

## DAYBORO AND DISTRICTS RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

6 July 2015

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

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of the members of the  
Dayboro and Districts Rural Fire Brigade.

Our focus in the limited time available to study the legislation and consult amongst our  
membership is centred on its impact on volunteer Rural Firefighters.

Most discussion has focussed on the minimum number of exposure incidents required to be  
attended by rural firefighters vs. full-time and auxiliary in order to qualify for standard  
statutory compensation entitlements.

Having reviewed the Monash University Final Report Australian Firefighters Health Study  
December 2014 we accept its findings as the most authoritative available at this stage and  
concede that there is a significant variation in the incidences of cancer between full-time  
and volunteer firefighters.

However the Final Report does state amongst male volunteer firefighters there was a  
trend of increased cancer risk with the number or type of incidents attended.

The risk of prostate cancer and lip cancer in male volunteer firefighters is significantly  
higher compared to the Australian population.

The Final Report also noted that male volunteer firefighters also had a significantly  
increased risk of dying in a fire.

Other submissions, including the submission by Brian Marfleet of Armstrong Creek, provide  
insight into other hazards faced by rural firefighters in the conduct of their regular duties  
on behalf of their communities.

Although the latter point is not directly relevant to the legislation under discussion it is  
highly germane to the perception, widely held amongst volunteer rural firefighters, that  
the qualification provisions may be designed to limit the Government's potential liability to  
claims from a significant group of citizens.

This perception is reinforced when considering the minimum 150 exposure incidents plus length of service required to be attended by rural firefighter which in the absence of evidence supporting the quantum appears arbitrary.

As mentioned earlier the Monash University Final Report clearly differentiates the cancer risk between full-time and volunteer firefighters.

However, in deriving the one incident plus service for full-time and auxiliary firefighters vs. 150 incidents plus service qualification threshold for volunteers the Government has the enviable task of explaining to a very large body of community minded volunteers, upon which it is utterly reliant to respond to not only wild fires but a host of other natural disasters include flood clean-up and cyclone damage clean-up, that in the event they contract any of the prescribed cancers there are significant, if not insurmountable barriers, in their way to accessing compensation more readily available to other firefighters.

Our submission is that the qualification bar is reset for all firefighters, not necessarily at the same level, because the risk is not the same for all, and, cost to the State cannot be ignored in any balance view.

If the scheme is unaffordable by placing volunteer firefighters on the same basis as full-time and auxiliary firefighters then the Government ought to say so

The perception, and in reality (150 incidents plus service), of volunteers not being valued by Government is overwhelming, Monash University Final Report notwithstanding. The legislation as currently drafted fails the Dayboro pub test on this point.

Yours faithfully

**Kevin O'Sullivan**

Treasurer

On behalf of the Dayboro and Districts Rural Fire Brigade