

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND WILDLIFE PERSONNEL —
HEALTH LEGISLATION

784. MR N.W. MORTON to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I note the minister's recent announcement that cabinet has approved legislation to provide compensation to volunteer and Department of Parks and Wildlife firefighters who —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Excuse me. Member for Girrawheen, you are now on 3.5 calls. You are lucky that I am in a good mood today.

Mr N.W. MORTON: There are so many comments I could make, Mr Speaker. I will start that question again since I was rudely interrupted.

I note the minister's recent announcement that cabinet has approved legislation to provide compensation to volunteer and Department of Parks and Wildlife firefighters who contract a prescribed cancer. Can the minister please provide the house with further information on this initiative?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Forrestfield. Three point five—it is tempting, but I will behave!

I thank the member for Forrestfield very much for his question. A week and a half ago—the weekend before last—the Department of Fire and Emergency Services hosted the fourth annual Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services Conference in Perth. Volunteer fire and rescue firefighters, bush fire brigade firefighters and State Emergency Service and volunteer marine rescue service personnel from all over the state came here for a wonderful weekend to see firsthand what each other is doing and to learn from each other and share the positive experiences of being a volunteer emergency services worker. During that weekend we announced that cabinet has approved moving forward and drafting the bill that will provide the same presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters as it does for career firefighters. I have mentioned this before; we have had to go through two processes to cover everyone. The first one was to cover the career fire and rescue firefighters. That was achieved through a simple amendment to the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act. However, for retired career firefighters and volunteer firefighters, it has been somewhat more difficult to reach the point at which we can be fair and honest and not be disingenuous, as are some other states—for example, Tasmania—that have set standards that no emergency services personnel will ever reach.

The government recognises that if volunteer firefighters and personnel from the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the Forest Products Commission—no matter which branch they come from—are exposed to certain carcinogens through fighting hazardous fires, such as building, rubbish, tip or car fires, they should be given the same principle of coverage and benefit of the doubt that we give career firefighters.

Going into the fire season, we acknowledge the work that all firefighters do across the state of Western Australia. We wish them all the best and I hope they all stay safe while doing a very, very challenging task. There are some 30 000 emergency services volunteers across Western Australia. Looking at the weather today, we can see that the seasons change very, very quickly. We are getting on with the job. We have made some significant progress now in coming to a sweet spot about which everyone will agree. Hopefully, everyone will agree on not only the standards of length of service when we announce them, but also the qualifying exposure. We think we have come to a fair place that will cover everyone equally without being disingenuous.