

**Verbal Submission to Queensland Parliament's Finance and Administration  
Committee's Review of Workers' Compensation in Queensland**

**31 October 2012**

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Finance and Administration Committee's hearing as part of the review of Queensland's Worker's Compensation arrangements. My name is Beth Mohle and I am Secretary of the Queensland Nurses' Union – the union for nurses and midwives employed across all health and aged care settings, public and private. Appearing with me today is James Gilbert, QNU's Occupational Health and Safety Officer. Mr Gilbert is an expert in Workers Compensation and Health and Safety issues as they affect our members and will be available to answer any detailed questions the committee may have today.

Before I briefly summarise our main take out messages for this inquiry, I would like to place on record my disappointment and dismay about the 90 second time limit imposed on verbal submissions to this inquiry. It is appreciated that there have been a significant number of submissions to this inquiry, no doubt because of the keen interest in this vitally important topic. However, providing such a ridiculously short timeframe for verbal submissions sends a message that the committee is not genuinely interested in hearing the considered views of stakeholders on such a vitally important and nuanced issue. I have appeared before many state and federal parliamentary and other inquiries over my 20 plus years as a union official and have never before experienced such a short time allocated for verbal presentations. The QNU takes inquiries such as this very seriously and expends considerable effort in preparing and appearing before such events as it provides an important avenue to advance the interests and values of our members.

I believe that it is important to make the QNU's concern and disappointment about the process of this inquiry known, but in doing so I have taken up precious time of the 90 seconds allocated, so I will now turn to highlighting our main areas of concern as outlined in our written submission. I would however like to stress that it is impossible to cover the nuances and particular issues of

concern to our members given the time limits that have been imposed. I will read quickly.

During the course of their employment, nurses and midwives may experience exposure to a wide variety of physical, chemical, biological, psychosocial or other hazards. As the majority of our members also work shift work, fatigue adds another layer of complexity to the issues that need to be taken into account when considering the design of an adequate Workers' Compensation regime for our members. Not only are our members reliant on a robust Workers Compensation Scheme as workers, they also care for those who have sustained an injury at work. They therefore have a unique dual perspective that is worthy of proper consideration.

As we highlighted in our submission, workers compensation is a vital component of the social wage of the QNU's membership and the management of workers compensation is of particular concern to us. The Queensland workers' compensation scheme has delivered close to the lowest premiums in the country over the last 15 years and reliable coverage for the workforce. We strongly believe that the Workers Compensation system in Queensland is not broken and therefore does not need fixing.

The QNU believes that the existing scheme adequately compensates injured workers and/or their families and should not be altered in any way that undermines or undervalues the provisions of this scheme.

Given the time restrictions this morning, I will now quickly summarise the recommendations made to this inquiry by the QNU:

- The Queensland government should not change existing benefits to injured workers and/or their families as they currently provide adequate compensation particularly in relation to journey claims.
- There must be no changes to the main provisions of the Act. Recent changes to the legislation should be given adequate time to take effect.
- There must be no changes to the area of damages so that injured workers retain unfettered access to common law claims.

- Ongoing financial support must be provided for QComp's *Return to Work Assist* Program and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and WorkCover's *Injury Prevention and Management Program*.
- Ongoing financial support is required to enable Workplace Health and Safety Queensland to continue its work aimed at reducing the injury and fatality rate in Queensland. This work must occur in consultation with employer and employee representatives and also maintain the balance between proactive and enforcement activities.
- The workers' compensation premium rate should be set at the breakeven rate with minimal reliance on investment returns in setting this rate. This is especially important given the new investment return paradigm post the Global Financial Crisis.

And finally,

- The government should maintain a consultative forum that enables WorkCover to consult with key stakeholders such as unions, employers, researchers and the legal profession to address any ongoing process issues associated with damages claims and the scheme in general.

Mr Gilbert and I would be more than happy to take any questions arising from our written submission.