.

Centenary Bridge Incident

33. On 23 February 2024, I attended a meeting at a BMD worksite on the Jindalee section of the Centenary Bridge project with Patrick O'Doherty (**Mr O'Doherty**), another AWU organiser.
34. During our meeting, CFMEU organisers Dean Mattas (**Mr Mattas**) and Dylan Howard (**Mr Howard**) accompanied by two other large men who I did not recognise barged into the meeting without any notice or invitation. I have since been informed by the solicitors assisting the Commission that evidence has been tendered to the effect that the other two men were Jamie Porter and Elliot Stanfield.
35. Led by Mr Mattas, the group started criticising the AWU Enterprise Agreement, calling it "*piss weak*" and accusing the AWU of "*selling out its members*." They demanded that the AWU scrap the agreement and negotiate a new one.
36. The meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes and involved persistent sledging of us by these four men. We asked them to leave the meeting multiple times, but they refused.
37. After the meeting finished, I attempted to leave the site. But as I drove away, Mr O'Doherty's car was in front of mine and I could see he had stopped. I saw a group of about 20 CFMEU personnel walk up through the site entrance and surround Mr O'Doherty's car. Mr O'Doherty was alone in the car. The CFMEU personnel surrounded Mr O'Doherty's car and blocked him from leaving the site. They were screaming loudly and aggressively. The car I was driving in had a dash camera mounted that recorded this incident.
38. Once I saw what was happening in front of me I initially called Mr O'Doherty to check on him and to advise him to remain calm and I explained to him that I was calling 000 to get the both of us off site. I then proceeded to call 000 and got through to the Police dispatcher who I explained the situation to. By the time this has occurred the group Mr O'Doherty was able to move forward and exit the site and so was I so I ended the call once I was on the highway. I asked the Police dispatcher to make a note of the call in case it was needed at a later date.
39. I called 000 as I was concerned for the safety of myself and Mr O'Doherty.

Stickering harassment

40. Sometime in the middle part of 2023 the exact date I cannot recall, I was visiting the Caboolture Hospital in northern Brisbane. I was there on union business. When I returned to my vehicle after visiting the site, I found it plastered with CFMEU stickers bearing slogans such as "*AWU weak as piss*" and "*Australia's Worst Union*."

41. On about 28 March 2023, I was visiting the Karara Wind Farm Project in the Southern Downs. When I returned to the car park, my vehicle, and the vehicle belonging to the AWU's District Secretary for the Toowoomba region were plastered with CFMEU stickers that had anti-AWU messages on them. There were members of the crane crew working in that site who I would expect were members of the CFMEU.

I swear the contents of this statement are true.


Signature of Deponent

Place Brisbane Date 01/10/2026


Before me (signature of witness)

Salvatore Concetto Sciacca
Full name of witness (please print)

- ☐ Justice of the Peace (JP #)
☐ Notary public
☒ Lawyer
☐ Another authorised person (specify)