

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

31 October 2012

Thankyou for a minute and a half of your time to make an opening statement on the vital issue of income, medical and other support for nurses and midwives injured at work or as a result of their employment obligations.

I am Beth Mohle, Queensland Nurses Union secretary. With me is James Gilbert, the QNU's Occupational Health and Safety Officer. We are both available to answer any questions the committee may have.

However, I believe the ninety seconds timeframe for opening statements is absurd and suggests the committee is not genuinely interested in the views of stakeholders on such an important issue. I hope you prove me wrong.

My opening presentation today is timed at about three to four minutes, which is still below the appropriate time for such a statement.

Compensation for workplace-related injury is an issue vital to the job and financial security of every wage and salary earner in this State and, frankly, the Queensland parliament should have found more time to deal with the many stakeholders and representative organisations involved.

However, I will start my opening statement and see how I go. I will then hand up the remainder, once my ninety seconds have elapsed. I will read quickly.

Nurses and midwives experience exposure to a wide variety of physical, chemical, biological, psychosocial or other hazards. As the majority of QNU members also do 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 nurses and midwives.

Not only are nurses and midwives, as workers, reliant on a robust Workers Compensation Scheme, they also often nurse those injured at work. Therefore they have a unique perspective worthy of proper consideration.

The Queensland workers' compensation scheme has delivered employers some of the lowest premiums in the country over the last fifteen years, while also providing reliable coverage for workers. The QNU strongly believes the Queensland workers compensation system is not broken and, therefore, does not need fixing.

Finally, I will quickly summarise the recommendations in our written submission:

- The Queensland Government should not change existing benefits to injured workers and/or their families, as they currently provide adequate compensation.
- There must be no changes to the main provisions of the Act. Recent changes to the legislation should be give 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.
- The workers' compensation premium rate should be set at the breakeven rate, with minimal reliance on investment returns, which are subject to market peaks and troughs.

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 look forward to any questions you may have.