




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 16 September 2015

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND
REHABILITATION (PROTECTING FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (11.54 pm): Tonight I rise to speak in favour of the opposition's private member's bill, the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015. In a huge blow to businesses throughout this state, Labor's bill will retrospectively reinstate common law rights for injured workers, potentially at a huge cost to Queensland businesses, and prohibit access to claims histories for employers. Contrary to the Labor government, the LNP believes employers should be able to know the claims history of a prospective employee in relation to workers compensation, as it gives them the opportunity to manage that person and appropriately allocate the duties they undertake. It is no wonder that the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland outlined strong reservations about the government's bill in its submissions to the committee, particularly in relation to costs for Queensland businesses, and highlighted the potential impact to the economy as a whole.

Equally concerning is the fact that Queensland nurses who fall under the workers compensation scheme are still routinely having their details shared with unions in an effort to dupe nurses into joining the QNU. As I have stated on many occasions, nurses join a union for protection and indemnity, not to become card-carrying members of the Labor Party unaware that their union dues are funding Labor campaigns. As a registered general nurse, I remain concerned that this government is not addressing the privacy concerns of public sector nurses who fall under its union encouragement policy as a result of its drive to boost union numbers for its mates in the union movements.

In addition, Labor's bill is fundamentally unfair and discriminates against the 35,000 volunteer firefighters who serve diligently throughout this state. Under the provisions of Labor's bill, the hardworking volunteer firefighters in my electorate of Mudgeeraba would be required to attend 150 incidents before they are considered for workers compensation. My electorate is home to a number of fantastic local rural fire brigades, including at Mudgeeraba, Gilston/Advancetown, Clagiraba which I share with my good friend the member for Gaven, Bonogin, Springbrook, Lower Beechmont and the Numinbah Valley. They all work to ensure the safety of residents throughout my hinterland electorate and their firefighters regularly put themselves in harm's way. I take this opportunity to thank first officers in my electorate for their service, particularly Philip Thompson from Numinbah Valley, Darryl Hall from Lower Beechmont, Tristan Gough from Gilston/Advancetown, Simon Hall from Bonogin, Paul Spinks from Springbrook, Jay Lockyer from Mudgeeraba and Luke Jarzynski from Clagiraba.

As a result of their line of work, those volunteer firefighters may be exposed to conditions that could lead to them contracting specified latent onset injuries, including cancer. It does not matter how many fires they attend or how many incidents they assist with; volunteer firefighters in my electorate and throughout Queensland still face very real challenges in their line of work which leave them

susceptible to lasting illnesses. An arbitrary minimum number of fires attended is not the way to ensure our fireys are looked after.

This Labor policy flies in the face of community expectations. I am sure that the countless individuals who have received assistance from our rural fire brigades over the years would be appalled at the way they are being treated by this Labor government. With homes in hinterland electorates such as my electorate of Mudgeeraba, Clagiraba and Springbrook in particular, while in some instances the red fire trucks are fairly close by they cannot access the driveways.

Mr Cramp: And Beechmont.

Ms BATES: And Beechmont as well. The crews cannot get the red fire trucks down some driveways, so crews in the yellow fire trucks respond.

I understand that on 9 September the *Sunshine Coast Daily* quoted the member for Bulimba, as the chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, as saying that her own government's bill is not workable as there is 'not enough evidence to actually justify the threshold' of 150 fires for rural fire brigades, as well as identifying issues in relation to record keeping and the burden this would place on our fireys. I am supporting the LNP's bill, which will see all firefighters, including full-time, auxiliary and volunteer fireys, receive workers compensation straight away if they contract cancer. We believe that all firefighters should receive the same level of protection, regardless of their pay status or the colour of their fire engine.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BATES: I take that interjection. The verdict of firefighters throughout Queensland in relation to Labor's legislation was clear and reflects an obvious failure by this Labor government to adequately consult before it proposed these laws. This is from a government that says they care and consult. What an insult to my brave rural volunteer firefighters—men and women of courage who routinely keep the hinterland of my electorate and its residents safe.

Encouragingly, firefighters have given their clear support to the LNP's bill, which provides the highest level of support to fireys in the country. The United Firefighters Union Queensland, the Queensland Auxiliary Firefighters Association and the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland all support the LNP bill. Unfortunately, this Labor government was not going to support our legislation which protected the rights of fireys until it was shamed into it by the LNP. I congratulate the member for Kawana for introducing a sensible bill which will see the health and safety of firefighters in my electorate protected into the future. I encourage other members of this House to support our sensible LNP alternative.

I look forward to hosting the shadow minister in my electorate next week so he can meet the wonderful volunteers that make up my seven rural brigades in the electorate of Mudgeeraba. Unlike the ALP, I support my fireys.