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Dear Committee Members,

Re: Inquiry into aspects of Australian workers' compensation schemes

I wish to make the following comments in relation to the third dot point of the Terms of Reference.

In March 2000 whilst employed as Communications Advisor to the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory Government I was involved in a very serious road smash. I was the only Government employee on the trip to Apatula (Finke) permitted to drive the hire vehicle and my travelling companions were Producer of television programs, Peter Welch and cameraman Ken Braun from Imparja Television.

We were all injured, Peter and Ken quite severely and the only way to get assistance required me to walk for 38 kilometres with broken bones and other injuries.

We were eventually airlifted to Alice Springs Hospital about 22 hours after the smash had occurred.

Since that time my injuries have been treated – broken wrist, severed thumb, elbow injuries, two shoulder injuries, hip, head and feet.

I have worked since 1982 in a senior capacity in my chosen field and have held executive status positions in two television networks, two radio networks and then in the political arena.

All that said, it came as a shock to me that the attitude of the insurer (TIO) is that I "find a job, any job" and if I can't find what I want "then get a job in a call centre or as a receptionist".

I attend physio twice a week, hydrotherapy twice a week, psychologist for posttraumatic problems, orthopaedic surgeon, occupational surgeon, local general practitioner and counsellor. Yes I can work and after moving to Adelaide to get the specialist treatment that was unavailable in Darwin I held the position as Chief of Staff to the Minister for Transport, Urban Planning, Arts and Cultural Development.

I am told there is no provision to retrain me – "it's not our fault you had a smash" and "can't get a job", but in the next instance provide me with a vocational employment advisor to assist me to get a job.

That is the emotional part of it.

The facts are:

- I was acting on instructions to complete a job which required me to drive two people to Apatula. The hire car company failed to provide us with the correct vehicle and we travelled in a Rav4, which was not appropriate for the journey.

- I have complied with every instruction, attended every medico-legal examination that the insurer has arranged, completed every piece of paper work and provided same to their office (even providing copies of material they could not locate) and communicated each and every doctors' recommendation to the case worker.
- There is no doubt, and it is well documented, that with the extent of injuries I have done extremely well in MY OWN rehabilitation, but I believe that not providing retraining or pressuring me to take a job answering a phone will not mend my body faster.

There will always be fraudulent claims and conduct by employees, and there is a responsibility on behalf of the schemes to seek out those people.

At the other end of the scale there is a responsibility not to threaten, intimidate, discount or ridicule those employees who have had the misfortune of sustaining an injury in the course of their employment.

Under the Northern Territory Workers' Compensation Scheme I could never be accused of malingering to obtain a cash payout – there is none. What I am left with is a person that now has multiple injuries that will be ongoing, I have had to pay to have my house change to suit a person with limited arm use, I pay to have people do my ironing, cleaning, mowing, etc etc etc – all daily things I did for myself in the past.

My pseudo-employer, TIO, pays me less than half of my former salary, and treats me with indifference. It is costing me a fortune to travel to all my appointments (no longer driving) and an equally small fortune to pay to do things I normally did myself.

Yes I want to return to work fulltime and in my usual occupation, not in a job that I have never done just so I am off the books.

I am sure your Committee will have ample comments from employer groups and insurers and I do hope you consider the genuinely injured worker before throwing us all out with the bath water.

A hearty recommendation would be to change the attitude that is directed at injured workers and seek out those people roting the insurance companies.

Yours sincerely

Julia Mourant