

4th August 2015

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Finance and Administration Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane QLD 4000

#### SUBJECT

Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Amendment Bill 2015 (Protecting Firefighters)  
Workers Compensation, Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendments 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

Over 90% of Queensland is looked after by volunteer rural firefighters. They not only respond to wildfires, but also have a responsibility for fire mitigation, as well as flood and cyclone clean up etc. All this is done with a very poor protection of P2 style masks.

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

#### RATIONALE

A volunteer rural firefighter gives his time freely, and it often costs him or her financially to be away from work. To suggest that they need to attend at least 150 fires as opposed to 1 fire for a permanent firefighter is ludicrous. A rural firefighter will spend long hours of varying shifts at a fire that can sometimes takes days to control.

A permanent firefighter has supplied breathing apparatus, and rightly so, but a rural volunteer is expected to go into unknown conditions, and unknown fuels and possible dumped materials, and all they are supplied with is a paper style mask. A rural firefighter has to contend with wind shifts and constant varying conditions, and often gets caught in smoke and ash matter. There is usually no indication of the type of fuel, or the health danger. In a rural environment, where there is no mains water, volunteer rural crews are relied on to ferry water for the Urban or Auxiliary appliances, and work in the same environment, yet we are told that we must do this 150 times more? I have personally been to 6 such incidents and most volunteers would be in a similar position. A rural volunteer also gets called to shed and house fires, to control the spread of fire onto grass/bush lands.

Rural properties historically contain a lot of hazardous materials, such as herbicides and pesticides, fuels and oils etc, and these are only the ones that can be seen. A lot of items can be dumped in bushland, and then get covered by lantana etc.

Also a hazard, is illegal dumping of materials in bushland such as asbestos and industrial waste. This waste in its many forms including plastics, foam boxes, etc can cause carcinogens when being burned.

As mentioned earlier, a rural volunteer also helps out in non fire events, such as cyclones, floods etc. and this can also be in a hazardous environment. In the floods of previous years, volunteers were used to clean mud areas, also containing human waste, asbestos etc.

There is no way a rural firefighter will know what harmful gases are inhaled, or what may adhere to his or her clothing, in the way of asbestos materials or similar.

South Australia has adopted the view that all volunteer firefighters should be covered in the same manner as employed firefighters, with exposure to one fire only. Why should Queensland discriminate against their firefighter resource?

If we are to train and encourage new recruits, they should expect the same type of protection as a paid employee.

With all these factors outlined, it can be deduced that a rural firefighter has to potentially contend with the same levels of exposure and hardships as an urban or auxiliary firefighter.

In conclusion I respectfully request serious consideration be given to abandoning this discrimination against volunteer rural firefighters with regard to their possible workers compensation claims.

Stephen McCabe  
Volunteer Rural Firefighter