

Ms Di Farmer
Chair

04 August 2015

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
fac@parliament.qld.gov.au

[Ref: B6/B7.15: 24/07/15]

Dear Ms Farmer,

Re: The Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation & Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and
Workers Compensation & Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015.

Government Bill Amendment Bill Introduced 15th June by Treasurer, Minister for Employment and
Industrial Relations and minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

Private Member's Bill introduced by Member for Kawana 3 June.

Each Bill is comended in having the welfare of Fire Fighters at heart. The difference between these
Bills, is the inequality with implementation. The core of the application of the Government's Bill is
one of discrimination towards one Fire Fighter against that of others. No State will, nor should,
permit unquantified damages for any Class of Fire Fighter, be he/she full time, part time or unpaid.
This will always be in line with Legislation for Return to Work/ Work Cover of each State.

Acknowledging proposed amendments to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 –
Onus of proof now to be upon WorkCover Queensland to prove that the cancer is not work-related.
Each Fire Fighter in his/her own right is a Profesional – Specialist in a structural fire or specialist in a
wild fire in bush vegetation be they Urban (Paid), Urban Auxiliary (Part paid/part Volunteer) and
Voluntary Rural Fire Fighter (Unpaid). All in their specialist roles find themselves in the same
situation in smoke of fires.

One difference is the equipment supplied by Governments. Urban Fire Fighters supplied with P3
masks and the other with ineffective paper or woven material masks.

Another difference is the length of time spent in the smoke that is known to have carcinogenic
effects on human health. Attendance at Wild Fires by Volunteer Fire Fighters is usually for very
long periods, taking in the innitial fight to confine the fire (or when necessary, to let it run to a given
point where a back burn will halt it) and then the eventual 'mopping up' where clouds of smoke are
present. This is not the case with Paid Urban Fire Fighters, where they work on shift rosters and are
obliged to be replaced by a fresh Paid Crew or a part time Paid/Voluntary Auxiliary Crew after a
given time when continued urgency of the event is required.

Respect for an individual is a given, when any Fire Fighter (Paid or Voluntary) is given equal
recognition for the dangerous work that that Fire Fighter carries out.

No discrimination – equal in his/her value to the State of Queensland.

Your Committee has the power to show the State, it recognises All Fire Fighters as heroes.

We have included some instances below that illustrate our Brigade's situation.

Continued on Page 2

SUBMISSION – J.C. Thomson, Fire Fighter/ Warden Speewah RF Brigade (46 years Fire Fighter)
Y.M. Thomson, Former Fire Fighter/ Support Speewah RF Brigade/ Admin Officer
Clohesy RF Group. (22 years Fire Fighter)

Continued from Page 1 - Some instances stated below that illustrate our Brigade's situation.

All of Speewah RF Brigade members are Volunteers, some retired, some owning their own businesses and some in paid employment with others.

All Speewah Voluntary Rural Fire Fighters would be COVERED ONLY AFTER 150 EXPOSURES as per schedule.

All other Fire Fighters would be COVERED AFTER ONLY 1 EXPOSURE as per schedule.

Kuranda Auxiliary Station is 10 km from Speewah by road. Shortest possible callout time for a structural fire at Speewah would be 25mins.

Speewah RF Brigade callout would be less than half that and may save a structure.

We Volunteers would be inhaling the same smoke that all other Fire Fighters would when they attend a structural fire. Rural Fire Fighters do not only fight grass fires.

Our Speewah Community is situated in the hills West of Cairns and a great proportion of homes are built where large Urban appliances are unable to go.

Speewah RF Brigade trucks are four wheel drive and much more manoeuvrable and lighter. They are able to access properties that would otherwise be undefended. Thus Rural Fire Fighters would be fighting the same fires as that of an Urban Crew.

Yet we are discriminated against because we are not employed by the Government.

DO VOLUNTEERS NEED TO BE PAID TO ATTRACT THE SAME BENEFITS?

There are approximately 36,000 of us covering about 93% of Queensland.

CAN THE STATE AFFORD NOT TO HAVE US ON AN EQUAL FOOTING?

With respect,

John and Yvonne Thomson.