FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members present:
Ms DE Farmer MP (Chair)
Miss VM Barton MP
Mr MJ Crandon MP
Mr CD Crawford MP
Mr DA Pegg MP
Mr PT Weir MP

Staff present:

Ms D Jeffrey (Research Director)
Dr M Lilith (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRIES INTO THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015 AND THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION (PROTECTING FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2015

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 17 AUGUST 2015

Brisbane

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Committee met at 1.04 pm

GILLESPIE, Mr Alan, Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade Group

McWILLIAM, Mr Graeme, Sandy Straits Rural Fire Brigade (via teleconference)

THOMPSON, Ms Karen, Clear Mountain Rural Fire Brigade Group

CHAIR: Good afternoon. I declare open this public briefing of the Finance and Administration Committee's inquiries into the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015. I am Di Farmer, the chair of the committee and the member for Bulimba. The other members of the committee are: Mr Michael Crandon, deputy chair and member for Coomera; Miss Verity Barton, the member for Broadwater; Mr Duncan Pegg, the member for Stretton; Mr Pat Weir, the member for Condamine; and Mr Craig Crawford, the member for Barron River.

The purpose of this hearing is to receive additional information from submitters about the bills, which were referred to the committee on 16 July 2015. This hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and is subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind you that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

Thank you for your attendance here today. The committee appreciates your help. You have previously been provided with a copy of the instructions for witnesses, so we will take those as read. Hansard will record the proceedings and you will be provided with the transcript. This hearing will also be broadcast. Could I also remind witnesses to speak into the microphone for the benefit of Hansard.

I remind all those in attendance at the hearing today that these hearings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. We have no members of the public here today. We are running this hearing as a roundtable forum to facilitate discussion; however, only members of the committee can put questions to witnesses. If you wish to raise an issue for discussion, I ask you to direct your comments through the chair. I also request that mobile phones be turned off or switched to silent mode. I remind you that no calls can be taken in the hearing room.

The committee is familiar with the issues you have raised in your submissions, and we thank you for the detailed submissions we have received from you. The purpose of today's hearing is to further explore aspects of the issues you have raised in the submissions. The committee has a number of questions it does wish to put to you. I am going to invite each of you to make a brief opening statement. The other day we gave three minutes to the organisations, but I think given our time what we are asking is if each person could perhaps make a one-minute summary of anything that is over and above what you have in your submission, because you can be assured that we have read all of the submissions in detail. We do have a range of questions that we want to ask which we hope will give you the opportunity to help us with our considerations. Alan, would you like to begin?

Mr Gillespie: Thank you, Madam Chair. You threw me then. I practised this over the weekend to make it exactly three minutes.

CHAIR: You do what you are comfortable with, but we certainly will be asking you lots of questions. We just want to make sure that we have enough time.

Mr Gillespie: Good afternoon, Madam Chair and committee members. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee to champion presumptive legislation on behalf of volunteers. It is certainly not my intention to reiterate that which I have already covered in my submission, but I would like to provide comment about information that was provided last Thursday by the United Firefighters Union, who are supporting the government's bill and the 150 prerequisites for volunteer firefighters.

My contention is that the government's bill in its present form and the United Firefighters Union's position both discriminate against volunteers without justification. I base this on the fact that the UFU's claim from last Thursday—and it is not an organisation that represents volunteers—that in

some respects by giving volunteers the same rights as paid firefighters it will weaken the legislation. Their contention is that there is insufficient research to prove that volunteer firefighters are more susceptible to certain types of cancers than you would see in the general populace. They base this claim on the Monash study and believe that a volunteer firefighter only has to attend a prescribed incident within the defined period for any claim that may arise to be challengeable in law. They say the government should follow the Tasmanian model and implement a threshold of 150 attendances for volunteer firefighters and that that would negate any challenge.

If we assume for one moment that this hypothetical scenario is possible, I ask you to consider this: if, as is claimed, the evidence does not exist to support any claim made by a volunteer firefighter then it makes little difference whether they attend one, 150 or 1,050 prescribed incidents. The evidence, or lack thereof, would be the same regardless of the number of incidents they attend. In fact, the truth of the matter is that the arbitrary figure of 150 incidents contained in the Tasmanian legislation was based on political will, not scientific evidence. The whole notion that providing the same coverage for volunteers as is afforded paid staff will in some way allow a legal challenge to be mounted is nothing but pure speculation on behalf of the UFU. They presented no legal basis upon which such a challenge could be made and they produced no scientific evidence in relation to the 150-limit threshold.

