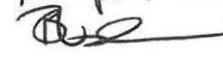




Tabbed by 4:27 pm 20/8/15.
J. Bleijie mp 

Nathan Ruhle

From:
Sent: Thursday, 6 August 2015 10:54 AM
To: Nathan Ruhle
Subject: FW: Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Bill
Attachments: 20150804 Letter to Volunteer Firefighters.pdf; Attached Message Part.txt

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject: Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Bill
Date: Tue, 4 Aug 2015 10:00:26 +0000
From:  

Secretary / First Officer

I have been asked by the Bundaberg Electorate office to forward you this letter.

Regards







Bundaberg Area Office
Rural Fire Service Queensland
Queensland Fire and Emergency Services





Web: www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au



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Bundaberg QLD 4670
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Leanne Donaldson MP

State Member for Bundaberg

4 August 2015

Dear Volunteer Firefighter

I am writing to remind you that submissions close at 4pm on Thursday 6th August to have your say on the Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Bill.

I have been contacted by a number of Rural Firefighters particularly in regards to the 150 event criteria. I have a very open mind about the concerns of volunteer firefighters and I'm very keen for your position to be put forward on behalf of rural firefighters in the Parliamentary Committee process.

I think the broad issues here are issues that relate, obviously, to the threshold itself but also how this would be implemented in terms of people's burden of proof for those exposure events.

I've been told that demonstrating attendance at 150 events might be difficult:

- Due to computer system upgrades wiping data, and
- Record keeping not being correctly recorded.

But I'm sure you will recognise there's a need to establish a workable eligibility criteria so that only those people who may have contracted cancer through their firefighting duties can access compensation.

There has been a lot of scaremongering about our Bill and I should clear up some misperceptions:

- There is no 10 year time limit on making a claim, firefighters can claim entitlements regardless of how long ago they retired.
- The claim fulltime fire fighters only have to attend one fire is untrue, they must also meet the minimum qualifying period of firefighting service.

Our Bill will give firefighters – all firefighters, fulltime, auxiliary or volunteer – some of the best access to compensation in the world. And once they've qualified, they will all have the same access. No discrimination.

There is no other deemed diseases scheme that offer volunteer firefighters unfettered access to common law damages and the same entitlements in terms of common law.

That's a very important part of this particular bill and that's where we differ from the LNP's Bill (the LNP's Bill does not provide access to common law damages).

It means under our proposal, in addition to weekly payments and medical benefits, volunteer firefighters may be entitled to a statutory lump sum payment of up to \$315,000.

This is especially important where a firefighter might have a significantly reduced life expectancy or even die from their contracted disease – in these circumstances weekly payments may not enable a firefighter to financially care for their own family without our assistance.

When developing a policy basis for the new deemed disease provisions, discussions with Queensland Fire and Emergency Services highlighted that the roles, responsibilities and expectations of volunteer firefighters are distinct from auxiliary and full-time firefighters because they don't engage in active sustained firefighting work as regularly as auxiliary and permanent firefighters.

This was supported by the findings of Monash University's recent Australian Firefighter Health Study, a national retrospective study of mortality and cancer incidence among a cohort of 232,871 current and former Australian firefighters.

The data analysed by the Monash Study indicates that many volunteer firefighters have significantly fewer recorded attendances than full-time and part-time firefighters.

The study found that overall, full-time and part-time paid male firefighters have a significantly increased cancer incidence when compared to the Australian population, whereas Australian volunteer firefighters do not.

On this basis the additional exposure criteria of 150 exposure events has been introduced, which is also a requirement in a number of other jurisdictions that have introduced deemed disease coverage for firefighters.

The Bill we've put forward has been based on the advice on ensuring we can get some threshold there in terms of the 150 exposure events.

Exposure events can include anything from back burning to training exercises or attending a fire interstate. In Bundaberg I can think of a few rural firefighters who have been on the job for many, many years who may not have the appropriate paperwork (so they might have a difficult time proving the 150 exposure events as the Bill stands).

If there is a strong case put forward that we need to look at a different evidence threshold so we know who meets the criteria, we are happy to have that considered. We're a government that's about consultation.

This isn't about cost, this is about ensuring sick firefighters who contract potentially deadly illnesses through their work receive the compensation they deserve in a timely fashion.

The 12 specified cancers on the schedule are also prevalent in the general community so it is reasonable that the deemed disease provisions restrict access to some extent to reflect the known exposure risk and cancer incidence of firefighters.

The Palaszczuk Government understands how important it is to support and properly resource our hard-working volunteers and I am pleased to convey that the 2015-16 Budget includes \$37 million for operating activities and an additional capital budget of \$7.6 million to the Rural Fire Service Queensland. This funding supports essential fire equipment and appliance replacements at no cost to brigades.

The term 'discriminatory' has been used but this isn't full-time firefighters versus part-time firefighters or rural firefighters versus auxiliary firefighters issue.

The important thing is we should take the most common sense approach we can.

If there is a strong case put forward that we need to look at a different evidence threshold so we know who meets the criteria, we are always happy to have that considered – but there has to be a threshold criteria to ensure only those who are eligible receive the assistance they deserve.

I understand the need to set specific criteria. For example there might be people who have been on the job for ten years but haven't maintained good records of their attendance at fire events, but it would be reasonable to assume they've responded to a great many fire events over that period.

The Government is open to considering the views of key stakeholders like the RFBAQ have on the proposed changes. This includes any additional data or research volunteers have on their exposure risk relative to permanent and auxiliary firefighters.

The Bill has been referred to the Finance and Administration Committee for further consideration. The Government is committed to listening to the Committee and will give due consideration to its recommendations.

At the end of the day, the Government wants to ensure that the deeming provisions are workable and that firefighters making claims are treated fairly.

For a guide on making a submission please refer to this website:

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/FAC/inquiries/current-inquiries/B7-WorkCompandRehabProtectFirefighters>

Alternatively submissions can be emailed to: fac@parliament.qld.gov.au

Yours sincerely



Leanne Donaldson MP
Member for Bundaberg