

Question on Notice

No. 458

Asked on 3 June 2014

MRS SMITH asked the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (Mr JARROD BLEIJIE) –

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise how the Queensland Government's new WorkCover laws have assisted local businesses in my electorate of Mount Ommaney, and businesses more broadly in Queensland?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Mount Ommaney for her question.

The Queensland Government recently announced a 17% reduction in WorkCover Queensland's (WorkCover) average premium rate to \$1.20 from \$1.45 per \$100 wages. Queensland's average premium rate is the lowest in Australia, making Queensland the most attractive state to employ workers.

In addition, 93% of the 150,000 businesses who insure with WorkCover will have their claims history wiped clean through a simpler premium model, and policy holders will have greater flexibility to pay their premium in instalments.

This is good news for the estimated 1,095 businesses with a WorkCover policy in the Mount Ommaney electorate. Of these businesses, 93.2% have declared wages of less than \$1.5 million and will be eligible for WorkCover's simplified premium model.

This simplified premium model is based on a claims performance rating and protects small to medium sized employers from large variances in premium costs that can be incurred through an expensive one-off claim. Premium rate variances are capped at 10%, providing stability and making it easier to more accurately budget for premium costs.

The 2013 legislative amendments to Queensland's workers' compensation scheme simplified regulatory processes and ensured that compensation is available and accessible to assist injured workers.

The 2013 legislative amendments introduced a threshold of greater than 5% degree of permanent impairment to access common law damages for workers injured on or from 15 October 2013. These claims are more appropriately dealt with through the statutory no fault system instead of through the Courts. This will ensure that the focus of injured workers and their employers is on rehabilitation and getting injured workers back to work as soon as it is safe for them to do so.

In addition, employers are now able to require prospective workers to disclose any pre-existing injuries that could reasonably be aggravated by performing the duties of employment. If workers do not comply, their entitlement to compensation or damages for an aggravation of the pre-existing injury ends.

It is in a prospective worker's interest to voluntarily disclose any pre-existing injuries to minimise the potential for an aggravation of the injury. Employers can already require prospective workers to undergo a pre-employment medical assessment to determine suitability for a role.

Employers are also able to request a prospective worker's claims history summary, with the worker's consent. Allowing access to claims histories from consenting prospective workers will help to prevent employers placing workers in positions or duties to which they are not suited and which carry the risk of re-injury or aggravation of a pre-existing injury.

These legislative amendments provide incentives for business to employ Queenslanders and promote our economy, while retaining appropriate protections for injured workers.