




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.45 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. I do not propose to stand here today and recount the horrific incidents I have been exposed to in my former life as a police officer. There are several former police officers, paramedics and nurses in this place who, during the course of their careers, were no doubt exposed to significant trauma. I have seen firsthand the effects of trauma on our emergency service workers. From domestic and family violence to road accidents, suspicious deaths and other incidents, almost every emergency services worker has been exposed to horrific incidents and trauma as a part of their duties.

The LNP will not be opposing this bill. However, I can attest from personal experience that managing trauma, life-threatening incidents and the myriad duties that our first responders attend to is not easy. Certainly communication, education, health literacy, claims management, rehabilitation and return to work are integral to both supporting first responders who are exposed to trauma and life-threatening incidents and managing their return to work.

In recent years we have come a long way in terms of the way we deal with post-traumatic stress and exposure to trauma and major incidents. I recall when I first started in the Police Service that if you attended something like that after your shift finished you went down to the local hotel and you had a few beers with the troops. That is how you dealt with it. There were no counselling services. There were no support mechanisms in place. There certainly was not anything like the workers compensation and rehabilitation we are talking about here. You just got on with it. Unfortunately, as a consequence we saw a lot of our first responders suffer terribly from the effects of post-traumatic stress.

It is a fact that until people have been exposed to the incidents that the brave men and women who attend and deal with them every day are exposed to they will not understand the effect they have on those workers. For a lot of these workers it may not be today or tomorrow that those effects are seen or felt, it may be several years down the track. People can talk to any first responder and they will always point to the one incident that got through the chinks in the armour—the one incident that struck home and had a lasting impact on them.

Whilst we must show support for our emergency services workers, especially when they need it most, it is important to note the age-old adage of 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'. As the Australian Medical Association Queensland said in its submission to the committee, I want to draw specific attention to the plight of emergency services workers in regional Queensland. As the AMAQ said, 'Doctors working in rural and remote areas may be prone to developing PTSD due to being overworked and under-resourced,' but, unfortunately, that is not limited to doctors.

In addition to ensuring access to workers compensation, good government should be about ensuring we prevent the suffering wherever possible. In my electorate we have a hospital with a termite infestation and we have ambulance staff risking their own lives to respond to accidents due to

substandard road conditions. In cities like Townsville and Cairns, on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast and here in Greater Brisbane, we have police officers responding to stolen vehicles being driven dangerously by juvenile offenders. As we have already seen, this can and does result in fatal incidents that, without doubt, have an impact on police officers, paramedics, Fire and Emergency Services workers and others.

I note that this bill introduces presumptive workers compensation laws for first responders diagnosed with PTSD. I certainly want to lend my support to calls for first responders to lodge their claims as early as possible and to access existing early intervention treatment. For that reason, I call on the minister to ensure all of our emergency services personnel have access to the resources and support services they need regardless of where they work in this state.

In many parts of regional and rural Queensland, our emergency services workers, when they first identify and put their hand up to seek assistance, are desperate for the support they need to deal with this trauma. Being a first responder can be both the most rewarding and challenging career imaginable. We owe a debt of gratitude to our first responders. We certainly owe it to all of those personnel to give them the protection and support they need.

I note the comments from my colleague the member for Kawana that this bill continues the work implemented by the former LNP government. As the shadow minister for police, corrective services and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, I too want to personally thank all of our first responders for the job they do each and every day in keeping Queenslanders safe and protecting our communities.

I also note the amendments moved by the minister to include coalmine workers. Who could forget the horrific incident that occurred at the Grosvenor mine just over 12 months ago when five miners were severely injured in a mine explosion and what those rescuers faced when they went underground to rescue their mates. Of course it is only appropriate that this legislation be extended to coalmine workers in Queensland and to those workers within the meaning of the Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999. I commend the bill to the House.