

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

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PETER DAMIAN BENNETT

I, Peter Damian Bennett, Senior Electrical Supervisor, swear:

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. Attached to this Statement is a Bundle of documents (**Bundle**). I refer to relevant documents by reference to the annexure number and the page number of that Bundle.
3. I am an electrician by trade and have approximately 30 years of experience in the construction industry. During my career, I have worked as a construction manager, superintendent, project manager and senior electrical supervisor.
4. My relevant employment history includes the following:
 - (a) from approximately 2018 to 2020, I was employed by CPB Contractors Pty Ltd (**CPB**) as the Mechanical and Electrical Superintendent on the M5 tunnel project in Sydney;
 - (b) after leaving the M5 project, I worked for a period as an electrical contractor in regional New South Wales (**NSW**), including work restoring electrical supply following bushfires in Southern NSW;
 - (c) on or about 28 May 2022, I commenced work on the Cross River Rail (**CRR**) Project with UGL Engineering Pty Ltd (**UGL**) as a Senior Electrical Supervisor at the Northern Portal site;
 - (d) after the events in July and August 2023 described below, I was ultimately transferred to the Milton head office; and
 - (e) in about December 2025, I was transferred from Roma Street, then to Boggo Road station from March 2026.

My role on the CRR Project

5. At the Northern Portal, my principal responsibilities included planning and coordinating the installation of mechanical and electrical systems in the tunnels, running daily pre-starts meetings, coordinating interfaces between work groups, procuring materials and resolving technical and operational issues.
6. Depending on the stage of work at the Northern Portal, there were approximately 60 to 100 mechanical and electrical personnel. The team also included supervisors, engineers, a superintendent and project managers.
7. Although I was formally a senior supervisor, I regularly performed duties ordinarily undertaken by a superintendent because of my prior experience.

8. When I commenced, I reported primarily to Jamey Purvis, a project manager with an electrical background. Other relevant managers included Josh Sims and Nigel Bucknall.

General approach to union site visits and walk-throughs

9. In my electrical role, most of my dealings with union officials were with the Electrical Trade Union (**ETU**). I also had some dealings with the CFMEU and the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union (**Plumbers Union**).
10. When a union official attended under a right-of-entry notice, Project industrial-relations supervisors generally met the official at the gate, checked the relevant entry permit and escorted the official while the stated issue was inspected.
11. The Project, CPB specifically, generally required two management representatives (industrial-relations supervisor and a safety advisor supervisor) to participate in such interactions. One person would conduct the discussion and the other would make a contemporaneous record. This meant that during the walks, one person would do the talking and the other person would write down the discussion.
12. I made contemporaneous notes of a number of union interactions. Those notes recorded matters such as the time of discussions, the persons involved, requests made by union representatives, inspections undertaken and the outcome of the interaction. I understood those records were to be scanned and provided to the industrial-relations team as part of the Project's daily industrial-relations response, which was managed by Terry Prior. The people I recall dealing with in that process included Ben Loakes and, at a more senior level, Terry Prior, the Industrial Relations Managers for CPB.
13. My experience on the M5 project in Sydney had been that significant union interactions were documented promptly and management expected an industrial-relations response within about 24 hours. On the CRR Project, I often felt that I did not receive the same level of direction or standard process of reporting about what was to happen after an incident was reported regarding the union delegates, which was the IR management's responsibility.
14. That difference concerned me because, in my view, the purpose of keeping detailed notes was not merely administrative. It was to create a reliable chronology of what had occurred, identify the issue raised by the union, record the Project response and preserve the material needed to decide how the Project should deal with any continuing dispute.
15. I accept that genuine safety issues had to be identified and addressed and that union representatives had legitimate safety functions. I tried to allow union representatives to fulfil those functions and, where an interaction became unnecessarily argumentative, I sometimes stepped away and allowed another manager to continue the discussion so that the interaction did not escalate.
16. Based on my experience, however, I considered that some union representatives attempted to turn ordinary technical discussions into confrontational exchanges and sometimes relied on legislative or technical propositions which, in my view, were incorrect or overstated.
17. I regarded de-escalation as important. Through experience, I learnt to remain non-confrontational towards the union representatives and, where possible, agree on a practical way the Project could investigate or rectify concerns. Having two Project

representatives present also allowed one person to step back if the discussion became heated while the other continued to record what occurred.

18. In my experience, if an initial discussion with management did not resolve matters in the way a union representative wanted, the interaction could move quickly to a formal safety or right-of-entry process. Workers could then be directed or encouraged to remain in crib rooms while the issue was investigated, which stopped or substantially reduced production.

