



NO EQUALITY

By **Elle Vince**

COUNTRY Fire Service volunteers are calling for equality after South Australia's Legislative Council last week announced they will not receive the same workplace protection as paid firefighters.

Under the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill, Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) members will receive compensation for work-related cancers if they meet the eligibility criteria.

But for volunteer firefighters to receive the same compensation they must first prove they have been exposed to at least 175 fires over a five-year period before being able to access the same eligibility criteria.

Originally the Bill only provided compensations to MFS firefighters in a bid to keep costs down, but the Opposition and crossbenchers have pushed for fairness.

Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick, pictured right, said the Liberal Party was forced into supporting the Government's amendments in fear that Country Fire Service (CFS) volunteers would miss out altogether.

"We decided that some benefit for firefighters was better than nothing," he said.

Mr Pederick, who has been a CFS member at Coomandook for the past 12 years, said volunteer firefighters should receive compensation for work-related cancers and equality between all firefighters must be ensured.

"Paid and volunteer firefighters fight fires side by side, so therefore there should be equality across the system," he said.

"CFS volunteers face the same dangers and health risks as MFS members in their efforts to protect communities."

Last Tuesday the CFS Volunteers Association handed over a petition to the State Liberal Party calling on the State Government to include CFS volunteers in the legislation.

The 10,000-person-strong petition showed how serious CFS volunteers were about the Bill and proved they were not going to back down easily.

Mr Pederick said legislation could not change until late April or May but he did not want volunteers to give up hope.

"We value the contribution of volunteers," he said.

"We believe we should give them something back and that they should be eligible to the same criteria as paid MFS.

"The volunteers association needs to keep talking to everyone in the loop and keep lobbying the Government."

"Keep fighting the good fight."

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