




Speech By
Bruce Saunders
MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (4.18 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I congratulate the minister, the member for McConnell, and her ministerial staff and departmental staff for the information we received from the department and the minister's office. I thank the 11 stakeholders who came to the public hearings. I also thank my fellow committee members: the chair, the member for Nudgee, and the other members of parliament who were on the committee.

The workers compensation scheme is a great Labor policy and something that we believe in very strongly on this side of the House. As a former employer I had some great relationships with my staff through the workers compensation scheme. It is a very good scheme. If you look at the record it is probably, if not the best in Australia, the best in the world. This side of the House, the Labor side, is very proud of this scheme. Queensland's return-to-work rate increased to 93.6 per cent last financial year. I am pleased to see that the bill continues the Palaszczuk government's and Labor's commitment to ensuring Queensland's injured workers receive the rehabilitation support and assistance they need to return to work. That is a big thing in getting people back to work and helping them get over their injuries.

Rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinators have long held a critical role in large businesses and high-risk industries in supporting positive return-to-work outcomes. Coordinators are a key communication point between employers, insurers and workers and facilitate our injured workers at the workplace level through their practical understanding of injuries, rehabilitation and the workers compensation process. The Newman government—there we go again—removed accreditation requirements for rehabilitation and return-to-work coordinators in 2013. How well did that go? Stakeholders, including employers and workers, have raised concerns that removing these accreditation requirements has impacted the skills being developed by the coordinators.

This bill recognises the critical skills needed by coordinators by requiring that employers must demonstrate their coordinators are appropriately qualified to perform their roles. To assist employers in demonstrating their coordinators are appropriately qualified, the Workers' Compensation Regulator will be able to approve industry developed training courses and qualifications for coordinators. These courses are not mandated, but rather provide employers with another way of being satisfied their coordinators are appropriately qualified. Employers will also be required to notify their insurer with details about the coordinators and how they are appropriately qualified. This information will in turn be used by the Workers' Compensation Regulator to deliver tailored education and support directly to them. The administrative burden of these notifications has been minimised by streamlining these notifications with an employer's annual insurance premium renewal. There will also be a transitional period to provide employers and coordinators a reasonable time in which to comply with these requirements.

To further assist in achieving meaningful return-to-work outcomes the bill includes important amendments that ensure that the rehabilitation and return-to-work progress of injured workers is not interrupted or stopped at crucial times either during, or at the end of, the worker's statutory claim. That is very important. The bill includes a mandatory requirement for workers to be referred to an accreditation rehabilitation and return-to-work program by their insurer if their statutory compensation ends but they have not yet returned to work because of their injury. Workers will also be able to make a request for a referral to these accredited programs at any time during their claim.

Overall, the initiatives in this bill will further contribute to Queensland's excellent record in improving rehabilitation and return-to-work outcomes for injured workers while providing flexibility and balancing costs for Queensland employers. What a great scheme this is! As I said earlier, I would like to thank the minister because this scheme protects workers. That is something we do on this side of the House. I have noticed that that side of the House takes credit for looking after workers, but I am afraid it is only this side of the House that stands up for workers in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.