**Stressed and injured police barred from relief**

Figures obtained by the Greens show that one police officer a day is claiming compensation for psychological injuries caused by their work. Cuts to the compensation scheme for police however mean that an increasing number of these police are receiving no financial assistance with an increase from around a quarter to closer to 40% in the last available numbers.

*Mental Stress Claims*

In the period 30 November 2011 to 30 November 2013 there were a total of 825 claims by police for compensation as a result of mental stress – this works out to be approximately 1 per day.

Mental stress claims are generally related to exposure to a traumatic incident, workplace or occupational violence or workplace harassment and bullying.

SafeWork Australia identifies mental stress claims as being “the most expensive form of workers’ compensation claims because of the often lengthy periods of absence from work typical of

these claims”.[[1]](#footnote-1) The reason for these long absences is the severely debilitating nature of this condition which makes many workers unable to undertake their normal duties in a way that does not compromise their recovery.

SafeWork Australia also recognises mental stress can escalate into serious physical and mental illness if not dealt with appropriately and in a timely fashion.[[2]](#footnote-2) This can include anxiety and depression as well as musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular disease among others.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Of the police making mental stress claims approximately one third of claimants receive a payment for permanent incapacity, and approximately a short receive a payment for both a both a Partial & Total Incapacity. In general these claimants have initically received a payment for partial incapacity, then moved to receiving a payment for total incapacity when the impact of their condition has been fully assessed.

Worryingly this class of claimant appears to be decreasing, while the numbers of claimants not receiving an incapacity payment increases.

The number of police receiving payments for both a Partial & Total Incapacity Payment went from 41.26% and 42.2% of claimants down to 24.66% in the most recent period, while those not receiving an incapacity payment went from 24.54% and 24.63% down to 38.36% in the most recent period. This means that there is a 50% increase in the number of claimants for mental stress having their claims rejected. This means more police are making mental stress claims indicating that they do not feel they are able to do their jobs, but receiving no payments – essentially meaning they are forced to continue working despite the negative impact this has on their mental and physical health.

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| Mental Stress Claims | . | . | . |
| Period Date Claim Reported | 30 November 2011 to 30 June 2012  (7 months) | 1 July 2012 to  30 June 2013  (12 months) | 1 July 2013 to  30 November 2013  (5 months) |
| No. of Mental Stress Claims Receiving a Permanent Incapacity Payment | 81  (11.57) | 112  (9.33) | 50  (10) |
| No. of Mental Stress Claims Receiving a Partial Incapacity Payment | 11  (1.57) | 24  (2) | 4  (0.8) |
| No. of Mental Stress Claims Receiving Both a Partial & Total Incapacity Payment | 111  (15.86)  41.26% | 173  (14.41)  42.20% | 36  (7.2)  24.66% |
| No. of Mental Stress Claims Not Receiving an Incapacity Payment | 66  (9.43)  24.54% | 101  (8.42)  24.63% | 56  (11.2)  38.36% (50% increase in proportion of claims being rejected) |
| Total No. of Mental Stress Claims for the Period – approximately one per day. | 269  (38.43) | 410  (34.17) | 146  (29.2) |

Greens MP and Industrial Relations Spokesperson David Shoebridge said:

“The number of police having their mental stress claims rejected is increasing – meaning we have more police on the beat who feel they are not able to handle the job.

“The safety of our police and the safety of our community are not assisted by forcing police with mental stress claims to stay at work rather than providing for their recovery.

“This is the practical impact of the Government’s cost cutting of workers compensation and it is simply unsustainable.

“We call on the Police Minister to urgently review these figures, and commit to restoring workers compensation rights in NSW for all workers”, Mr Shoebridge said.

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1. <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/769/The-Incidence-Accepted-WC-Claims-Mental-Stress-Australia.pdf> page 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/769/The-Incidence-Accepted-WC-Claims-Mental-Stress-Australia.pdf> page 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/769/The-Incidence-Accepted-WC-Claims-Mental-Stress-Australia.pdf> page 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)