




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND
REHABILITATION (PROTECTING FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BOOTHMAN** (Albert—LNP) (3.40 pm): I rise to speak to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015. First, I thank the committee in terms of supporting the Rural Fire Service. I thank the member for Kawana for his unwavering support of rural fire members.

I am proud of each and every rural fire unit in the Albert electorate. The Albert electorate is home to the northern Darlington Range, a very picturesque part of the Gold Coast. It is a place where families choose to live in a more private, rural atmosphere. There are a number of lucky individuals in the hilltops who have spectacular views to North Stradbroke and to the New South Wales border. It is certainly a place of natural beauty. While it is peaceful and tranquil, we all know that for local residents it can turn very deadly.

The Rural Fire Service volunteers give up their time and put their lives on the line to help others. They ask for so little. All they want back is a little respect. At numerous fairs, community and school events throughout the Albert electorate they educate residents about the dangers of fires and about preparation techniques. These men and women make themselves available to discuss issues or to offer services in terms of pre-emptive fire reduction burns, which help reduce fuel load in local bushland and which certainly help protect our environment from intense summer fires. There are members like Brett, Lewis, Wayne, Andy, Karen, Matthew and Peter, just to name a few, and our first officers Paul Graham, Bevan Love and Col Veivers. I could talk all night about these members and about their passion for our community. They are part of the Ormeau Rural Fire Brigade, the Cedar Creek Wolffdene Rural Fire Brigade and the Coomera Valley Rural Fire Brigade.

In times of need, these members rally in numbers and put themselves on the front line to protect our homes. The stories I hear from residents about their amazing work are truly uplifting. They are exceptionally professional in their conduct and demonstrate exceptional skills. I refer to their efforts in places like Timberview, at the base of Mount Tamborine. Many locals voice their accolades in terms of their swiftness of response and their competency in dealing with the bushfire situation. It is not just about bushfires, as many times they help with Queensland floods. These individuals stand united to volunteer their services during these flood events—cleaning houses, removing debris and assisting those in need.

Mr Costigan: Motor vehicle accidents?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Yes, motor vehicle accidents. Every time there is a flood event in the Albert electorate, to ensure safety they are the first people to put up the signs warning motorists that a road ahead is flooded.

I am very proud that my fellow LNP colleagues so vigorously opposed the 150-incident prerequisite proposed by the government for volunteer units. All firefighters, volunteer or not, must be treated equally if they are diagnosed with one of the 12 specific diseases within the required qualifying period. Depending on the disease, the minimum number of years ranges from five to 25. To be eligible under the government's original proposal, volunteers had to participate in 150 exposure events. Some of my volunteers would average attendance at about five fires a year as they have families, other commitments, businesses and work. It could potentially take 30 years to reach the 150 figure. This discriminated against the 37,000 Rural Fire Service volunteers. Cancer does not discriminate on the basis of the colour of one's uniform or whether people are paid or volunteer.

Our rural firefighters attend bushfires and do not know what is lying in the bush. It could be a dumping ground for those who have little respect for our laws and our environment. In a recent discussion, local quarry managers highlighted the amount of illegal dumping in the back country in my electorate. While the quarries and the local council do their best to ensure this vile mess is cleaned up, some individuals flout the law, do not care and will dump anything they like.

A rural firefighter said to me, 'Mark, imagine a fire roaring towards us. We do not know what is in the undergrowth. There could be dumped tyres. We will be covered in these toxins and potentially be forced to breathe them in. We do not know what is out there in the bush.' As I said, there could be tyres and toxins. As we all know, tyres are highly toxic when on fire.

We all have seen the horrible, soul-destroying effects of cancer. Everybody in this chamber knows somebody who has suffered this horrible disease. These exceptionally good and highly trained individuals give up a huge amount of their time and their lives training to harness their skills to become very proficient in dealing with bushfires.

My community holds these individuals in such high regard. This summer fire season is predicted to be very busy because of the El Nino effect. I ask residents to take pre-emptive action, to clear away combustible materials such as branches from their houses, to do everything they can and, most importantly, to ensure that their driveways are safe to traverse in the case of emergency. People should not forget that Rural Fire Service trucks must traverse these driveways and firefighters do not want to be put in dangerous situations. I ask residents please to take that action. Importantly, people should ensure they have a fire evacuation plan and discuss it with their family.