My observations of coordination between unions

19. I formed the view that representatives of the ETU, CFMEU and, at times, the Plumbers Union coordinated their approach to right-of-entry and safety issues on the Project.
20. That view was based on patterns I observed over time. In particular, I observed union representatives meeting and speaking together away from the worksite, including at coffee shops, and I observed right-of-entry activity by different unions occurring in sequence. For example, the CFMEU might state that they have a right of entry on Monday and Tuesday, and then you'll get a right of entry for the ETU on Wednesday and Thursday.
21. I understood that union representatives would discuss the issues that each intended to raise with each other. One union might raise an electrical matter such as a cable, switchboard or emergency-lighting issue while another union would raise a different safety or amenities issue.
22. The practical consequence of a safety issue being raised could be immediate. Workers could be told to remain in crib rooms while an inspection was undertaken. In my experience, production would then stop or substantially reduce until management had demonstrated that the relevant requirement had been met or the issue had been rectified.
23. The unions were working together to stop as much work on the Northern Portal as possible under the guise of safety issues.

ETU action at the Northern Portal in March 2023

24. [REDACTED]
25. [REDACTED]
26. I understood that the industrial background to the dispute included negotiations [REDACTED] concerning UGL EBA bargaining. During a two-week period, a substantial part of the workforce was present but did not perform ordinary production work while the issues raised by the ETU were being worked through.
27. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

28. [REDACTED]

29. [REDACTED]

30. [REDACTED]

31. [REDACTED]

32. [REDACTED]

33. [REDACTED]

34. [REDACTED]

35. [REDACTED]

36. Once the matters had been addressed, UGL's industrial-relations representative, Chris Newitt, informed the workforce that the stand-down period would not be paid because the Project considered that the workers had engaged in unauthorised industrial action. I understood that Mr Lynch had indicated to workers that they would be paid because the stoppage concerned safety. The decision not to pay the period appeared to intensify the dispute.

37. After the announcement of the non-payment decision to the workforce, I formed the view that Mr Rasmussen and I had become particular targets of unions because we had challenged the basis for the stoppage and insisted that safety assertions be supported by technical information. No union official told me directly at that time that I had been placed on a list or targeted, and that is an inference I drew from the events which followed in the future.

[REDACTED]

38. [REDACTED]

39. [REDACTED]
40. [REDACTED]
41. [REDACTED]
42. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
43. [REDACTED]
44. [REDACTED]
45. [REDACTED]
46. [REDACTED]
47. [REDACTED]
48. [REDACTED]
49. [REDACTED]

Bullying allegation and direction to take leave

50. On 5 July 2023, the following day, a HSR meeting was attended by Mr Wellcher, Peter Cullen and other project personnel.

51. Mr Wellcher said that he objected to the way I had spoken to him. I responded that I considered his conduct towards the injured worker inappropriate and that I did not want him to repeat it.
52. During that meeting, Mr Wellcher gave an account of the previous day which I considered untrue. I remember becoming frustrated and pointing my finger while telling him, in substance, not to lie and to tell the truth. I left the meeting before it concluded.
53. Mr Wellcher subsequently made a complaint that I had bullied him. My understanding was that the written complaint later relied upon the fact that I had pointed my finger at him.
54. There were several people present during the relevant interactions. I provided an account to human resources and asked that the allegation be properly investigated because I considered it false.
55. Later that day, I was told that the ETU had been contacted about the allegation. Mr Purvis suggested that I take leave for a period and told me words to the effect that this was part of the "game" which had to be played. He told me, in substance, that I was not in trouble and that my job was not in jeopardy, but that there was "*heat in the kitchen*" and that a period away would allow matters to cool down.
56. The leave had not been prearranged. I took leave from 10 to 24 July 2023.
57. On returning, I attended a meeting with Mr Sims and human-resources personnel, Nicole Watson, about the bullying complaint and provided a written statement.
58. I was not informed about the details of the allegation against me and whether they had been substantiated and I did not receive any formal disciplinary outcome.