I suggest that, rather than considering an unsupported hypothetical scenario, the committee should be paying due notice to the situation in South Australia. South Australia has presumptive legislation that has no attendance threshold on volunteers. Paid and volunteer firefighters only need to attend one incident within the prescribed time frame to be eligible for compensation. Since the introduction of this legislation there have been three claims made by volunteer firefighters, and all of those claims have been accepted without challenge. This is not hypothetical; this is fact. It negates the argument put forward to the committee by the UFU quite successfully.

Volunteer firefighters breathe the same smoke. We deserve the same level of protection, and I ask the committee not to treat volunteers as the poor cousins of career firefighters. That has happened far too frequently as it is.

Ms Thompson: I also prepared a three-minute presentation.

CHAIR: I will have to let you all go, and we will see what we can do with questions at the end.

Ms Thompson: I am from the Clear Mountain Rural Fire Brigade. I am a rural firefighter and also a volunteer community educator with Queensland Rural Fire Service. I have been a rural firefighter for four years. I live at Clear Mountain of Brisbane. It is considered by QFES to be an iZone area where the country meets the urban sprawl and lots of larger properties and bushland are taken over by new residential developments, often including dense housing. iZone regions are internationally recognised as areas of the greatest risk for many communities.

Unfortunately, when the city meets the country it often presents a number of unanticipated situations for firefighters. Car fires, for example, are far too often an issue in our area. Often misidentified by a well-meaning public as grass fires, based on callout guidelines we are called out instead of the closest urban station. By the time we get there the vehicles are usually well engulfed in flame. With no breathing apparatus I am entrusted with my P2 paper mask, and I brought one here today to show you. I am trained to stand upwind and cool the vehicle until support staff—who are wearing negative pressure breathing apparatus—arrive. But hey, I'm upwind. I'm okay.

In September 2014 we were advised that certain incident response protocols have been updated from joint urban and rural to rural only responses. The list of changes is not insignificant and I am happy to share this with you if required. We now also support the SES with storm and other disaster situations on a needs basis. There is no denying that the scope of a rural firefighter's role continues to significantly increase, as do the risks to personal safety. I am also a volunteer community educator. We attend emergency and high-risk situations supporting the community. I believe that the participation of VCEs has not yet been addressed within these discussions, but I can assure you it is very worthy of your consideration.

Yesterday I attended a fire. I got home smelling like a bushfire. I showered. I still smelled like a bushfire. I had another shower this morning. I can still smell the smoke in my skin and in my hair. My nose is clogged and I will be blowing out black particles for the next two to three days. My throat is thick and it is a little bit hard to swallow. Yesterday was a low-intensity fire. I have been to far, far worse. When we get back to the station after a fire we replenish our trucks for the next callout, debrief and go home to our families. I throw my yellows in the washing machine—I am not sure that everyone does this—and try to get the smell out of my skin and my hair. I throw my mask in the bin. My helmet

goes back in my turnout bag and I restock it with a clean uniform. This thing goes into the back seat of my ute ready for my next callout. I know it is there: I can smell it. I do not even have to look. Why? Because my callout bag sits on the back of the truck when we are attending a fire. We do not have decontamination areas, washing units for PPE or deemed contaminated zones at our station, nor have I seen these at any other rural station I have attended. I have been to fires where multiple agencies have been in attendance—me with my P2 mask standing in the smoke next to my urban colleagues in their breathing apparatus.

I guess I am not worth the investment of more appropriate PPE, or protective personal equipment, because I do not get paid to do this job. I do get paid to do a job—a job that I work very hard at. If I were unable to do so, it would have severe consequences on my family and my lifestyle. My partner and I own a small business, and God forbid if I were ever to contract cancer. Our lifestyles would be forever altered. I am a consultant. If you do not work you do not get paid. There is no paid sick leave, no paid annual leave and no-one steps up to pay my mortgage. A few days ago I was talking about this proposed legislation amendment to a fellow firefighter who is both an urban and a rural firefighter. He said, 'I've got a lot more chance of ever contracting cancer as a rural firefighter than urban. We wear all that protective gear.'

I am very proud to be a member of the Queensland Rural Fire Service, and I currently work between seven and 20 hours a week in this role. Why? I think this popular quote says it all: volunteers do not get paid—not because they are worthless but because they are priceless.

