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HANSARD

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WORKERS REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION (SAMFS FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (21:30): I rise to speak on the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation (SAMFS Firefighters) Amendment Bill. I echo the thoughts of people on this side of the chamber. We think this is a great bill with respect to compensation with regard to certain cancers that can be picked up by metropolitan firefighters, but we wonder why the government has this discrimination in place with regard to Country Fire Service volunteers. I will note my interest: I am a CFS volunteer. I have been for many years. Probably because of this job I do not get to as many fires as I would like to.

Ms Chapman interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, that's it. Not that I am looking for fires to fight, I must say. It is just that you do not have the availability to be as close to the truck as when I was working on the farm, being only three kilometres from the local Coomandook fire shed. It is interesting that the government completely disregards the needs of about 13,500 volunteers who operate with 425 brigades in this state and who operate over 850 trucks. That is not insignificant in anyone's language.

The Country Fire Service attends about 8,000 incidents every year—another not insignificant number. If people think the Country Fire Service just goes out to the odd bushfire, where the odd harvester lights a fire or there is a lightning strike—and we had a few of them late last year; I certainly had one on my property—think again. They attend very similar, and sometimes the same fires as MFS units attend. The CFS attends bushfires, structure and motor vehicle fires—with many structure fires the MFS are involved as well—road crash rescue, hazardous material spills and, as I said, are a great support for the Metropolitan Fire Service.

There are CFS brigades right throughout my electorate, and we have a Metropolitan Fire Service in Murray Bridge and they fight fires side by side. Whether they are structure fires, road traffic fires, all of those incidents are attended by people from both corps of firefighting. It is interesting, if you look at what happens with the highway work—I am mainly talking about the Dukes Highway now, down near where I live at Coomandook.

We have brigades like Coonalpyn just south of my electorate in the member for MacKillop's electorate, which are set up for road crash rescue with breathing apparatus. Obviously, we are only about 20-odd kilometres up the road from there towards Adelaide at Coomandook and we have a 34 and also a 9,000 litre tanker truck. So, we are pretty well serviced by the CFS. Apart from the other trucks, they are very close on other highways around us in other locations.

It is interesting, you talk to blokes who have been in the CFS for a few years, especially the guys and ladies who are involved in the vehicle crash rescue teams, and some of them are just having a year off. I know one man who is having a year off this year because he has seen enough. He has seen enough, as the member for Morphett indicated, of truck accidents, cars going under trucks, rollovers, vehicles going off the road, having to deal with burning vehicles and—

Dr McFetridge interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Absolutely. Burnt bodies—and as the member for Morphett said, sometimes people come across someone they know, especially in a small community. We have had some horrors. At Coonalpyn there was an unfortunate incident on the highway where a man was hit by several large trucks, and it was a terrible sight for people to deal with as volunteers but they got on with the job. That goes home with these volunteers, and that is why I am not surprised that some of these people have decided they just need a year or so off to ease the mind. They will get back into it when they have their mind right.

This is the volunteer work these people do day in day out. They do not ask for a lot of things but they just like a bit of recognition. I look at what happens with a lot of these road traffic accidents and, because we just don't have the numbers of police out there, it is the CFS personnel who become the road traffic management personnel. They shouldn't have to do it but they do it because that is what has to happen in the first instance because there are not the police numbers that close. In fact, we have one police officer stationed at Coonalpyn and it is just not enough when you have a massive incident and you need people to do the traffic management around these sites.

When there is a fatality—and it happens too often for my liking—the Dukes Highway gets shut down and they have to wait for the road crash incident team to come down from the city and then the volunteers have to be in place so what happened gets worked out and the site gets cleaned up, and that can be many hours that these people aren't doing their jobs. Many of these people are self-employed on farms but some are working for different industries around the place and different jobs in the surrounding area. So, it is a huge commitment.

I would like to note a group training day that the local CFS through the Swanport Group and, apart from trucks from the Murray Bridge area and further south down my way to Coonalpyn and Coomandook, there were trucks there from down towards Salt Creek and also trucks from north of Murray Bridge, and their training was about a whole range of fires. It was about assisting the SES in doing fires in boats on the river. There was structure fire training and, apart from that, what happens in many places is the standard bushfire training where you are either turning grass fires or crop fires or stubble fires.

CFS volunteers deserve to be acknowledged, they deserve to be part of this bill to have the same compensation eligibility as MFS firefighters and they should not be discriminated against. They should have their day in the sun. They do a great job for this state and it is about time the government recognised that.

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