



## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 01<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2017

### PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION: WORK RELATED MENTAL DISORDERS AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. S.W. Key:

That the 26 th report of the committee, entitled Work Related Mental Disorders and Suicide Prevention, be noted.

(Continued from 16 November 2016.)

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 11:30 ):** I rise to speak to the 26th report of the Parliamentary Committee on Occupational Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation, entitled 'Work related mental disorders and suicide prevention'. Certainly, since coming into this place I have become well aware of a broad range of issues that can occur due to work-related mental disorders. Before coming into this place, I was well aware of the issues facing our service men and women with post-traumatic stress disorder in the military forces, especially those who in more recent times have served overseas, whether it be in Afghanistan or Iraq.

I have talked about this matter before in this place. My brother was a warrant officer in Iraq during 2005-06 and he had a colleague of the same rank who rotated next to him on their six-month tours. He was, for want of a better word, one of the most bulletproof characters you could ever meet. Sadly, however, getting past the military psychologists, he succumbed to post-traumatic stress disorder and lost his marriage, lost his family and paid a huge price for his service. This former colleague of my brother is not alone. Our service men and women are to be admired for the job they do, not only those who work overseas but also those who work on home soil. I want to make sure that gets onto the *Hansard*.

In relation to other front-line workers on the domestic scene, whether they be police, nurses, firemen or Country Fire Service people, I am a member of the Country Fire Service, as many members are in this place and I have met and talked to people from some of the brigades, especially on the Dukes Highway at Coonalpyn. This is a crash brigade, a highway brigade, and they are involved in dealing with crashes on the Dukes Highway. Anyone who knows about highway crashes knows that they can be pretty terrible, especially when a couple of trucks come together and are burnt out and the only remains of the people inside are, sadly, burnt corpses.

These workers see some terrible things, such as vehicles that have gone under trucks. We also have suicides out there, where people have driven out of Adelaide for a couple of hours and decided to line up a truck that will end their life. It happens far too often. The volunteers in the Country Fire Service are people from the community, and it is also very traumatic for the local ambulance people who have to turn up and pick up the pieces.

I know of at least one person who has said, 'Look, I've got to step back for 12 months because I've seen enough for a while. Hopefully, I can get back and do this volunteer service.' Our paid professionals on the front line—nurses, doctors and police—see some very traumatic incidents, some involving life and death and others involving people having drug episodes, and other episodes they need to deal with, which obviously affect their mental health at the time and into the future.

Mental health and the workplace can go right across the board. I know MATES in Construction do great work in trying to combat suicide in the construction industry, which has one of the highest rates of suicide at an industry level. I have spoken about them in this place before and they do excellent work, they have excellent forums and excellent outreach programs to workers in construction to keep them on the right track. I think the problem may be related to the cyclical nature of construction work, where you have a big building program, then that drops off and all of a sudden there is no pay for a while and you are up against it with payments and so on.

That is just one example, but I believe it has an impact on mental health issues and suicide in the construction sector. My background is in farming and, sadly, it is one of those jobs that has always been linked to rural suicide. Too often, farmers feel isolated and alone, so it is good to see so many different groups operating. I know there is a Men's Shed group that meets regularly on a Friday just outside of Coomandook. There are so many other rural and urban Men's Shed places where people can go to have a chat.

Men's Shed is based around trades, but you do not have to go there and make anything; it is more about making conversation and knowing that there are other people you can talk to and relate to about anything. I think that is important, especially in rural areas. I know only too well from my own background that you can feel isolated at times, but it is only when you catch up with other people that you realise everyone has their issues.

It does not have to be just in a farming sense. It does not matter what occupation you are in, people have their issues. However, it can be accentuated in farming because people spend many, many hours on their own. They get up early, they do not even see the family and get back late. They do that day in, day out during the busy seasons of seeding and harvest especially, and also when they have busy times, such as shearing and other jobs.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the suicide prevention networks. I am certainly involved at a local level with a network based in Murray Bridge. I think all the groups connected with that network are doing great work. I know Silent Ripples do postvention work helping people who have been bereaved by suicide, but there are also suicide prevention networks that have been set up in Sedan, up in Schubert, and throughout Coorong council areas like Tailem Bend and Meningie. I mentioned MATES in Construction earlier. They held forums in the South-East, but they have not just concentrated on the construction industry. They talked to their local audience, which obviously is mainly a farming community, about mental health issues and suicide prevention.

I know that in the report there is part of a speech by the Hon. John Dawkins, and it would be remiss of me not to mention his work both in this parliament and outside this parliament with regard to mental health and suicide prevention. His work has been exemplary. I know others work in these areas, but I know that John is highly dedicated to this cause and puts in a lot of time and effort, and I truly do commend him for that.

At all levels, we can never do enough and we must keep doing more. Sometimes it comes down to the fact that people need to realise that they are not alone and that they need to find someone and have a chat. It does not have to be directly about their issues, but it helps to just have a chat, settle down, realise that tomorrow is another day and work through them. I am certainly pleased to see that this fulsome report in regard to work-related mental disorders and suicide prevention has gone on, and I commend the report.