Mr McWilliam: I just want to add to the last two speakers. There has been fear of the legislation for volunteers being rebutted by professionals. That is the purpose of presumptive legislation, so that it can be gone through for volunteers. One fire or 150, you do not know at which fire you are going to pick up carcinogens. We do not have decent protective equipment such as our career firefighters do. I have been to many fires in tips where there is waste liquid in dumps where paid firefighters are sitting in a command centre because they cannot put their trucks into where we go. It is wrong, but volunteers give of their time and are not being treated equally.

CHAIR: Thanks, Graeme. Was there anything else that you wanted to add?

Mr McWilliam: A lot of people do not realise that formaldehyde levels and that sort of thing in bushfires can get quite high. What research has been done into plantation fires and that sort of thing we do not know. We are coming across dumped building materials and that all the time burning. There is so much unknown. They are saying that the science is not there. We need legislation to cover us and treat us as we should be treated—the same as any firefighter.

CHAIR: Thank you to all of you for the thought and preparation you have put into those. We will move to questions. This is a question to all of you: can you tell the committee what sort of record keeping your brigade undertakes and your experience of record keeping with other brigades you are familiar with?

Ms Thompson: We have an A4 size turnout book that sits next to where the appliances are and every time a firefighter at Clear Mountain brigade attends the premises—whether turning out for a fire or just for training—they sign in and sign out from that book. Unfortunately it is known that those books have in the past gone missing, so the possibility to produce evidence would be near impossible for me to confirm to you how many fires I have attended.

Mr Gillespie: I am aware that a number of the more active brigades such as the iZone brigades and certainly a lot of the ones that I am familiar with on the Gold Coast and within my own brigade keep a similar book in the station, but of course it is not always filled out and that information is not necessarily passed on to the fire service. It was noted in the Monash report that Rural Fire Service records in Queensland were deemed to be very inaccurate right up until 2011. In fact, they are still not 100 per cent. One of the interesting aspects that came out of the recommendations of the Malone review was that there was too much red tape for firefighters and that we should be able to capture a lot of the information in terms of responding to incidents. So a lot of the information that was captured at that time by Firecom should be able to fill out what we call the RF14, our fire report, and that system has been in place for a couple of years. What it does not capture is the names of the volunteers that go to the fires. That is not captured.

CHAIR: Can you tell us what it does capture?

Mr Gillespie: It will capture things like the type of incident that you went to—whether it was a bushfire or a grassfire—the trucks that went, the number of people that went but not the names, the timing and that sort of thing.

CHAIR: Graeme, can you comment on that?

Mr McWilliam: Yes. At our brigade we have a call-out book, but the trouble with call-out books is when you are actually called out you forget to sign in.

CHAIR: Because you are in a hurry?

Mr McWilliam: Yes, and when you get back you can be pretty tired. I have been called out to fires at nine o'clock in the morning and come back in at three o'clock the next morning and then am back on the road again at six o'clock. When you get a bad fire season like 2009, I was at multiple fires on most days for 36 days out of 40 and the record keeping just goes out the window. All you want to do is get home, get clean and get some sleep because you know you are going to be back out again the next morning.

Mr Gillespie: Of course that record keeping too does not necessarily indicate the types of duties that you undertake. I do a lot of IMT stuff—incident management team—so on the management team. That is my speciality from the years of senior management that I have had, so that is a relatively safe position to be in. You are not necessarily in the smoke. You are not doing the hard yards at the front—that is probably why I do it; it is not that hard—and you are using your brain rather than your brawn. But your book does not indicate what types of duties you are doing, so that is an anomaly that is not captured anywhere.

Mr CRANDON: Graeme, you mentioned formaldehyde a moment ago and, Karen, in your testimony just a short while ago you described the fire that you attended yesterday.

Ms Thompson: Yes.

Mr CRANDON: I will just read from this document, *Assessing firefighters' exposure to air toxics in bushfire smoke*. The last page of the document states—

> There is also a concern that some of the air toxics in bushfire smoke are carcinogenic. Formaldehyde has recently been classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as a known human nasal carcinogen ... and its exposure levels should be kept as low as feasible.

So coming to your statement a moment ago, Karen, you described what you are still feeling today. How long were you at that fire or at that incident and how long does that type of feeling—the blowing of the nose and so forth—go on for after a case?

