

## **Extract from Hansard 30 April 2013**

### **FIREFIGHTERS - SAFETY**

[10.36 a.m.]

**Mr STURGES** (Question) - Mr Speaker, could the Minister for Workplace Relations inform the House about what action is being taken to improve the safety for our hardworking and dedicated Tasmanian firefighters?

### **Recognition of Visitors**

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his question and in doing so would like to acknowledge in the gallery some of Tasmania's finest - members of Tasmania Fire Service - and thank them for coming here today.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - No-one can doubt the dedication and commitment of the hardworking firefighting personnel in Tasmania, especially in light of the difficult situations and conditions they had to endure during this last summer. During the career of a firefighter and, indeed, the service of a volunteer firefighter, they are often exposed to dangerous situations and environments and conditions that lead to exposure to toxic chemicals, fumes and other hazardous materials. Whilst we run from the danger, Tasmania Fire Service personnel run towards it.

Scientific evidence has shown that many of these substances are carcinogenic and it is on this basis that there is a strong argument to put in place measures that will make the process of applying for workers compensation less onerous for our firefighters who contract certain types of cancers. Under current arrangements, a worker seeking compensation for a disease must establish that his or her employment was the major or most significant contributing factor. From a legal perspective, it can be difficult to present sufficient evidence to satisfy this test.

It is my intention today to table a bill, subject to certain threshold requirements, that a person's work as a firefighter will be taken to satisfy this test unless there is evidence to displace this presumption. The commonwealth introduced similar legislation to take effect from 1 July 2011 and whilst that legislation covers firefighters in the ACT and airports, it does not include coverage of volunteer firefighters.

It is intended that retired firefighters and those no longer serving as volunteers will be covered by these provisions for a period of 10 years post-retirement or attendance at the last incident as a volunteer. Tasmania is proudly served by approximately 300 career firefighters and approximately 5 000 volunteer firefighters and there should be no distinction between one or the other as to whether or not a person qualifies for compensation. I am pleased to say that by taking this approach Tasmania will become the first state to introduce such contemporary, appropriate and fair legislation.

Mr Speaker, while this legislation is aimed at coverage for firefighters, it is again evidence of the resolve of this government to ensure that there is adequate protection for workers involved in dangerous and hazardous activities in their employment. I will continue and this government will continue to fight for workers' rights, for that is what Labor people do, and when I table this bill in the House today on behalf of all Tasmanian career and volunteer firefighters I will do so with pride and a commitment to continue to ensure that they are safe at work.

[Approximately 11.08 a.m.]

**Mr SPEAKER** - .... On behalf of the House I am sure every member would agree that we should thank the Tasmania Fire Service for their great effort this year.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

**WORKERS REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT  
(FIRE-FIGHTERS) BILL 2013 (No. 27)**

Bill presented by **Mr O'Byrne** and read the first time.