

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 2015

Parliamentary Committee on Occupational Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation: Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation (SACFS Firefighters) Amendment Bill

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:52): I rise to speak to the 19th report of the Parliamentary Committee on Occupational Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation, entitled Report into the Referral of the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation (SACFS Firefighters) Amendment Bill. I certainly concur with everything that the member for Schubert has stated. It does beggar belief that volunteers are being used as political pawns in a process by the government as to whether or not they would get compensation. This debate has been going on for the last couple of years. It all started from the Metropolitan Fire Service volunteers being able to get compensation for 12 particular cancers in regard to firefighting efforts.

In many fires across the state, MFS and CFS fight side by side. As the member for Schubert indicated, he has MFS brigades in his district. So have I in my district in Murray Bridge, and in many situations they are side by side. At a recent sawmill fire, I think it was only last week, they were side by side putting out that fire. It just seemed to be a debate we did not need to have, where basically the government was devaluing the close on 13,000 CFS volunteers—

Mr Knoll interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, close on 13,000; it is heading that way—for the work they do across the state. I certainly state my interest as a CFS volunteer for my local brigade at Coomandook.

As I said, it is something that should never have happened because of those man hours our CFS men and women put in, whether they are on the front line or manning the control centres, in regard to the work they do for this state in saving people's homes—and I have seen many effects of it recently in my electorate. Rockleigh has had four recent fires in the last few years, and they were fortunate that in the last huge blaze that happened only one house was lost. One house is too many, but it was amazing to note, when I toured the area afterwards, that that fire had burnt up to so many homes but that the CFS was in place to save those homes.

The CFS volunteers certainly do deserve the same level of compensation, and I note that they have that now. But they have been put on the merry-go-round by this government again with the emergency services levy debate. I know that in the member for Flinders' area his people are

still having discussions, and some have made it very clear that some of their brigades will not fight fires on government land; certainly they will if there are lives at risk.

When the debate gets down to that level, it shows how much the real people of this state are hurting under different government proposals and announcements. I think that ministers need to get out into the real world and talk to these people more. In saying that, we have heard from the Minister for Emergency Services that he has consulted heavily on his emergency services reform, but we note that that is getting peeled back layer by layer as time goes on. He made an announcement the other day that that will be peeled back further.

I wonder why all the volunteer sectors, and the Metropolitan Fire Service sector for that matter, are being put through these reforms. I think that it is more about the minister saving his skin and saying to the Premier, 'Well, this is why I am a minister: I've created this reform.' We have seen through all the recent fires and even going further back, through SAFECOM, and if we look at Sampson Flat, a whole range of fires that have happened—down at Tantanoola, for instance—the latest two big ones, all of the sectors work together well. They get on with the job and they do the job. To see a minister meddling in something that I do not believe should be meddled with I think is just wrong.

In closing, I reiterate what the member for Schubert mentioned about potential legal action against *The Advertiser* by the Minister for Emergency Services and, in particular, potentially CFS volunteers who the minister was hoping *The Advertiser* would name. Well, certainly *The Advertiser* will not name them. I think it is an absolute disgrace that a minister wants to go down that path.

The Hon. S.W. KEY (Ashford) (12:58): I thank members for their contribution to this longstanding issue. The member for Schubert's view that this is a matter of equity is my view as well. I think that most of the members in this house are particularly pleased that volunteer CFS people will be recognised, sadly, in a very difficult area of presumptive cancer. In saying that, I commend the report to the house.

Motion carried.