Ms Thompson: It was a fairly open and controlled fire, so it was not very intense. There were areas where we could get away from the smoke. We were there from 8.30 until one and it will probably stick around—just the gluggy throat, just feeling blocked up—for two to three days, but again it depends. It is probably worth commenting at this stage as well that more often than not when we attend a bushfire we do not know what is there. You talk about conservation parks and areas of bush. More often than not there are other things in there that is not just bush such as car tyres. Unfortunately we have come across a few shooting galleries and disposed of empty chemical containers and all sorts of plastics and things that we just do not even know are there. I have been to bushfires where explosives have gone off. Clear Mountain is covered in unexploded ordnance from World War II, so you do not know what you are going to get. I suppose that is what I am trying to say.

Miss BARTON: I guess this is a question for all three. One of the things that we have been trying to understand are the types of fires that you guys go out to fight, and also key for me is understanding how often you actually end up alongside your urban colleagues and are effectively fighting the same fire as them without the same level of protection. Obviously, Alan, you have spoken about having to go out to cars on fire and things like that. Are you able to detail how often the fires are something that are necessarily not something that a rural firey would go to or a volunteer firey would go to and how often you actually end up alongside your urban colleagues who are doing it in the full PPE that you guys do not have access to?

Mr Gillespie: As an iZone brigade—and iZone is the urban-rural interface, so we are right on the boundary as the majority of Gold Coast brigades are—we would do a lot of fires alongside our urban colleagues. The majority of them would be alongside our urban colleagues. We get a lot of the car fires, as Karen mentioned. We get a lot of those and a lot of stolen cars, but also being on that urban fringe you get a lot of rubbish dumped in the bush and that becomes a problem for us because we do not know what is in there and all we do is we get in there and we fight the fire.

The other thing you have to be concerned about, too, are the chemicals that are being used today to control weeds, fertilisers and those sorts of things which are perfectly fine when they are in the ground but of course once you subject them to the heat of a fire then their atomic structure can change and become quite deadly. A very good example, although it is not in the bush although you do find it a lot in the bush in dumps, is wool. Wool is a perfectly harmless product when we use it, but

when you burn it it produces cyanide. It is very toxic when it burns. Think of the number of times you have been out to a dump or been out in the bush and you have seen someone's carpet dumped out there. It is probably not wool these days and is probably nylon, but that is just as bad.

I want to draw on a point that Michael brought up and that Graeme brought up in terms of formaldehyde, and I am very pleased that Michael was referring to that particular document because in table 1 of that document—and I am referring back to the one that I emailed earlier, *Assessing firefighters' exposure to air toxics in bushfire smoke*—it talks about the levels of carcinogens that have been found by research in bushfire smoke and it talks about formaldehyde. It says that the long-term exposure should not exceed 0.3 parts per million and short-term exposure of 15 minutes 0.6 parts per million. It says very clearly in here that in fact the average that they have found is that it is three times that level in bushfire smoke—that is, one part per million and in concentrated forms two parts per million. So the levels exceed those in average bushfire smoke. This is a normal eight-hour shift. In fact, when we do strike teams and we are working 12-hour shifts and when we go to our own fires—and Karen will attest to this—we go for a lot longer than eight hours and that is a type 2 carcinogen. A type 2 carcinogen is a probable human carcinogen and there is sufficient evidence to provide a strong presumption that human exposure might result in the development of cancer. There is also benzene at one part per million and that is a level 1 carcinogen. It is an established human carcinogen and there is sufficient evidence of a causal association between human exposure and the development of cancers. That is in bushfire smoke.

CHAIR: Thanks for that, Alan, because it was very good to get that information this morning. We might just keep on going though, if that is okay, because we have questions that may not have already been submitted in writing.

Mr PEGG: I have a question about how many incidents each of you have attended over the last 12 months.

Ms Thompson: How long is a piece of string?

Mr PEGG: So you do not even personally for the last 12 months keep any—

Ms Thompson: I would have to go back to the turnout book and refer back to that. Unfortunately, we recently changed turnout books and one was lost. We train every 10 days at Clear Mountain Rural Fire Brigade and we are coming into fire season now. There were two call-outs yesterday. Some days you might have a call-out for six weeks and then you might get—you just do not know—two a day. Arsonists are always fun because they make things quite intense as well, so you do not know what you are dealing with and you do not know when your pager is going to go off and what it is going to be until you get there.

Mr PEGG: So right now you could not answer that, so you do not have a record of the last 12 months?

Ms Thompson: I have no record.

Mr PEGG: And there is no record you could obtain?

Ms Thompson: I could estimate. I could estimate it to be 75 to 100.