Union action at the Northern Portal on 25 and 26 July 2023

59. I returned to site work on 25 July 2023. On that day, a serious incident occurred elsewhere on the CRR Project in which a worker fell from scaffolding.
60. The following morning, 26 July 2023, two CFMEU union representatives arrived at the Northern Portal site and told Shane Rasmussen and me that no one would be working and that the blue-collar workforce would leave the Northern Portal. I understood that the initial pause was presented as a mark of respect following the scaffolding incident. Management did not resist that initial pause while information about the incident was being obtained.
61. On 27 July 2023, I arrived at the Northern Portal at approximately 5:30am. Approximately 25 to 35 people associated with the CFMEU and ETU were gathered outside the Northern Portal front gates. The group included union delegates who worked on the Project, including Mr Wellcher and Jayce Emmerton. There were also people whom I did not recognise as Northern Portal workers.
62. White-collar personnel were able to enter the gates of the Northern Portal. The group at the gate displayed union banners and flags and, at least initially, did not physically prevent those office personnel from entering. No construction work proceeded.
63. As the day progressed, the conduct became more hostile. I heard people outside the fence yell words to the effect that we had blood on our hands and were responsible for

a death. I also heard words to the effect that people knew where we lived and that there would be consequences.

64. I saw stones being thrown over the fence. Stones struck or landed near Mr Rasmussen's motorcycle, my vehicle and the site sheds. I approached one person whom I had seen throwing stones and asked what he was doing. He swore at me and accused us of having killed someone. I did not know his identity.
65. I witnessed one confrontation in which union representatives were shouting at Mr Rasmussen at close range. I was concerned that the exchange was escalating and told him to step back and disengage. At no stage did we see any industrial-relations supervisors or industrial-relations management assist with the confrontation.
66. I left the site at about 1:00pm or 2:00pm that day. I subsequently became aware of picketing at other sites across the Project.

Events on 28 July 2023

67. On the following morning, 28 July 2023, a substantially larger group was gathered near the Northern Portal. I observed approximately 20 to 30 people in a picket line outside the Northern Portal. I observed that the front gates had been locked with chains and locks.
68. Mr Emmerton approached my vehicle and warned me not to use the front gate. He said that the situation was dangerous, and that people outside had weapons.
69. I also observed a smaller group of approximately six men standing apart from the main union crowd. They were about 50 to 60 metres from me. Some wore black clothing, some had extensive tattoos, some wore balaclavas or clothing which obscured their faces and one wore a long coat. They were physically large and, to me, appeared intimidating.
70. These men looked to me like bikies.
71. Later that morning, Mr Emmerton told Mr Rasmussen, Mr Cullen and me that he had seen weapons including knives, a sawn-off shotgun, machetes and a bat. He told us that the people meant business and to take the stand-down seriously. Mr Emmerton also said that he understood that some of the people involved were affiliated with bikie gangs.
72. Because of Mr Emmerton's warning, Mr Rasmussen and I entered the site through the rear gate and attempted to assist other staff to enter safely.
73. Union organisers then worked out that the back gate was being used to enter site and began shouting threats about recording or knowing the number plates of people who were entering the site.
74. By about 7:30am, the threats included that the people outside knew where workers lived and would visit them at home to make sure that they understood they were not to work on the CRR Project. Some of the threats were directed specifically at Mr Rasmussen and me.
75. People outside were taunting us to come out through the gate and saying that they had the number plates of people who were working. I understood the message to be that anyone who continued to work could be followed or confronted away from the site.

76. After about 8:00am, I saw rocks being thrown towards Mr Rasmussen's motorcycle and my vehicle. This conduct reinforced my concern that the situation had moved beyond an ordinary peaceful picket.
77. A number of engineers, including graduate and female engineers, appeared frightened and distressed. Some were crying. I escorted some personnel to their vehicles and advised others not to attend the site.
78. Mr Rasmussen, Mr Cullen and I contacted Mr Purvis and asked him to listen to what Mr Emmerton was saying. We arranged a telephone or conference call during which Mr Emmerton repeated to Mr Purvis what he had told us about the threats and the weapons.
79. After hearing that information, Mr Purvis directed that the site be secured and that all personnel are to leave the site. We removed food from the crib facilities, locked down the toilets, turned off generators, secured the site and left at about 10:35am. I said that police should be called because of the reported weapons and threats, however I understood that the police were never called.
80. I never returned to the Northern Portal site after this date.
81. I was later told by Phil Millan, a CRR project manager, that persons including union representatives and bikies had been brought to Brisbane, including from Victoria, for the picketing. I was also told that threats had been made to Mr Millan concerning his wife and where his children attended school, too. This was at the same time as the Northern Portal incident.

