



Speech By
Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND
REHABILITATION (PROTECTING FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.21 am): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the Workers' Compensation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill. My contribution will mainly cover the protecting firefighters component. Tonight I pay tribute to them all across Queensland but in particular those in my electorate of Currumbin.

The policy objective of this private member's bill is to introduce deemed disease coverage for Queensland full-time, auxiliary and volunteer firefighters who contract one of 12 specified cancers in the course of their employment. As the shadow minister outlined in his explanatory speech, if a firefighter suffers a disease which is deemed work related, which is listed in the table in the bill and which meets the specified time requirements, it will be deemed that the disease was caused by employment for the purpose of workers compensation. This legislation moves the onus of proof from the worker to the employer or insurer to prove the disease was not due to the worker's employment. This is about making the process easier. The last thing someone needs when they are told they have cancer is to face extra battles. Former minister Jack Dempsey was extremely passionate about this and had been working on it for some time. The introduction of our private member's bill delivers on LNP commitments from 2014 supporting presumptive legislation for firefighters.

Queensland has over 2,000 permanent firefighters, 2,000 part-time auxiliary firefighters and some 15,000 active rural fire brigades with about 30,000 rural fire brigade members of the association. We have three dedicated rural fire brigades within the Currumbin electorate: Currumbin Valley, Tallebudgera Valley and Tomewin. The job of a rural firefighter is unpredictable. Each brigade is made up of approximately 15 active and 10 additional members, all of whom are volunteers who regularly give freely of their time. The southern Gold Coast is blessed with exquisitely beautiful and extremely diverse environments that attract families and individuals to acreage living. Our community is grateful for the remarkable efforts of our fireys, who undertake proactive initiatives and reactive measures to protect lives and landscapes.

Local fireys tell me that Currumbin Valley has unique foliage, best described as rainforest, that therefore does not burn at the same velocity as neighbouring Tallebudgera Valley with its heavier foliage which can unfortunately see fires rip through at an alarming rate and require a more widespread response. Just recently we had a fairly significant fire burning in Tallebudgera Valley, and officers from neighbouring brigades were deployed to assist, all willing to sacrifice their time and expertise to help where needed. On behalf of Currumbin residents and the wider community I place on record my thanks to those men and women who kept under control not only that fire but others that have threatened our

homes in our valleys over many years, and mine is one of those. I also commend the men and women stationed at Coolangatta Fire Station who daily put their safety on the line to protect us and our homes.

I have consulted with my local rural fire brigades, who have rightly expressed their concern at the legislation proposed by this Labor government. The most glaringly obvious issue is the requirement that volunteer firefighters must attend 150 fires before receiving adequate protection. Not only is this discriminatory; it is entirely unworkable and highlights a lack of foresight by Labor. Some of my local fireys, who have been serving as volunteers for over 20 years, could not for the life of them estimate how many fires they have fought. Even if they had kept a log, what exactly constitutes a fire? Is it putting out a cigarette butt that had the potential to cause immeasurable damage on our dry land, or perhaps a false alarm which selfless volunteers responded to in the middle of the night ready to face whatever obstacle was presented? Does that count?

In their submission to the committee, the Gold Coast Rural Fire Brigade group said—

We are *truly disappointed* that volunteer firefighters in this state whom freely give their time to protect life and property in Queensland along side allied agencies and fire and emergency staff are not offered the same protection as a paid staff member. When making a submission on the opposition's private member's bill the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland Inc. said—

The proposed Private Members Bill regards all firefighters as equal and does not define a person by their pay status, rather recognises all firefighters equally as Queenslanders who place their lives at risk in defending the community.

In his submission, Darren Badger from the Tallebudgera Rural Fire Brigade said that 'smoke does not discriminate' and that 'we are trying to encourage new volunteers, not scare them away'.

As more and more people choose a rural lifestyle to escape the pace of city life, our rural firefighters are becoming more and more important. I know many rural fireys who cannot go to their paid job when there is a fire in our backyard as they are duty-bound to make themselves available to fight fires. Labor's proposal to introduce legislation that discriminated against these good men and women was met with a wave of rejection. I am genuinely pleased to see that this outcry resulted in the committee's recommendation to abandon the 150 incidents quota. It is pleasing the government has changed its stance and agreed to remove the quota. It is just a shame that this anxiety and division amongst our fireys was created in the first place. There should have been bipartisan support all along for this kind of bill and there would have been if Labor saw all categories of firefighters as being worthy of receiving equal treatment.

Our firefighters—full time, part time, auxiliary, volunteer, rural or whatever they may be—all put their life on the line for us. These amendments demonstrate that, and we support them and will protect them. However, I cannot give my support to Labor's proposed changes to the Workers' Compensation Act. This attack on our small businesses is so typical of Labor and drives home the vast divide between Labor and the LNP, because the LNP gets small business and Labor chokes them. Labor gives lip-service to small business, and if ever there was a misfit Minister for Small Business it is the member for Ashgrove, who punished small businesses with a waste levy and supported a carbon tax when she was last a minister in the Bligh government. Now we all have received an earnest letter from CCIQ calling on every member in this House to block the passage of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. CCIQ have a seat on the minister's Small Business Advisory Council, an entity existing to advise the government on initiatives to grow small business, and yet they are being ignored by this union-infested Labor government. The LNP will be reminding Queensland's 400,000 small businesses that Labor will do anything for their Labor mates at the expense of small business, no matter how many of them go bust.