

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Inquiry into the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011

28 July 2011

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) supports the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011.

The ACTU is Australia's peak union body and represents some 2 million workers, including firefighters. The ACTU is the worker representative body on Safe Work Australia (SWA) and the International Labor Organisation (ILO). The ACTU advocates for improvement to health and safety and workers' compensation laws and standards and the reduction to zero of work related death, injury, illness and disease.

We have read the Bill, Explanatory Memorandum, and Hansard transcript of its first reading 4 July, 2011.

The ACTU makes the following limited comment:

- The Bill is based on evidence gathered internationally as to the employment relationship to the development of particular cancers within the population of active firefighters
- The relationship between firefighting and specific cancers has been traversed and established in a large number of studies, not least of which is the Le Masters¹ study. Many of which were conducted throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and have since been reviewed and supported in later studies.
- Such 'presumptive legislation' has worked effectively in jurisdictions based in broadly similar economies and with similar firefighting hazards
- The provisions are rightly restricted only to those for whom firefighting duties made up a substantial portion of their duties
- Where a firefighter suffers one of the cancers specified in the Bill, for which the dominant cause is an already established occupational exposure, it should be that worker's right to access, without the impediment of prosecuting a case, all full compensation.

The ACTU would be pleased to provide, if requested, further supporting documentation in support of this submission.

¹LeMasters G et al. Cancer Risk Among Firefighters: A Review and Meta-analysis of 32 Studies. JOEM Volume 48, November 2006; 48:1189 – 1202