

SPEECH

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WORKERS REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION (SAMFS FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BROCK (Frome) (21:25): I also rise to speak on this bill. I congratulate the government on bringing this bill forward, as the member for Mount Gambier indicated, but I will not support the bill in its current form. The main reason is the omission of CFS. I am not going to go over the whole lot, but other members have spoken very clearly and very passionately about the value of volunteers, not only in firefighting, but in volunteering across all of regional South Australia and also the metropolitan area. We need to recognise that and ensure that they have the same opportunities and protection as everybody else.

I would just like to go back to when the Deputy Premier introduced the bill on 19 June 2013. He indicated that this measure would ensure that from 1 July 2013 South Australian MFS firefighters, including retained firefighters, would be covered. The question there is—and it has not been mentioned in here—concerns some of the retained firefighters. They are the ones in locations such as Port Pirie, Port Lincoln and others where there is an MFS facility in a regional area.

Mr Pegler: And Mount Gambier.

Mr BROCK: And Mount Gambier; sorry, member for Mount Gambier. Some of those retained firefighters are also CFS volunteers. My question to the Deputy Premier is, how will they decipher if one of those retained firefighters does unfortunately contract one of these cancerous diseases? How are they going to decipher that issue? On 5 November 2012, the press release from Premier Jay Weatherill stated:

We have seen the terrible headaches caused when people working with dangerous materials are not acknowledged for the risks they take.

He also went on to say:

We will join the Commonwealth and become the first state in only the third country in the world to recognise and compensate firefighter cancer. Scientific studies across the world have demonstrated that firefighters are at greater risk of developing certain types of cancer through direct exposure to materials as part of their job.

The question there is very clear. In my opinion, the Premier makes it quite clear about firefighters. That press release does not distinguish between retained or separating CFS. They are all firefighters in my opinion. The workers rehabilitation minister at the time, Jack Snelling, said:

The onus of proof should no longer be on those who risk their lives for our safety every day. If a firefighter develops a specific cancer, they will be automatically covered under our workers' compensation claim.

I think some of those press releases are very misleading. They say firefighters, and by firefighters they should be including the volunteers, the CFS and the retained and full-time MFS people. I am not a member of the CFS.

An honourable member: Shame!

Mr BROCK: Shame; I realise that.

An honourable member: We'll get you signed up.

Mr BROCK: Get me signed up. In my previous job I did not have the time to be firefighting, but in my electorate I am very fortunate to have the MFS. They have retained and they have full-time firefighters, and I also have 18 CFS locations across the electorate of Frome. Those 18 CFS locations do exactly the same as our MFS firefighters. They go out there and they fight fires. They also go out there and attend road traffic accidents. They attend a lot of stuff there.

The ones from Napperby, Crystal Brook and Port Broughton also assist the MFS people in Port Pirie. They are full time. We have volunteers, retained and MFS personnel going to a same incident, inhaling the same odours, smoke or vapours. If somebody from the MFS or a retained and also a CFS volunteer contract one of these cancers, are we going to leave that CFS person out?

I believe that this bill, in this current format, is discriminatory. I cannot support it in its format and I would very strongly urge the government to just put three letters into this bill: CFS. If this bill does not get through in this place, I am hoping that in the upper house it is pulled apart and a bit of common sense is put into it.
