

4th August, 2015

I am writing to the committee that is currently deliberating on two Bills before the House, I am deeply concerned with the one that was presented on the 15th July, 2015 by the Hon. Curtis Pitt, M.P. which is clearly discriminatory to unpaid firefighters, as a proactive Rural Fire Service Queensland Volunteer I feel that the Honourable Member has discounted the contribution that I and every other volunteer make to this State. Deloitte Economics in a study a few years ago conservatively estimated, the contribution that volunteer rural firefighter's made to Queensland, at \$700,000,000.00 annually.

Volunteer firefighters are supplied with a lesser quality of personal protective equipment than paid firefighters, yet are often exposed to the same or worse workplace conditions. I have personally been called to wildfires in rubbish dumps, liquid waste dumps and vegetation fires containing suspected drug set ups, asbestos and treated timber, chemical drums and other plastics and household goods illegally dumped. We also do regular flood and storm clean-up work where we are exposed to numerous pollutants, agricultural chemicals and waterborne nasties like typhoid, cholera and E.coli.

In the training that we receive from RFSQ we are told that we are covered for workplace injury the same as paid employees, as volunteers we are deemed as employees under the relevant OWH&S legislation.

Workers compensation bureaucrats often say, that if you cover volunteers there will be a flood of claims, as the reason to exclude volunteers from coverage. With Presumptive Legislation there is no evidence to back these claims, in fact since the legislation was amended in South Australia there has only been a couple of claims. Volunteers will still have to comply with the schedule nominating years of firefighting for each of the twelve specified cancers.

In introducing his Bill, the Hon. Curtis Pitt M.P. has evidently thrown the ethos of the Labour movement out of the window, this Bill is not giving the unpaid worker "a fair go", and it is also not conducive to attracting and retaining the Volunteer Emergency Services workforce that the Government relies upon so greatly.

In my volunteering I am involved with a lot of Brigades and other Volunteers across the State, everyone that I have spoken to since the Hon. Curtis Pitt M.P. introduced his Bill feels let down by the Government and also are concerned at the short time in which to respond, I spoke to a Brigade First Officer today who only received the B7 letter sent out by the Committee this morning, he has only 2 days to consult with his Brigade and write a response, was this done to minimise responses from Brigades? I would suggest that the Committee speak to groups of volunteers across the State to get an understanding of how strongly they feel about this issue.

I call on the Finance and Administration Committee to recommend to Parliament that the Private Members Bill of the 3rd June, 2015 be adopted as a bipartisan Bill or that the Bill of the 15th July, 2015 be amended to remove the discriminately conditions applying to the 36,000 Rural Fire Service Queensland Volunteers who protect 93% of the State from fire and also storm and flood recovery.

It is also about time that legislation was introduced to give Emergency Service Volunteers a standard of rights and conditions for the workplace, we should be treated no different than a paid employee.

Thanking you,

Signed electronically:

Graeme McWilliam
Sandy Straits Rural Fire Brigade

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