



Minister for Fire and Emergency Services

File No: QFS/15767
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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
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Dear Mr ~~Laurie~~ NEIL,

Thank you for your letter dated 5 February 2020 about petitions received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No. 3279-20 and 3254-19 regarding 'blue cards' for volunteer rural firefighters.

The Queensland Government takes the safety of Queensland's children extremely seriously and as a result Queensland is recognised as having one of the strongest working with children check systems in Australia. Blue cards (or working with children checks) are one of a range of measures in place to protect children. I, like other Members of Parliament, am a current blue card holder.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) has a legislative and shared responsibility to achieve the Government's commitment and QFES has taken professional advice about the application of the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000* (WWC Act) to its paid and volunteer workforce in performing their functions under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990*.

The usual functions of a Rural Fire Brigade are firefighting, fire prevention and other functions as the QFES Commissioner may direct. The other functions of Rural Fire Brigades (and thus the volunteer members) includes assistance with road crash rescues, community evacuations, community education, disaster preparation and response, and participation in field days and other like community events. When undertaking its functions, a brigade (and thus the volunteer members) frequently interact with the community, of which children are a part and young people aged 16 and 17 can volunteer as firefighters.

The usual functions performed by a brigade fall within the regulated employment categories of "health service" to a child [other than at a health facility], which includes a service for maintaining, improving, restoring or caring for a person's health or wellbeing, and "support service" to a child under the WWC Act, meaning a blue card is required for Rural Fire Brigade volunteers to undertake these functions.

There is no choice for QFES on this issue, because like all Government departments, QFES is required to comply with legislation and ensure personnel who perform these regulated functions have a current blue card.

When the WWC Act was considered by the Queensland Parliament, it received unanimous support meaning all the members present agreed to this very important measure in keeping Queensland children safe.

I trust this information is helpful to you. Should you wish to discuss this matter in more detail, please contact Mr Peter Clarke, Chief of Staff on telephone (07) 3008 3700.

Thank you for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a long horizontal stroke that tapers to a point on the right.

The Honourable Craig Crawford MP
Minister for Fire and Emergency Services

6/13/2020