



SAMFORD RURAL FIRE BRIGADE
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2nd August, 2015

Finance and Administration Committee of the Queensland Parliament
By email: fac@parliament.qld.gov.au

CC: The Honourable Peter Wellington MP, Speaker and Member for Nicklin
[REDACTED]

CC: Mark Furner MP, Member for Ferny Grove
[REDACTED]

CC: Jo-Ann Miller, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services
[REDACTED]

CC: Jarrod Bleijie MP, Shadow Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Corrective Services
[REDACTED]

CC: Robert Katter MP, Member for Mount Isa
[REDACTED]

CC: Shane Knuth MP, Member for Dalrymple
[REDACTED]

CC: William Gordon MP, Member for Cook
[REDACTED]

Your ref: B6/B7.15

To whom it may concern,

Re: Inquiries into the *Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015* and *Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015*

I'm writing on behalf of the Samford Rural Fire Brigade members to raise what we consider to be a serious issue with the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015.

Our main issue with the pending legislation is an apparent inequity with the eligibility for compensation for volunteer rural fire brigade members and fire wardens in comparison to our counterparts in the permanent fire service.

Subsection 36D(1)(c) of the pending legislation means that individual rural fire brigade members and fire wardens will have to attend 150 exposure incidences before they have equal standing for compensation eligibility with permanent firefighters.

The Explanatory Notes to this Bill state that the Policy Objective for this change is (to) “provide *greater certainty of entitlement and accessibility to compensation* for firefighters by introducing deemed disease provisions for firefighters with prescribed diseases.”

When attending incidents shoulder to shoulder with our permanent firefighting counterparts, we are obviously working in the same environment and are being subjected to the same toxins and contaminants that can be found in the smoke. Here we have the potential for both volunteers and permanent staff to contract the same specified disease. What we cannot understand is why volunteer rural firefighters and fire wardens are blatantly discriminated against by this legislation, having to endure the same situation for 150 exposure events whilst a permanent firefighter is eligible only after one event.

A Government representative referred us to the recent 2014 Australian Firefighters’ Health Study by the School of Public Health & Preventive Medicine at Monash University, which was possibly used to justify this inequity. Having searched this report, we still struggle to understand how it could be used to establish the 150 exposure incident requirement specific to volunteers as we are unable to see any correlation with the findings of this report. The 150 exposure incident value appears to us to have been arbitrarily created with no reference to research or science.

It should also be noted that the only respiratory protection that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services issues to volunteer rural firefighters and fire wardens are P2 particulate filter masks whilst for permanent fire fighters, the Fire Service issues not only the P2 masks, but also P3 negative pressure full face masks and of course all have access to Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA) on all fire appliances. P2 masks supposedly filter 94% of airborne particles whilst P3 masks are rated to filter 99% of airborne particles and CABA excludes all particles and contaminates. In addition, the permanent firefighters can also use a disposable canister with their P3 masks which can filter out not just the 99% of particulate matter, but also a large proportion of the toxins and irritant gases present in the bushfire smoke.

It is therefore quite evident that given the lesser quality of respiratory protection issued to rural volunteers and fire wardens, they will be more susceptible to breathing in a greater concentration of toxic contaminated smoke at any exposure incident than a permanent firefighter, and therefore would conceivably be more likely to contract one of the listed diseases.

For these reasons we do not believe that this Bill has met one of its stated policy objectives. Whilst it may provide “*greater certainty of entitlement and accessibility to compensation*” for permanent fire staff it makes accessibility to compensation for rural fire brigade members and fire wardens significantly more onerous. In practice, if a rural fire brigade member or fire warden wanted to make a claim under the section, they would have to be able to show that they have firstly attended 150 exposure incidents. This is no easy task as there would be few rural brigades who operate independent record keeping systems that would allow them to obtain this information. For the many brigades who do not have these resources, they would need to seek this information from QFES, who in this context would be the Defendant in any potential claim.

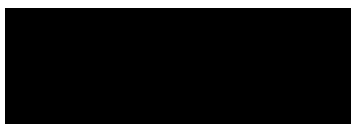
When compared to our permanent counterparts who do not have to meet this standard, it is quite a considerable impost on volunteers and further evidence of inequity.

If the 150 exposure incident requirement had any foundation in science, we would accept its application if the same value was applied to permanent firefighters as well. Then both arms of the service would be on equal terms. We acknowledge that a permanent firefighter would reach this target at a quicker rate due to the volume of incidents that they would attend, however we would prefer that there is no exposure incident number requirement applicable to the legislation at all.

To this end the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015 does not include the 150 exposure incident requirement and places rural and permanent firefighters on equal footing for compensation. This Bill is by far more equitable on the specific issue of firefighter compensation than the Government's proposed legislation and has the full support of the Samford Rural Fire Brigade in this regard.

We appreciate you taking the time to consider our submission and trust that it may help in achieving an equitable outcome for volunteer rural fire fighters and fire wardens.

Yours faithfully,



Alan Wells

First Officer

On behalf of the members of
Samford Rural Fire Brigade