Mr Gillespie: I am in a similar position. I would have no idea. I would have to go back and have a look at the station records. The issue with that is it relies on me going to the station, signing the book and jumping in the truck. I live a little bit away from the station, so half the time I do not even go to the station; I will meet the boys at the fire itself so I do not even get to sign the book.

Ms Thompson: Attending a fire may be in a controlled environment in training. It may be something that does not actually have fuel or flame involved—it could be something completely different—so an attendance is not necessarily an instance of fire.

Mr McWilliam: I think the longest I have been on one fire continuously is 22 hours and then backed up again the next day. We are doing a lot of hours on fires. I was on one fire from lunchtime to 11.30 at night, went back in the next morning and were mopping up and when we were driving out there were urban trucks there wearing BA that told us we should not be in the area because of the formaldehyde levels. They did not tell us that crews had gone down sick—multiple crews—in the night. So they had somebody out there looking and these guys were wearing full BA and we had been wearing paper masks the night before.

Record keeping is pretty terrible. If I want to say how many fires I had been to I could only guess without going back through call-out books and that sort of thing. But whether the call-out books have been maintained since I first started in the brigade, I know we are on about our third or fourth one now.

We go anywhere for fires. The closest paid firefighters to here is a good 20 minutes with lights and sirens. So we get called to caravan fires, house fires, car fires before the urbans arrive here. We have that to contend with. It is all right saying be on the downwind side of the smoke. That is fine if it is a car burning, but when you are working with a dozer pushing a break in front of an oncoming fire, you are in the smoke. There is nothing you can do about it. That is all I have to say.

Mr PEGG: Do you think an electronic system for records of call-outs would assist? We have heard a number of times that the records go missing. There is a book and then the book goes missing. Do you think an electronic system would assist with record keeping?

Ms Thompson: It would assist at our station because of the kind of people we have in our brigade. I think it would not necessarily be as effective in some of what we call bush brigades further out west and further north where they are more remote, particularly where you have older, less technically savvy participant firefighters.

Mr Gillespie: But the reality of the situation is that a lot of those places do not even have a fire station and some fire stations do not have electricity. The people would respond from their home. How do you implement such a system?

Mr McWilliam: Particularly in Gaeta where they have had the bad fires in 2009. There is a prime example of that. The brigade meets in the local park.

Miss BARTON: In terms of how you would keep records, say, for example, you were going to a bushfire that had multiple fronts and as it spread you kept on moving from fire to fire to fire. I would think—and maybe because I am not a rural firefighter—if you were going to five different fronts, for example, and you were constantly moving that that would be five incidents because you had done five different things. But it strikes me that the chances are that if you had just ticked the book once when you go out and then you sign yourself back in, it is counted as only one incident.

Ms Thompson: That is correct.

Miss BARTON: Whereas I would have a perception of it being five, because you have fought five different fronts. So does that impact record keeping as well?

Ms Thompson: Absolutely. I can give you an example where I went out to a station celebration—like a 60th anniversary type of scenario—dressed in station uniform, got a call-out, went to a fire on the other side of town in our area. That was fine. Three hours later, I swapped to another fire front, spent another three or four hours there, went and dropped some guy back home over the other side of town, came back over and went to another fire. I had left home at 10 on the Saturday morning and I got home at 3 am the next day. I went to one call-out, four fires.

Miss BARTON: Yes.

Mr Gillespie: In fact, the government's bill before the committee, in fact, defines that as only one fire, because you are attending just one fire despite how many fronts you may have attended over one period—gone away and come back. If it is the same day, it is the same fire, one incident.

CHAIR: Okay. We have to move quickly, only because we have so many questions to ask you. We will probably follow up in writing. So sorry to rush you. I will just hand over to Craig.

Mr CRAWFORD: Thanks, Chair. During my time in the brigade—I was in a number of different brigades—there were people like you who were obviously busy volunteers. I am sure that if we did have the records for all three of you and we were able to sit down and put them together that all three of you would easily have 150 and, for that matter, that would probably be for most of the people who you regularly turn out with. My question is: do your brigades have people on the books who have been members of the brigade, who have been there for some time, maybe never attended a fire or at best maybe one in their time, or people who, like Alan said, do a lot of IMT work and those sorts of things? Should they have the same coverage as you guys? You have certainly all convinced me that you all deserve coverage, but what about the ones who were not doing any calls or hardly any?

Ms Thompson: I would not know a firefighter who could say that they have done 150 fires in five years and could prove it and I am talking about every firefighter I know.

Mr CRAWFORD: You just told me that you had been to about 75 to 100 calls in the last month.

