




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Record of Proceedings, 18 August 2016

MOTION: BLACK LUNG DISEASE

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (6.17 pm): I rise to support the amendment moved by the member for Mirani and note his untiring support for coal workers in his electorate. The Palaszczuk government is taking decisive and concerted action to tackle the re-emergence of this terrible disease, coal workers' pneumoconiosis. Through the leadership of my colleague Minister Lynham this involves first a range of measures to prevent new cases of CWP and second identifying and detecting existing cases earlier. Thirdly, this government will be providing a comprehensive safety net for those workers with the disease through our state workers compensation system. My focus as industrial relations minister is on ensuring that any worker with CWP gets their full entitlements without delay. We will be there for those workers when they need it most. They deserve the best care and support, and that is what they will get. Any and all workers who are diagnosed with CWP can claim no-fault statutory compensation and common law damages. Their rights to make a claim do not expire if the worker has finished work or retired and there are no age based limits to applying for compensation.

At this point I can confirm to the House that there have been 16 workers compensation claims for CWP, with seven accepted, one withdrawn and eight claims being processed. I am putting in further measures to ensure that there is a streamlined process for fast-tracking entitlements, including lump sum payments. WorkCover will now treat CWP claims in line with the streamlined process for other latent onset diseases, such as mesothelioma, which was developed during the mid-2000s. It will include a dedicated specialist team of experienced claims officers within WorkCover to expedite coal workers' pneumoconiosis claims.

As with asbestos related disease cases, this will mean that Queensland workers diagnosed with CWP will have their claims accepted, entitlements paid promptly and workers can be offered lump sum compensation payments quickly, often within weeks. This process will avoid unnecessary delays through the courts and remove some of the stress on people at a very difficult time. This will help workers diagnosed with CWP to focus on dealing with the impact of the disease instead of worrying about how they will provide for their family or pay their medical bills.

Workers with a latent onset dust disease injury that is a terminal condition are eligible for lump sum compensation of up to \$661,355. In addition, the workers' dependants are eligible for lump sum compensation of up to \$88,485 and a further \$11,800 for funeral expenses. If the worker did not receive any lump sum compensation, dependants are eligible for maximum death entitlements of up to \$589,875 plus weekly compensation in respect of dependent children. Workers with non-terminal dust diseases are entitled to compensation for lost time earnings and all reasonable medical expenses, including hospitalisation, surgery, rehabilitation, medication, medical aids such as mobility scooters and possible lump sum compensation payments for permanent impairment. In addition, the worker may be eligible for a caring allowance if required for day-to-day living.

The Queensland Resources Council CEO, Michael Roche, is right in saying that we need to be action oriented in response to this issue. Our focus must be on doing all that we can to prevent future cases occurring, to detect existing cases earlier through better screening and to ensure that there is a safety net that provides workers with their full entitlements as soon as possible.

This is a terrible disease. Again, I want to assure anyone with the disease and their families that they will get their compensation, medical assistance and the support they need quickly and promptly. If an inquiry by a parliamentary select committee can assist us in those endeavours, then I am more than happy to support it.

I am proud to have put these measures in place. We have now added pneumoconiosis to the latent onset diseases process of WorkCover Queensland. That will provide real benefits for those workers diagnosed quickly, promptly, without court appearances and, as I said, lump sums will be paid often within weeks.