

FIREFIGHTERS — PRESUMPTIVE LAWS

728. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to the minister's predecessor's commitment that presumptive cancer firefighter laws would apply to both career and volunteer firefighters.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the new laws in Queensland specifically provide that there will be no discrimination between paid and volunteer firefighters under new cancer compensation rights?
- (2) Is the minister aware that volunteers in South Australia have the same eligibility requirements as paid firefighters who work alongside them?
- (3) Given the stance in other states, what is the impediment to meeting the three-year-old election commitment?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

- (1)–(3) I thank the member for Girrawheen for the question. The answer is yes, I am aware about Queensland; yes, I am aware about South Australia. This government went to the last election with a very clear commitment to give presumptive cover to both career and volunteer firefighters, and retired career firefighters who may contract a particular prescribed form of cancer due to the exposure that they may have been subjected to in their roles either as career firefighters or volunteers. The government said from the start that it would do this in two tranches of legislation. The first one, obviously, was an amendment to the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act for career firefighters. We made that amendment first because it was the easiest act to amend and the easiest one to draft. About a year and a half ago, that was passed unanimously by all members of this house; it was a great day. Our second tranche of the legislation will cover volunteer firefighters: fire and rescue firefighters; volunteer bush fire brigade firefighters, who may be exposed to certain carcinogens; and also marine sea rescue volunteers, because sometimes even they have to put out fires. Just because it is on water does not mean the fire is any less dangerous. In fact, some of the stuff that boats are made out of makes it even more dangerous and carcinogenic. That legislation will also cover retired career firefighters. The legislation has been approved to be drafted by cabinet. I expect to see it back from the draughtsman shortly. There is an issue, obviously, and some concern has been raised, no doubt with the member for Girrawheen and also with me, about the timing of this legislation, but I have stated before and I will state again now that it is nothing anyone has to worry about because the start date for it will be retrospective, in line with the legislation that currently covers career firefighters. The start date will be the same for both.