



## Speech by

# GEOFF WILSON

## MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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Hansard 4 August 1998

### WORKERS COMPENSATION

**Mr WILSON** (Ferry Grove—ALP) (6.42 p.m.): I rise in support of the amendment moved by the Minister. It gives me great pleasure to know that the first speech that I am making after my maiden speech is in support of a reviewed and revised WorkCover system that enables workers to receive their just entitlements. Let us not forget that it was a Labor Government that first introduced the Queensland workers compensation system. At that time, as it is today, people were being injured at work, often through no fault of their own. Workers compensation provides valuable protection for workers, giving them financial assistance when they most need it.

In its motion, the Opposition wanted this Chamber to note the reforms that the coalition introduced while in Government, implying that it had done great things. We have heard from the Minister that the financial improvements currently experienced by the board cannot be attributed to the coalition's reform of the scheme. In fact, they can be attributed to the coalition's attack upon workers who would otherwise have been entitled to reward and financial assistance under that scheme. Members of the Borbidge Government took drastic steps, not to improve the commercial viability of the scheme but to reduce the access, thereby producing a result for which they feel they can be commended. I suggest that they have a distorted outlook on the objectives of that scheme. Every worker would like to go to work knowing that he can do so and return to his family with every finger on his hands, every arm attached to his body and his back in good condition. Every family expects the breadwinner to return and support the family in that way. The primary objective of a WorkCover scheme is to provide financial assistance to those workers who are injured at work through no fault of their own and, indeed, even when it is their fault because of the special and unique nature of the employment situation.

It is certainly the case that the scheme has to be commercially viable, but one has to start with the primary objective. Then one must consider how many employers meet their WorkCover obligations. As I indicated to the House earlier today, many employers— particularly within the building and construction industry with which I am most familiar—are very happy not to meet their obligations for WorkCover insurance; yet, as soon as there is a newspaper report about an alleged workers compensation fraud by a worker, there is a great hue and cry about the corruption of the WorkCover system and the way in which workers are allegedly accessing it wrongly. As in any insurance system, there are workers who make claims falsely. Insurers, particularly contractors, also make claims to cover losses that perhaps they have not experienced. That is in the nature of things. We should work against that. It is destructive to an effective workers compensation system that any worker makes a false and fraudulent claim. That is something that the trade union movement has been proud to work actively against and will continue to work actively against.

Workers are entitled to financial assistance to compensate for injury at work. The review that is to be conducted must consider how we tighten up compliance so that those employers who are cheating on every other employer in industry are required to make their fair payment to support the system. As I said earlier, the primary concern of the WorkCover system has to be to provide financial assistance to workers. Underlying that objective, the most important aspect is the consideration of workplace health and safety to eliminate the reasons workers claim against this system.

Time expired.