

**Submission
No 190**

INQUIRY INTO NSW WORKERS COMPENSATION SCHEME

Organisation: NSW Rural Fire Services Association Incorporated
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RFSA

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Joint Select Committee on NSW Workers Compensation Scheme
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee Members

I refer to the recently circulated "Issues Paper" and offer the following comments.

By way of background, this Association was formed to provide a formal means by which staff of the NSW Rural Fire Service (900) and volunteer firefighters (70,000) could express their views to the Government and others, particularly in relation to issues such as funding, personal equipment and the welfare of members and their families.

Over many years compensation for injured firefighters has been at the forefront of the Association's efforts and many reforms have been achieved in an attempt to ensure that members and their families are looked after should injuries or death result from their firefighting activities.

Indeed, it was the Government of the day that in 1987 identified the need to enact specific legislation known as the NSW Workers Compensation (Bush Fires Emergency and Rescue Services) Act. This legislation recognised the unique nature of volunteer emergency service workers but made reference throughout to the Principal Act (the Workers Compensation Act) in determining various benefits.

It therefore follows that any changes to the Principal Act will have a flow-on effect to the NSW Workers Compensation (Bush Fire, Emergency and Rescue Services) Act.

Given the high risk nature of the work performed by our firefighters and the potential for long term rehabilitation needs for burns victims, the Association is extremely concerned about some of the changes suggested in the Issues Paper.

Supporting Our Members To Protect The Community



These relate specifically to:

- Journey Claims
- Strokes and Heart Attacks
- Medical Expenses
- Weekly Benefits 'step downs'

The Association therefore suggests that if the Principal Act is to be amended to change injured worker benefits, compensation arrangements for volunteer emergency service workers should be incorporated in stand alone legislation, which recognises their unique employment arrangements and the nature of the work carried out on behalf of the community of NSW. Such legislation would prescribe appropriate benefits without reference to the Principal Act.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the paper and I would be only too pleased to elaborate on our concerns in due course.

Yours faithfully

Brian McKinlay, AFSM
President