

Gregory River Rural Fire Brigade

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6 Aug 2015
Finance and
Administration Committee

Secretary: Mrs Kerry Hetherington
1084 Farnsfield Road
CHILDERS Qld 4660
Phone: 4126 9118

5 August 2015

Submission on Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Bill

We are writing on behalf of our members who are called on regularly to attend fires across the Wide Bay region. We welcome this review into workers compensation and are hopeful that it translates into meaningful cover which can be easily accessed by our members who may be affected by fire related illnesses currently and in the future.

We have real concerns with the proposed eligibility criteria. Our brigade has existed for 40 years and members have varying fire fighting histories that range from very recent right up to that 40 year time frame. We do not believe that any of our members could provide proof of attendance at 150 fires although many would have exceeded that number over the years. Further, we don't believe that 150 events should be the threshold for cover under this scheme. The burden of proof is too onerous given for many years no records of attendance were kept and record keeping systems have changed many times over the years.

The concept of a threshold of 150 events ignores the possibility of some fire fighters being exposed to extreme conditions during a small number of events which could be more detrimental than low exposure over 150 events.

Each individual should be assessed on a case by case basis based on their testimony as to the level of exposure they have suffered and not be subjected to any particular number of events attended. As an example, two of our members attended a fire where drums of chemical were burning unknown to them; they were first on the scene and inhaled potentially toxic fumes before realising what they faced. Fire fighters have not necessarily reported such events in the past, as to date there has been no scheme to cover them for illnesses contracted at a later time.

We believe this scheme should be designed to cover the maximum number of our members who could suffer serious illness as a result of their volunteer service. In it's current form we think the scheme will merely provide the government with a public relations benefit without giving our members real access to the cover they need. Volunteer fire fighters provide a service to the state and their communities unselfishly without payment however in most cases they shoulder the costs involved with transport and loss of earnings. They should not have to provide their own medical costs if struck down by illness as a result of their service.

We sincerely hope this review provides our members with access to real cover so they can be treated at least equally to the government's paid employees.

Yours sincerely

Gregory River Rural Fire Brigade

Chairman ...
Geoffrey McCarthy

First Officer ...
Rudy Stakenburg