



Adrian Pederick MP
Member for Hammond

House of Assembly
5th June 2014

**Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation
(Firefighters) Amendment Bill**

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (10:49 :18): I rise today to speak to the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Bill. I think this is a very important bill. It is about seeking equity for Country Fire Service volunteers, and I know there are members of the Country Fire Service on this side of the house as well as the other side.

What we have seen with the recent workers compensation arrangements in regard to certain types of cancer is that Metropolitan Fire Service firefighters and retained Metropolitan Fire Service firefighters do not have to prove how many events they have attended in their service. Once they go through a qualifying period, depending on the type of cancer that they may pick up, they qualify and are eligible for compensation under the compensation scheme. I think that is a good thing. I think that is a great thing, because our firefighters, whether they are from the MFS, CFS or, quite frankly, just farmers who turn up with their fire units and are not a member of either, all do a great thing for this state.

I think people need to be recognised for the health concerns that they encounter, whether it be out in the field, a shed fire, an industrial fire with poisonous fumes and obviously the effects of potential asbestos contamination from fighting fires. It still beggars belief as to why Country Fire Service volunteers are not recognised in the same way by this government. The member for Brock, the regional development—

An honourable member: Frome.

Mr PEDERICK: The member for Frome, sorry. The member for Brock—he is not dead, is he? No. You usually only get a seat named after you after you die, I think.

Members interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Thank you to my friends on this side. I get confused with the 'Brockument' and everything, but anyway. The member for Frome, who was a strong supporter prior to the recent state election, of the CFS volunteers and that they should get the equivalent compensation of Metropolitan Fire Service members, seems to have gone to water on this issue since. He was going to chair a committee but, no, now the government have set up their own committee to look into this. Quite frankly, I think it is a pretty easy thing to fix. I

think the government should give absolute equity to the many thousands of CFS volunteers across this state.

The government has made it such that the onus of proof has to come back to the CFS volunteer, that they have attended 175 incidents over five years. What the government has forgotten in this whole debate is that many incidents that the CFS attend are not bushfires, building fires or structural fires. I have many CFS volunteers in my electorate, from Coomandook, which merged with what was the CFS brigade at Ki Ki, Cooke Plains, Tailem Bend, Murray Bridge, Langhorne Creek, Milang, Currency Creek, Clayton Bay, Goolwa and Finniss, and I certainly have members in my electorate who are in the Rockleigh and Coonalpyn brigades as well.

Especially on the Dukes Highway, the brigades down there from Tailem Bend, Coomandook and Coonalpyn have to attend many horrifying scenes and many accidents that result in terrible injury and quite often death. One of my friends who serves on the Coonalpyn brigade, which is a brigade that is a specified road crash accident brigade, has said, 'Look, I've just got to have some time off from the CFS. I've just got to get my head right.' This is coming from someone who volunteers their time, because what they see out there on the road are terrible things: dismembered bodies, people dying in front of them or people already deceased because they have had a terrible accident.

Occasionally there are head-on accidents on the Dukes Highway and terrible outcomes as a result. It is not just there, it is right throughout my electorate and right throughout the state, throughout the Fleurieu Peninsula where a lot of the roads need upgrading, and the brigades through Goolwa, Clayton Bay, Finniss, Milang and Langhorne Creek, very sadly, have to deal with these accidents all the time. It is a huge thing to put on people and, as I said, sometimes people just need some time out to have a break from the service. These people do fantastic service for our community.

I had a fire from a lightning strike on my property in the last 18 months or so when I was on Kangaroo Island with the Hon. John Dawkins and the member for Finniss. You can imagine, I am trying to manage a fire on my property from Kangaroo Island where it looked all fine, but obviously there were hundreds of lightning strikes throughout the South-East. The CFS were absolutely flat out that day. They were fighting fires towards Meningie, right down through the South-East and through to Naracoorte because of the hundreds of lightning strikes around the place. It was great that everyone could coordinate what other resources we had in farm fire units to back up the service of the CFS to put out all of these spot fires. I am certainly very grateful of the CFS that day and my neighbours who helped extinguish those fires.