Ms Thompson: Events, yes, but a call is not necessarily a fire. It could be training, it could be a car accident, it could be a community education session—it could be lots of things—but it is not necessarily a fire. So even the most experienced firefighters I work with—and I have had this discussion with many people—would not be able to prove that they have attended 150 fires in five years.

Mr CRAWFORD: So how long do you think it would take an iZone brigade member, who was an average member who got to most jobs, to achieve 150 exposures? We are not just talking calls here; we are talking prescribed burns and training drills and that sort of thing.

Mr Gillespie: In terms of the legislation, which specifically talks about fire, be that training fire or normal fire, as I indicated last week, Mr Neil Gallant very kindly ran just a quick scan on the databases and the records kept by the fire service and came up with 106 brigades in the last five years who had attended 150 or more incidents. So 106 brigades out of 1,400 brigades is a fairly small percentage.

CHAIR: They are recorded incidents.

Mr Gillespie: They are recorded incidents, and the incident may not have been a fire. It may have been a flood; it may have been whatever. So the figures go down considerably. Many brigades have a large number of members. I was talking to the first officer of Rangewood brigade up in Townsville a little while ago. He has about 80-odd members on the books. Now, 80 people do not go to each fire. So how long would it take? I do not know. We do not have that sort of recording, but my contention is that they only have to go to one to get the cancer.

Mr CRANDON: Yes.

Mr McWilliam: What happens in our brigade is that we have a lot of young members at the moment and so we try to give everybody a go. So you are rotating people around. You might have one or two people attend all fires and all the rest are rotated. If you get members and you do not send them out to fires, you lose them. It can take quite a while to build up 150 fires. If you are a proactive brigade who is mitigating in their area, you might go 10 years with only having reduction burns and then all of a sudden you get a really bad year where you have fires going off left, right and centre. So putting a number on it is unrealistic.

CHAIR: Thank you. I am just going to ask Pat if he has a question and then we will have to finish up, I am sorry.

Mr WEIR: Yes. I probably should have asked this question the last time, because it affects the auxiliaries as well. When you join the rural fire brigade, do you go through a medical at all? Do the auxiliaries?

Mr Gillespie: Yes.

Mr WEIR: They do?

Mr Gillespie: If you get paid you have to go through a medical. If you are a volunteer, you do not.

Mr WEIR: Would there be any objections, do you think? I am just getting a feeling here.

Mr Gillespie: Yes, I know.

Mr WEIR: There are a lot of rural fireys. Someone talked about one where there were 80. I was talking to a rural brigade the other day and they had 75. So if they had to go to a medical when they joined, do you think that would be a problem—just ruling out any diseases before they came in?

Mr Gillespie: So would it be a problem? Yes. It would be a problem. It depends on the standard that you put on that medical. If you put the fire service standard on it, I hope you have a lot of money to pay for a lot more urban firefighters. You are going to have to, because you are going to rule out probably half the volunteer firefighters around the state. This is all about cancer. It is not about anything else. It is so hard. This is what presumptive legislation is all about. It is about the fact that it is so hard. If I cut my finger at a fire or burn myself, it is there, it is visible, I can see it, it is damage that is done. But cancer takes so long. You cannot put somebody through a medical and expect them to pick up something like a type of cancer. So could you do it? Yes. Would it be advisable? No. Would it in the end provide you with more assurance that the people coming in are healthier in terms of cancer? No, it would not.

Ms Thompson: And is there any less risk of them contracting cancer? Absolutely not.

CHAIR: Graeme, did you have anything quickly you wanted to add to that?

Mr McWilliam: Carcinogens can appear in the body undetected for years and years and years. So a person could have a medical and that particular carcinogen would not be picked up. It is not until your immune system stops fighting it off that it just triggers. That is the thing about cancer. Just having a medical, a person could join brigade when they are 16, do two or three years of mitigation burns, go away, come back later in life and they could have picked up a carcinogen in that first fire. Who knows?

CHAIR: Okay. I thank all three of you. I am sorry, but we have to wrap it up now. As I said, we will have written questions for you. We really appreciate you taking the time to come down and, Graeme, to phone in. It is not easy doing these things on a teleconference. Alan, this is obviously your second trip, so thank you very much for the help that you have given us today. I declare this hearing closed.

Ms Thompson: Thank you.

Mr Gillespie: Thank you, Madam Chair; thank you committee members.

Mr McWilliam: Thank you.

Committee adjourned at 1.41 pm