




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (6.27 pm): I rise to support the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. I am very proud to be a part of the Palaszczuk government that will introduce what I consider to be one of the most important pieces of legislation for our frontline responders in Queensland. From the outset I thank the ministers involved and a number of ministers were involved. I know Minister Crawford had carriage of this bill in the previous term. To Minister Crawford, Minister Ryan and Minister Grace I say thank you so much. I thank the committee for the work they did in this important space.

I apologise if my voice is a little croaky. I sounded like Barnsie in my MPI speech. It is due to the Cowboys beating the Broncos on Friday night.

Gallows humour is often used by emergency services personnel when discussing topics that are serious or considered too painful to discuss. I might insert a little bit of that in my contribution. I warn members that some of it will be graphic but it needs to be shared. I want members to understand this by looking at it through the lens of someone who has worked in emergency services for over 30 years. I am reminded of going through the Ahpra registration process in March of last year. They wanted 5,000 hours for the past 10 years of work; my statement of service had 50,839 hours. That is just in 25 years full-time, let alone the honorary work or on-call work.

As many members know, police officers, firies and nurses are constantly vigilant in getting up and going to work the next day. I think the member for Macalister said it well: you do not sleep well. It is set, reset, rinse, go back and do it again the next day. It is incredibly difficult.

As a union delegate I sat with many affected members, at their GP getting assessed under a workers compensation review, who did not get what they needed. I was later at a funeral. I will just say that I lost a couple of mates along the way. This legislation will save lives.

I cannot believe the similarities between my experiences and the experiences of someone who lives 1,400 kilometres away. I only have had the pleasure of meeting the member for Macalister in this term, but she has talked about day one. I want to reflect on my day one in the Ambulance Service. I had done five years in the hospital and I thought that had stood me in good stead for day one. My day one in 1990 involved a hanging, a stabbing and a motor vehicle accident. You never forget your first day. You do not forget your last day, either.

In mid-1995 I was stationed at Black River station north of Townsville. It was a single-officer station on the highway which covered about 80 kilometres of highway. I was there to relieve the former officer; he never came back. I sat with him out the back. We smoked quite a bit and he broke down. He had been there two years and he said that he just could not do it anymore.

Someone who had studied medicine, who was a critical care paramedic like myself, came along and did a thesis on road trauma in North Queensland and identified that station. I was attending about 12 motor vehicle accidents on the highway per month. As a single officer, I was so grateful that I had

our rural volunteers—rural fireies and SES. I want to thank the minister—I spoke to her earlier—because they were often the first people on scene to help you with some of the most graphic things you will ever see. I am talking decapitations. I am talking people literally torn apart—limbs missing. I note the similarities with an experience of the member for Macalister. One that will live with me forever was an incident near Rollingstone of a fellow who was entrapped by his legs. It was futile. We were just waiting for the fireies to get there to cut him out. We had a brief conversation as he took his last breaths and he died in front of me. That is the stuff that a first responder goes to each day.

Then there are the kids: the babies who are pulled from pools, the babies who are thrust into your arms by parents who have backed over them, and the SIDS cases. As a CCP you are called out to everything. When you are a parent, when you go home you just hold your baby or you are too frightened to open the door of their nursery the next day. That lives with you, but we get past it.

We have some good coping mechanisms in the service these days. I thank our peer supporters and the people who are there to provide support. People often wonder why I continue to be in the service. It is because I find it hard to let go. These are people you have shared experiences with, and I am very proud to be part of an ambulance service. Think about those 50,000 hours and multiply that by 4,000 paramedics or the thousands of nurses, fireies and police. Multiply that and just pause and think for a moment. I do not care what this costs. This is about looking after people in our community who look after us. This is one of the best pieces of legislation I am so proud to be part of to see this passed.

I will not even start on domestic violence. As I think the member for Macalister said, one of the most depraved things you could possibly see is a two-year-old stabbed multiple times in a domestic violence incident. I remember going to a lady who I thought was dead. I rolled her over and she took a breath. Her face was kicked in. She had full facial fractures. You could not recognise her; she was covered in blood. I looked at her supposed partner who had stabbed himself. All I remember was that his boots and his socks were covered in blood from where he had kicked her face in. I did not care whether he lived or died. Thankfully, she lived. Those are the kinds of cases that our first responders go to every day.

As chair of the Health and Environment Committee, paramedics and police wrote to our committee in terms of reliving incidences from 20 years earlier where people had suicided. Others came before us and talked about the memory of seeing the guns on the ground where people had shot themselves. These are people who deserve the very best of support. This government is giving them that.

I want to give a shout-out to my friends. I love you guys—I have made a lot of friends in this place—but politicians do my head in. My friends are fireies, ambos and coppers I have known for decades. I am so pleased that our EMDs are being recognised, too, because, as a clinical deployment, part of our role was working in comms and listening to those first calls. I am so glad that the EMDs who have to take those calls are a part of this.

I again thank the minister. Thank you for the thousands of people that you and this government will help save in years to come because this legislation is needed. Never again will I have to, I hope, sit with family of a peer who has taken their life because of the traumas they have faced and perhaps the support they did not get that they can now get under this Palaszczuk Labor government. I think you can all be very proud. I commend the bill to the House.