

Captain Creek Rural Fire Brigade



Dear Mr Butcher,

RE Policy for cancer compensation

2nd August 2015

The Captain Creek Rural Fire Brigade would like to express its concern over the proposed policy of a minimum of 30 fires per year, for compliance to receive assistance should they succumb to cancer. As a Brigade that has an average age of 30 years old, the accumulated breathing of smoke can occur over a lifetime of much fewer fires than the policy covers. Out of 23 members, we have only one cigarette smoker, this implies that any cancers that may occur to our members, are most likely caused by, or attributed to, by smoke inhalation from firefighting.

Two years ago, our longest serving member was hospitalized with severe smoke inhalation at one short fire, due to its intensity, and the type of vegetation. Many species of Flora in Australia are highly carcinogenic when affected by fire. She was never reimbursed expenses, or, for lost work time, due to a failure of Rural Ops to properly record the incident, despite the officer in charge doing this correctly. That one fire alone could create a cancer. She would be unable to comply with the 30 fire rule (why)

In fact it is unlikely that many of our firefighters would comply. For example, my own contribution on the fire ground is an average of 27 turnouts per annum. Sometimes a fire lasts many days and these would still be classed as a single fire. My first year I did 33 turnouts, one fire lasted 6 days, another 4, so this equates to 25 fires. Some days on the fire ground, we finish the job and are then responded to another incident.

At another fire of around ten thousand hectares I was stationed at a hilltop house on protection watch for 6 hours, the smoke was intense with incendiary bombs dropped on the ridge line and a fully encircling fire of 33km, in a strong wind on an upslope. The smoke alarms inside the sealed house were sounding, and paper masks were no protection, my goggle clad eyes were streaming and my breath rasped for days - that was one fire. The urban firefighters were at the foot of the hill, lighting up with the wind taking the fire away from them.

There is also a distinct logistical problem with recording fire attendances to incidents. Who will accurately and securely store records of each member's history, and will they be held accountable for lost records, or a failure to correctly file? Another apology for more of what have been regular paperwork failings, will not be acceptable when a person who risks all for strangers, receives no care or relief on their death bed. I find it unlikely that personally noted records will suffice from the view of government, and how can we back them up?

It is with concern for all fire fighters that I write this letter, in the hope that a more appropriate policy be devised, one that protects all firefighters who fall victim to cancer, for protecting the community and its assets, at their own peril. It is on behalf of the Captain Creek Rural Fire Brigade that I express serious concern over a lack of protection for those that suffer after the job has been long forgotten. In *their* time of need, *they* should not be forgotten!

Chairman.

Sean Small

CCRFB, [REDACTED]