Not enough recognition is given to the volunteers. They save the government hundreds of millions of dollars annually because it does not have to pay for these people to do their training or to go to their meetings. They give up their valuable time so that they can do this valuable work. They are saving money not just for the government but for insurance companies, and also ensuring the wellbeing of the citizens of this state. I think it is a very small price to pay to give them the eligibility to qualify for cancer compensation.

There are various arguments about how much money that could be. It is a bit like the workers compensation argument that we get in here all the time and the fund, I understand, of the unfunded liabilities is well over a billion dollars. We get different amounts brought to us here about what the fund could be but, as I said, I think that would be a very small price to pay for the massive and diligent service that these volunteers give.

I want to reflect on the area of Rockleigh. I represent a part of that area, the member for Schubert represents part of it, and the member for Kavel represents part of it. Finally, they are going to get a new fire station there. They have had their fire truck housed in a farmer's property and they use his shearing shed for training. I commend Don Moore and his group there for taking the initiative to house the truck so that they can look after the many fires. There were about four in the last 18 months to two years that have gone through Rockleigh and caused major devastation.

I think the government needs to wake up and recognise what a valuable resource they have in the Country Fire Service. I am a member. Sadly, not that I want to go attending many fires, I do not get the opportunity as I am not there a lot of the time to assist my colleagues with fighting fires, but I certainly commend all the CFS firefighters of this state not only for the work they do in fighting fires but the vehicle accident work they have to attend and the rescues. It is just such great service. They do not want pay. They do not want to be paid as firefighters, they just want some acknowledgment that their service is treated as fine service by this state, and I think that is all they can ask for.

We on the side of the house seek clarification—and we will hear back from the minister—about the security of agent-held client funds, with the repeal of the act, and the fairness of the market and governance arrangements. We think that there is need for a higher level of consumer awareness of the new arrangements, and the implementation of ATAS needs to be fair to small to medium operators.

I note that in the second reading speech made in the other place, the minister talks about the government's ongoing commitment to remove red tape. In the first instance, I think that is a great thing, but in the second instance, when you delve into the situation—I have had some feedback from some travel agents in my electorate—there could be some real issues in what happens in the actual running of the act if it does come into place in the near future. There are some real issues with whether people will have compensation.

You talk to people involved in the travel game, and they are very good operators. You can hear some of them advertising on the radio and they have their nightly shows, and they are very good operators, in the main. They have 24-hour call service—because obviously with the time zone differences you could be anywhere in the world—where you can ring your agent (if obviously they are one of these more reputable agents) and get service and get it all sorted out if something has gone wrong with some sort of tour, river cruise or a guided tour, or whatever tourism activity that someone is taking up. In talking to some of the operators in my area, what they are concerned about is that, under the new regime, someone can just set up shop across the road from someone who has been dealing with travel for the last 20, 30 or 40 years and decide to go into business with no accreditation and—

Ms Redmond: No knowledge.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes—no knowledge and no safety net, no fallback for the consumer. We all know how easy it is for people to go for the cheapest rate and think, 'Fantastic, I've stolen that trip. It's only cost me \$2,000' where perhaps with the agent across the road who has been accredited for 20 or 30 years it might have been \$2,300, but it might have come with all these protections and that client and operator service that you need when or if there are problems in regards to the tour.

If you are in Europe, North America, Canada, or anywhere in the world for that matter, you are a long way from home and the last thing you want when you are away is for something to go wrong. So, I seek assurance from the minister's comments to the house in regard to the protections that people will have under this scheme and the fairness that will be implemented for operators who have been involved in the travel industry for decades, who have done good work and who have looked after their clients and how that stacks up equitably with people who just pop up if this legislation is introduced and decide to run perhaps not such an honourable business venture.

Ms Redmond: Fly-by-night.

Mr PEDERICK: Fly-by-nighters—thank you, member for Heysen. As I said before, we on this side of the house are very keen to see red tape reduced, but we also want to see it reduced in a way that still gives people equity. We do not want to see thousands of people who are having distinct problems with new legislation, because what we have had in the past has done the job and next thing we have some fly-by-nighters or some not so honourable people setting up businesses.

Then when it all goes wrong when people are away on their holidays and they just want to enjoy that little bit of time they have got with the opportunity to travel, it can cost them many tens of thousands of dollars and not have any redress in regard to that. So, I will be very interested in the government's remarks on this bill and to see how it progresses through the house.