



**Adrian Pederick MP**  
Member for Hammond

**House of Assembly**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sep 2014**

### **Firefighters Cancer Awareness Day**

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 11:47 :56 ):** I rise to support the member for Stuart's motion:

That this house—

(a) recognises Firefighters Cancer Awareness Day; and

(b) calls on the government to guarantee that all firefighters, both professionals and volunteers, have the exact same access to the support if they contract cancer.

I declare that I am a CFS volunteer and also that, when I am not on a CFS truck, if there is an incident, I have the capability of deploying my farm firefighting unit, which has a reasonable capacity. I have it mounted on a four-wheel trailer, and I have 4,600 litres of water readily available if there is an incident. Farm firefighters across the board are extremely helpful in all incidents. Certainly, we need to acknowledge all our firefighters, whether they be MFS, CFS or people who operate their farm units.

In relation to the cancer cover, it has specifically been put in place for MFS personnel, and then CFS personnel have to come up with the onus of proof. What discrimination! We are already seeing problems now with the outrageous rise in the emergency services levy, where some farmers are saying, 'Perhaps we won't help out the government. Perhaps we just won't turn up,' and that would be a real tragedy. If it was not for those farmers, whether they be members of the Country Fire Service or the blokes and women who get out with their farm firefighting units, as well as the people in the background who provide the support on those days by bringing in supplies, whether it be food or water, to people putting out those fires and working with those incidents, this government might find out that it comes at a far bigger cost to the state. There are many hundreds of thousands of volunteers across this state—I note that a figure of 600,000 is put around at times, but I think it would be a lot more than that in all the various fields of volunteering right across South Australia—and this state would be worse than penniless, in a far worse position than it is with the current deficit of this state Labor government, if it had to fund these people to leave their workplaces and assist with emergencies.

I have been to many fires over my time, and at times people give up many days and sometimes weeks. We had a fire at my own farm in the last eight or nine years, and the local

units and local people were exhausted. I got up the next morning to see who was in charge, and there was a captain from Avenue Range who had been brought up with a strike team from the South-East. That is to be commended, that people travel hundreds of kilometres to help out their fellow man. They know that if it happens to them we will do exactly the same thing; head down the road and help put out their incident.

In the last couple of years I happened to be visiting the member for Finniss on Kangaroo Island. The Hon. John Dawkins was in attendance as well. There were many lightning strikes throughout the Murraylands and the South-East and hundreds of fires had taken off. I got a phone call saying there was one on my place. That is pretty handy when you are hundreds of kilometres away and with the barrier of the water, and you are wondering what is going on with your home property. I contacted one of my neighbours and asked him what he was doing. He said, 'I'm out at so and so's place.' He was so nonchalant about it. He did not say he was out at so and so's place fighting a fire with the rest of the CFS, but that was exactly what he was doing. That is how comfortable these people get in protecting lives and properties.

However, because all the local CFS units were tied up at another incident about 15 or 20 kilometres from my own property, thankfully a couple of farm fire units from my neighbours tore over. Not only did they put it out with their own units, but a lad who lives behind our property turned up and grabbed my unit, and tore out and helped to put it out and mop up.

If we do not look after our firefighters right across the board there will be a real problem in this state. I have seen what has happened with the recent fires in the Billiatt Conversation Park, the whole of which is now in the member for Chaffey's electorate; virtually all the park burnt. There are quite a lot of sandy areas adjacent to the park as well as in the park, and a lot of private fire units went in there. There were blown motors, blown differentials and a whole lot of vehicle damage, and I pointed people in the right direction to get some recompense through the government. I know that it caused a great deal of angst to those people that not only did they put their lives on the line but they have also basically blown up vehicles along the way and had significant repair bills to get them back on track.

I just fear where this government is going. The emergency services levy, which is raising another \$90 million, will impact, and is already impacting, on local CFS firefighters. There is also the reform that is going on with the management of all our emergency services. I have had people from the agencies that could be affected come to me saying, 'How are we going to go when we are all responsible to an MFS commander and we are members of the CFS or the SES?' I think that is a very real argument.

The Minister for Emergency Services (the member for Light) thinks it is a great thing to have this reform, but I do not think he understands that there is a reason that the different levels of emergency service have differing levels of command for the slightly different tasks, and sometimes more than slightly different tasks, that they do when they are out at emergency incidents. I raise that as another issue which is more than just bubbling along; it is fermenting along quite heavily in the emergency sectors, and especially in the volunteer sectors in all the communities across the state.

I think, in the light of all these actions, the simple fact is that the state Labor government will not recognise our Country Fire Service volunteers. They say they are going through all these reviews and all this kind of thing. It was mentioned in the 'Brockument' that the member for Frome has with Premier Weatherill, but it has gone nowhere. We heard in the parliament only yesterday that members involved were supposed to have a meeting the day before and that was supposedly the pointy end of the debate.

I think the pointy end of the debate has been long ago, when the government had the opportunity to move on this serious factor, to make sure that everyone has access to legal compensation. This government runs a real risk of alienating all our emergency service workers with everything that is going on: the cancer compensation, the emergency services levy and the reform. I think the government needs to have a real good look, because this could come back to bite them and cost this state far more than they think they are going to make out of the rise in the emergency services levy.