Union demands and exclusion from the site

82. After the scaffolding incident, Ben Loakes from the Project's industrial-relations team told us that senior management was negotiating with the CFMEU and ETU about a list of demands. I am aware that the "safety reset" meeting took place on 28 July 2023.
83. Mr Loakes told me that the demands, informally, included that Mr Rasmussen, Mr Cullen and I not return to the Northern Portal. I was not present during the safety reset meeting and did not see the original list of demands.
84. I formed the view that Mr Rasmussen, Mr Cullen and I were targeted because we had challenged the earlier ETU stoppage, required technical justification for the issues raised and had provided evidence which allowed the Project to address those issues. That is my inference from the sequence of events. I was not personally told by the CBGUJV managers or CFMEU or ETU why our removal was demanded.
85. One of the formal demands was the direct employment of approximately 12 union delegates or HSRs to perform safety roles on the Project.
86. I later regarded the direct employment of a substantial number of union delegates or HSRs into safety roles as a significant change in the balance of authority on site. In practical terms, I felt that supervisors and managers were increasingly required to consult those representatives before ordinary work could proceed everyday.
87. Work did not resume on any CRR Project site until 31 July 2023.

Management response and support

88. After leaving the Northern Portal, Mr Rasmussen and I were directed to work from the Projects Milton office. No explanation was given to me.
89. On 1 August 2023, I sent an email to Mr Purvis raising concerns about the threats, the alleged weapons and whether Workplace Health and Safety Queensland or police had been notified. A copy of my email is **Annexure PDB-01, pages 2 to 3**.
90. Mr Purvis later told me that he had escalated the matter to senior Project personnel, including IR/HR Director, Chris Butler, and Health and Safety Director, Chris Cordaro. Mr Cordaro's was the Project's Health and Safety Director, with senior responsibility for worker safety. Mr Purvis was the manager who most consistently checked on our welfare and attempted to obtain assistance.
91. The matter was also escalated within UGL. I recall Terry Elliott, UGL's Business Unit industrial relations manager, making inquiries/investigations with Cross River Rail Management.
92. When Terry Elliot became aware of the way Mr Rasmussen and I had been treated, and that police had not been called at the time of the threats, he told me words to the effect that the situation was ridiculous and that he would definitely get to the bottom of it. I understood that he was going to raise the issue at a senior level and investigate what had occurred.
93. Despite that assurance, I did not receive a substantive written outcome. Mr Rasmussen and I continued to send emails asking what had been investigated, what the outcome was, what our position was on the Project and how the Project proposed to keep us safe at work.
94. My recollection is that weeks passed without an answer from anyone. The response was "crickets" because, despite the number of senior people to whom the issue had been escalated, we were not given a clear account of what had been found or what protective measures had been put in place for our safety moving forward.
95. My concern was not simply that I had been moved from the Northern Portal. I considered that the Project had failed to explain how it would protect personnel who had been threatened or how it had discharged its duty of care to protect people from violence in the workplace.
96. There was a reluctance for Mr Rasmussen and me to make formal complaints without first obtaining approval or direction from management.
97. I later came to understand that Terry Prior had directed that there should be no substantive response in relation to the events that Mr Rasmussen and I raised.

Police report

98. While based at Milton, Mr Rasmussen and I attended a police Criminal Investigation Branch (**CIB**) office in Brisbane and reported the threats and harassment at the Northern Portal.
99. A police officer told us that Taskforce Mayima was dealing with related matters and invited us to provide information.

100. We provided written material so that there would be a formal record of what had occurred. At that stage, we did not ask police to commence a full investigation because we were uncertain about the support available from our employers and the Project.

[REDACTED]

101. [REDACTED]

102. [REDACTED]

103. [REDACTED]

104. [REDACTED]

105. [REDACTED]

106. [REDACTED]

107. [REDACTED]

108. [REDACTED]

109. [REDACTED]

Effect on my health and employment

110. [REDACTED]

111. I made a workers' compensation claim and obtained medical treatment, including consultations with a psychiatrist. I did so to protect my position and because I considered that the Project was not addressing the safety and welfare concerns I had raised several times to management. The lack of consultation had pushed Mr Rasmussen and I to breaking point.
112. After a period, I decided that I wanted to return to productive work and asked to be placed at another location. I was transferred to Roma Street. The management team there was supportive and took care to assist me to return to work. At Roma Street, I was able to focus on technical and supervisory duties and largely avoided further direct dealings with union representatives.
113. Mr Rasmussen was more seriously affected. He worked from home for a period and obtained medical treatment. I remained in regular contact with him. I also observed that Mr Cullen became more anxious and concerned following the events that I had relayed to him.

I swear that the contents of this statement are true.



