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Emergency Services Minister Kim Wells grilled in Parliament about CFA bosses' spending splurge

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EMERGENCY Services Minister Kim Wells has denounced a taxpayer-funded spending spree by CFA bosses but refused to commit to publicly releasing a probe into their credit card use. Senior CFA managers splurged more than \$230,000 at fancy restaurants, plush hotels and racecourses over more than two years, the Herald Sun revealed on Monday.

In a fiery parliamentary hearing, Mr Wells was grilled on the spending splurge and said it was "just wrong" that CFA bosses claimed everything from haircuts to 60 cent parking fees.

"Any misuses of a corporate credit card for a private or personal transaction should have been repaid immediately," Mr Wells said.

CFA BOSSES IN SPLURGE

Labor MP Jane Garrett pushed Mr Wells to release an accounting firm's audit of the CFA, but Mr Wells refused and said it was a matter for the CFA.

But he said he was determined to get an explanation and had already spoken to the chiefs of Victoria's emergency services this week to clarify their use of taxpayer-funded credit cards.

"Let's see what the accounting company comes up with in regards to the audit over what has happened," he said.

"We're very keen to get to the bottom of this ... We are looking for explanations to ensure that the use of taxpayer-funded credit cards will be appropriate all the way through."

Mr Wells also told the Public Estimates and Accounts hearing he was "absolutely gobsmacked" at claims from the United Firefighters Union that the CFA did not have enough firefighters to man stations.

"The reality is we do not close fire stations across the state ... That simply does not happen," Mr Wells said.

The Herald Sun reported that 20 CFA stations in high-risk areas had been shut, partially closed or had vehicles off the road since the start of the year, and the union accused the Napthine Government of reneging on a plan to hire 342 new firefighters.

Questioned on how many firefighters had been recruited, Mr Wells said the Government was "working towards that target by 2016" and had trained 181 firefighters since 2010.

Budget documents showed only 36 permanent firefighters started work this financial year.

But when Mr Wells said the Federal Court had declared the target of 342 firefighters an "illegal" clause of an bargaining agreement between the union and the previous Labor Government, shadow Attorney-General Martin Pakula lashed out.

"I am not going to have the minister accuse the former government of illegality ... You are a cover-up artist,"

Mr Pakula said before the hearing was briefly suspended.

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