



Justice at last

By **Elle Vince**

AFTER almost two years, the State Government has backed down and will provide automatic compensation to Country Fire Service (CFS) volunteers diagnosed with certain types of cancer.

Prior to Monday's announcement, CFS volunteers were required to attend more than 175 incidents over a five-year period to receive compensation despite paid Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) members being granted the presumptive cover in November 2012.

CFS Volunteers Association executive director Sonia St Alban said the association was relieved the cancer risk faced by CFS volunteer firefighters had been acknowledged.

"We are certainly pleased it (the legislation) has gone through," she said.

"Our issue was: it was not equitable.

"The enormous contribution made by CFS volunteers in protecting lives and property ... reminds us of the importance of looking after and protecting those who protect us."

Murray Bridge CFS captain Jiron Blacket said he was pleased to have similar rights as paid firefighters.

"Hopefully we don't have to draw on it but at least that compensation is there if we do need it," he said.

"Just because we are not paid doesn't mean we are not firefighters, that was more the push.

"It was unfair we were treated differently before."

CFS volunteers registered as active members on or after July 1, 2013 will be eligible for the presumptive legislation coverage which will remain in place for 10 years after a volunteer ceases operational activities.

The scheme has been funded at \$7.8 million for the first year, rising to \$13.4 million in the 10th year.

Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said it was a shame it had taken so long for the government to see the importance of honouring CFS volunteers and correctly budgeting for the scheme.

"It's absolutely vital for our volunteers to be treated on an equitable basis as paid MFS (fire fighters)," he said.

"We had the Labor Party originally estimating

it was going to cost around \$90 million, well now they are saying it'll be between \$7 and \$13 mil-

lion. They were a long way out with their estimate."

The State Liberals, Family First, the Greens and Dignity for Disability had supported CFS volunteers throughout their campaign and had a huge influence on the government's decision.

Emergency Services Minister Tony Piccolo, who led consultation with CFS volunteers and interested parties, said the scheme now struck the right balance.

"It was important that we designed a scheme

that is fair and sustainable and through extensive consultation with CFS volunteers, we are confident we have reached an excellent solution," he said.

"I see this as a solid investment in the wellbeing of our volunteers.

"As we head towards bushfire season, we again are thankful for the hard work of our CFS volunteers who place themselves in potentially dangerous situations for the safety of the community."



Happy helpers: Murray Bridge Country Fire Service (CFS) firefighter Scott Carter, senior firefighter Rebecca Weinert, lieutenant Darren Carter and captain Jiron Blacket celebrate Monday's decision to provide automatic compensation to CFS volunteers who are diagnosed with certain types of cancer.