Signature of deponent

Place: BRISBANE Date: 2 / 10 / 2026



Before me (signature of witness)

EDEN JARDINE
Full name of witness (please print)

☐ Justice of the Peace (JP No. _____)

☐ Notary public

☒ Lawyer

☐ Other authorised person (specify): _____

Commission of Inquiry into the CFMEU

and Misconduct in the Construction Industry

Bundle of Documents to
Statement of Peter Bennett

From: Prior, Terry [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 19 May 2025 12:13 PM
To: Prior, Terry
Subject: Fw: Union Intimidation and threats NP

From: Bennett, Peter [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 1 August 2023 11:01 AM
To: Purvis, Jamey [REDACTED] >
Cc: Rasmussen, Shane [REDACTED]; Cullen, Peter [REDACTED]
Subject: Union Intimidation and threats NP

Good Afternoon ,

I thought I would send a follow up email requesting Company assistance with the below situations of union intimidation, threats and accusations at me at the northern portal.

On Wednesday 5th July a HSR Committee meeting was undertaken .The code of conduct and difference of opinion was raised in relation to actions conducted with Union Delegate Rob welsher and Peter Cullen on Tuesday 4th July .

The ETU (chris lynch) was immediately contacted and came out to site and held discussions with Jamey Purvis .

I was Requested to have a meeting with Jamey Purvis and Shane Rasmussen-I was asked to explain the events that transpired at the HSR Committee meeting .I was requested to leave site (stood down) and work from home – Jamey explain that this was just to cool the situation down and is not on recorded with HR as a reprimand but in the ETU eyes it is the resolution they wanted .The ETU had advised that they are gunning for Peter Cullen, Shane Rasmussen and me to be removed from the job.I accepted the decisions but was not told of the accusation and reminded the both that I will be on holidays from 10/07/23 till 24/07/2023.

I returned to site on Monday 24/07/23 and was requested to present to Milton for discussions with HR and Josh Sims .I asked what was the reason for the Meeting and I was told by HR Nicola that there was an accusation of bullying , intimidation and harassment to Rob Welsher at the HSR Committee meeting on Wednesday 5th July.I was advised to fillout a witness statement and wait for the investigation to find the outcome. I was asked to have a meeting with Josh sims and Nicola (HR) that I was cleared of any wrong doing and requested by Josh Sims to undergo some coaching and mentoring by Terry Prior as positive out comes from the investigation.

I returned to full duties onsite (northern portal) Tuesday 25/7/23 and unfortunately heard of the Major Incident that happened at the Bogo rd site.

Wednesday 26/7/2023 5:30am I was greeted by 2 x CFMEU official onsite at Pre-start area advising Shane Rasmussen and I that “ No one will be going to work today “.All Blue collar left site by 6am .No one signed on .

Thursday 27/7/2023- 5:30am Greeted at the NP Front gates by 25-35 CFMEU/ETU officials and persons picketing the Front gates. Chains and locks where placed on these CBGUJV gates and no one was allowed to enter site due to the intimidating actions and words from the union officials. I managed to open the back gate and allow some whit collar workers through to conduct work. Throughout the day there was CFMEU/ETU yelling over the fence “your going to have blood on your hands” Rocks where thrown over the fence by CFMEU/ETU targeting Shanes Bike and my car and office shed walls.

Friday 28/7/23 -5:30am Greeted at the NP Front gates by 25-35 CFMEU/ETU officials and persons picketing the Front gates. Chains and locks were placed on these CBGUJV gates and no one was allowed to enter site due to the intimidating actions and words from the union officials.

CFMEU Union officials had communicated to Jayce Emerton (AMWU Delo) out the front of site, that there's going to be blood shed if we (Shane and I) allow people to work. They advised that they have all the number plates of persons onsite especially Shane Rasmussen and Peter Bennett and have no issues following these people home to help them understand what we want.

Jayce Emerton (AMWU Delo) also advised that there are people at the gates with balaclavas on and these persons are carrying weapons -bats/knives/hand gun.

Shane and I requested a meeting with Jamie Purvis and phoned Jayce Emerton to confirm the threats and intimidation being pushed by the CFMEU/ETU. Jamie Purvis advised everyone to leave site immediately and that he will call and advise on whether to come to work or work from home.

Jamey advised Shane and I to work from home until advised otherwise.

I have major concerns for the safety of myself Shane Rasmussen and Peter Cullen at the CRR worksites. These threats to life are very serious to the health and safety of us. I would like to understand the level of protection that CBGUJV are going to take to ensure I have a safe place of work. Have the local law enforcement agencies been informed. Has WPH&S been informed of these serious threats to us on site?

Regards

Regards

Peter Bennett

Senior Supervisor



Level 3, North Tower, 339 Coronation Drive, Milton, QLD 4064, Australia

T [REDACTED] M

E [REDACTED]

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