



30<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Finance and Administration Committee  
Parliament house  
Brisbane Qld 4000

## Subject

Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015.  
Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, clauses 36D, 36F and Schedule 4A.

Dear Committee,

As a volunteer rural firefighter I wish to make a submission with respect to the above.

## Introduction

Volunteer rural firefighters look after 93 percent of the State of Queensland. Their tasks within their communities vary however they all have a responsibility for fire mitigation and responding to wildfires when they occur.

I submit that to exclude rural firefighters from the presumptive coverage of the workers compensation with regards to cancers, as seems to be proposed, is extremely discriminatory and needs to be dispensed with.


## Rationale

- To suggest that a rural firefighter needs to attend 150 fires, as seems to be proposed, is ludicrous. There is no provision in such a view for those members who may spend days at a time on a fire ground on varying shifts, subjected to multiple exposures.
- Unlike permanent urban/auxiliary firefighters not all rural firefighters have breathing apparatus to wear when confronted by smoke and dust which is a mixture of particulate matter and gases. The respirators currently available do not completely shield against the varying gases created by a fire.
- Wind shifts and eddying of the smoke, ash and dust can envelope rural firefighters in a wildfire scenario.
- Smoke, dust and gasses are still present during mopping up operations stirred up by close quarter activities with water and/or implements.
- Rural environments include, apart from bushland, agricultural land, their homesteads, machinery, chemicals (herbicides/fungicides/fertilisers), fuels, sheds and storage areas. Historically, included in this mix, is the waste dump area used by the business, generally located on the property distant from the homestead, which can also contain a cocktail of products either explosive/flammable/particulate or gas producing.
- Bushland is also illegally used as a dumping ground for unwanted materials including asbestos, paints, solvents and other house hold or industrial waste.
- It is noted that mesothelioma, a cancer of the pleura, is not included within the schedule 4A.
- Some properties are also used for illegally dumping of products that require specific disposal protocols.
- The waste, in its many forms including plastics and foams, while being burnt can produce carcinogens, exposing the rural firefighters to inhalation.
- Burning vegetation also releases acrolein, formaldehyde and benzene, which are toxic or carcinogenic for humans.

- Currently there is no way that a rural firefighter would know what dose of harmful gases or particulates he or she is inhaling or being exposed to. It is feasible that friable asbestos (from illegal dumping) could be attached to the rural fire fighters coverings, only to be inhaled during release on removal.
- Currently, there is no requirement for land holders to show what and where they have stores/dumps of dangerous/flammable/gaseous/particulate or explosive materials, for the benefit of rural firefighters. Disclosure would enable an appropriate risk assessment to be conducted which may mean that the rural firefighters not attend.
- South Australia has adopted the view that all volunteer firefights should be covered in the same manner as employed firefighters with exposure to 1 fire only. Why should Queensland discriminate against their volunteer firefighter resource?
- Queensland's volunteer firefighting resource is a very valuable asset and the humans who go out of their way to provide the service need protection if it is to be retained.

With all these factors outlined it can be deduced that a rural firefighter has to potentially contend with the same levels of exposure and hardship if not more than urban or auxiliary fire fighters.

In conclusion I respectfully request serious consideration be given to abandoning any discriminatory mechanism against rural firefights with regards to their possible workers compensation claims, particularly involving cancers as outlined in Schedule 4A of the Bill.

  
 Brian Martlett  
 Volunteer rural firefighter.