




Speech By
Amanda Camm

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 11 May 2021

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

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (5.14 pm): I am pleased to contribute to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to start by acknowledging the work of the Education, Employment and Training Committee—the chair, the deputy chair and the secretariat. The committee report was thorough and outlined significant research that I think supports the objectives of this legislation.

I also want to highlight the importance of this legislation in that it provides recognition and validation of the critical role that first responders play across our community. I would also like to acknowledge those in the House who have served as first responders—in particular those first responders across my own electorate of Whitsunday, which takes in the northern beaches of Mackay and the Whitsundays, who play such a critical role in keeping us all safe but also who respond in dire times of need.

It is also important to highlight that the implications from potential trauma, whether that be cumulative or one of trauma, is now recognised with these improved pathways for claimants to access the WorkCover scheme and provisions. However, it is also just as critical to ensure that we continuously closely monitor the rollout of this legislation and how it is taken up across our state to ensure that those who most need the support that is underwritten by WorkCover in this regard receive it.

The social and economic cost to individuals and their families and more broadly our community of those who live with post-traumatic stress disorder without support or assistance would be significant and detrimental not only to their individual health but also to their friends, family and work colleagues. Statistics of accepted claims—which were outlined in the committee's report—from the public administration and safety sector that highlighted the significant trend across the QPS, QFES and the Queensland Ambulance Service, as well as Queensland Health more broadly, speak for themselves. They are dealing with more complex and traumatic circumstances across our community—in particular, responding to domestic homicide, to an increase in suicide statistics and also to child abuse across our community. We recognise that many of those first responders do suffer significantly and need to be recognised and looked after.

I would also like to highlight and welcome the committee's recognition of coal workers who are required to perform first responder duties in the event of mine accidents, and I acknowledge the comments from my colleague the member for Burdekin. Whilst we know that the mining industry more broadly across our state works towards zero harm, it is a high-risk industry. This has been demonstrated through the tragic circumstances surrounding Grosvenor in 2020 with five miners who received significant injuries and burns, as well as at Curragh mine in 2020 with a fatality from a crush injury whilst carrying out maintenance works, and at Carborough Downs in 2019 with a fatality from a roof fall at the face of a longwall.

I know that, as well as myself, many members in the House have inspected coalmines and underground mines. It is a dangerous and risky profession. I want to highlight and recognise the concerns raised by the CFMMEU, who do not feel that this legislation goes far enough. We do understand that at times workers at those high-risk sites are exposed to what is significant risk, particularly if there is an accident. They may not be deemed as first responders, yet they are first on the scene. We do recognise that the traditional avenues are still available to access WorkCover on the back of any impact of an incident.

As previously outlined by the member for Southport, I would also like to recognise the work of our child protection and youth justice officers across the state, the significant exposure they have to traumatic incidents and the cumulative impacts of continually having to investigate child abuse and neglect in the saddest of circumstances. I also acknowledge the submissions and concerns raised by local government which operates a frontline service of sorts. I know that many former colleagues across local government have come into contact with challenging and traumatic circumstances at different times, and I acknowledge the concerns that local government has raised.

I would like to highlight that across my electorate last weekend we had SAREX, which is a search and rescue operation and exercise carried out by Whitsunday Water Police in conjunction with the SES from Airlie Beach, the Queensland Ambulance Service at Cannonvale, and the RACQ CQ Rescue chopper in partnership with VMR Bowen, VMR Burdekin, VMR Whitsunday, VMR Mackay and Midge Point. I would like to seek clarification from the minister regarding the current VMR and blue water review reforms and implementation plan to ascertain the definition of those volunteers who fall within VMR and whether they are deemed to be first responders recognised under this legislation. In my electorate the VMR has played a critical role. I ask the House to cast its memory back to when there were significant shark attacks across the Whitsundays. The VMR volunteers in my seat of Whitsunday were first on the scene with CQ Rescue helping to coordinate quite devastating scenes across not only one incident but several repeated events. I hope the minister will clarify whether volunteers across those services are also recognised.

It is very important that we consider over the course of the next 12 months how we are going to roll this out—I look forward to the minister tabling the report—how we will see improved outcomes for first responders across our community while also identifying any unintended consequences as a result of this legislation, because it is important that is also evaluated and assessed. I support the recommendations in this legislation in the interests of first responders and our broader community.