

Submission regarding Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015.

1. Request for permission to publish this submission

The Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group requests permission from the committee to publish this submission. The distribution would be specifically for information to brigade volunteers within our region and across the State.

2. Thank You

A thanks is extended to the Chair and the Committee for approving an extension for submissions. This will allow both supporting and additional information to come before the committee which will be crucial to not only good legislation but will ensure present and future volunteers will continue to commit freely of their essential services to community and government.

3. Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group

The Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group, through its Volunteers provide fire protection and additional emergency support to the residents, businesses and landholders, of some 2,500 square kilometres between Gympie and Maryborough

This area houses substantive satellite communities at Curra, Glenwood and Bauple, with currently some 630, 1,020 and 320 homes consecutively in these areas. These plus the additional areas of Gunalda, Theebine, Gundiah and Tiaro, continue to grow rapidly, placing greater pressure and increasing the potential risks of those incidents.

This area serviced by the Rural Fire Brigade Volunteers is also the corridor for both the Bruce Highway and the Queensland Rail Corridor, carrying goods of every description, toxic and otherwise, both to the North and South. The isolation of these areas with approximately 100 kilometres distance between Gympie and Maryborough, places Brigade Volunteers at increased risk to toxic fumes and gases as first responders to these incidents.

4. Bills before Parliament (Protecting Firefighters)

The current Bills before Parliament and their amendments are causing great uncertainty for RFB Volunteers due to the fact that Government and their insurers, appear to be applying unnecessary impediments for claimants, in what is recognised as work related illnesses facing all Firefighters, such as cancer.

The employment time frames of recognised cancers as listed in Schedule 4A have been accepted as fair and reasonable, but to apply an additional 150 attendances at incidences on Volunteer Firefighters, ignores the fact we in rural areas are first responders to all or most of these attended call outs. Be it structural, hazardous, motor vehicle or bush or grass fire and without the same protective clothing and equipment afforded to our urban counterparts'.

Section 36 D (1) (c), appears to clearly discriminate against Volunteer Firefighters with career Firefighters and similarly in 36 B, on Definitions of a Firefighter, a Fire Officer under the Q F & E S Act 1990, makes reference to a paid employee. This includes all QFES personnel who wears a uniform and is employed in an operational capacity, whether they attend regular incidents or not.

The Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group strongly support, and calls on Government to ensure equity across all legislations which affect Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade members.

5. Support given to previous submissions.

The Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group, strongly support the submission that *Qualifying periods: date of application/manifestation*, should commence 09 July 2011, for all Queensland Firefighters, in line with Aviation Firefighters in Queensland under the Federal 2011 “Fair protection for Firefighters” Act.

The Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group strongly support the removal of the 5% common law threshold under the Workers’ Compensation and Rehabilitation Act.

6. Concluding Comments

The Mount Kanigan Rural Fire Brigade Group, encourages the committee to ensure there is no immediate or future reluctance for community members to participate in the essential services of volunteering, due to the fact that legislators and their insurers seem to apply further cost cutting to a service that saves money, by its selfless contributions.