

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS
COMMITTEE**

**ON THE
SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT
(FAIR PROTECTION FOR FIREFIGHTERS) BILL 2011**

Submission by: Ross Lindley

1. My name is Ross Lindley. I am 51 years old, married and have four grown children – 28, 25, 23 and the youngest is 21 years old.
2. In 1984 I joined the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Melbourne and served as an operational firefighter for 26 years before being medically retired in 2010
3. In January 2009 I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. Multiple myeloma is a cancer of plasma cells, a type of white blood cell normally responsible for the production of antibodies. Collections of abnormal cells accumulate in bones, where they cause bone lesions (abnormal areas of tissue), and in the bone marrow where they interfere with the production of normal blood cells.
4. I was diagnosed with the cancer through an MRI scan. For a few years I had a sore back and kept hurting it. I was having that investigated when the cancer was diagnosed. I underwent an aggressive treatment regime of chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant. The treatment left me extremely fatigued with no strength as you suffer from muscle weakness. The recovery period for such treatment was about 18 months; I am still having ongoing monthly treatment involving a Hospital day ward visit for an intravenous drip and take Thalidomide daily. All of these treatments and medications leave you with side effects and possible problems further down the track. Fatigue and Peripheral Neuropathy which is one of the side-effects is still a big hurdle in my life.
5. Being unable to work and to have treatment I had to use my accumulated leave and then when that was exhausted I utilised wage protection insurance. However, that is a significant reduction in income because I only received 70 percent of my income, and still had to pay tax out of that. Still having a mortgage and everyday living expenses and now medical expenses and medications to add to the list on a reduced income has put a lot of stress on myself as well as my family.

6. I made some inquiries at the time about claiming work cover. I was advised that it was difficult to get cover as I would have to prove the fire or incident where I was exposed to toxins or substances that later resulted in my cancer.
7. I did not pursue litigation in order to get cover because quite simply I could not afford to do so, and I did not have the energy to do so. As explained my income had dropped considerably and I didn't have any extra money to throw at litigation.
8. When you are battling cancer and doing everything you can to get through that, you do not have the ability to take on something like litigation. I was tired and fatigued. I did not have the strength physically or emotionally to put together a case to get cover. My only consideration was to get through this and get on with my life with my family.
9. I was also trying to minimise my stress at the time so that I had a better chance of recovery. Taking a case would have been very stressful and given the difficulties in proving which fire had been instrumental in the cancer, it was not worth it.
10. I firmly believe my cancer is a result of my work as a firefighter. There is no history of this cancer in my family and no other reason for it. We know we are being exposed to a range of toxins when attending fires and incidents. Our gear cannot protect us completely. I have since done a lot of research and read many studies. There is a significant amount of scientific information that supports the link between the role of firefighting and cancer.
11. If I was killed at a fire my wife and family would get compensation. If I die from this cancer they won't. They will not get anything.

12. This Bill will not help me personally, but it will help other firefighters and the firefighters of the future. My family and I will not benefit from this legislation but we need to have it in place for the future. The science on this issue has been accepted overseas and it needs to be accepted here. Firefighters who die as a result of their job should be looked after, just as they would be if they were killed at an incident or fire.

13. As a fire fighter you know the risks of the job. But you take those risks to protect the community. We are asking that the Government now recognises those risks and put the proper protections in place for firefighters.

Ross Lindley