



POLICY UPDATE

News and views from the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce *March 19, 1999*

Further Changes Still Needed in Bill 90

Background

On January 28, 1999 the Chamber presented its preliminary comments on Bill 90 to the Law Amendments Committee. These comments focused on the need for a hard look at the long-term impacts of the changes proposed in Bill 90 before moving ahead with the legislation.

Specifically, we highlighted universal assessment as one change that would have very negative impacts over the long term. We called on the government to hold a full stakeholder review of the Workers' Compensation System (WCS) before proceeding with fundamental changes to the system.

Thanks to the support of our membership, the Chamber has managed to convince all three political parties in Nova Scotia to reconsider their support for universal assessment. This issue has been removed from Bill 90 by the Law Amendments Committee.

[Editor's Note: The Chamber would like to thank the many members who responded to our Call to Action and contacted the Law Amendments Committee to express your concerns over the possible long term implications of Bill 90.]

The Law Amendments Committee is to be congratulated for the open and frank manner in which it has approached its review of

Bill 90. The willingness to hear and respond to the various stakeholders has laid a solid foundation for a full stakeholder review.]

Issue

Since our appearance before Law Amendments, the Chamber's WCB Task Force has spent considerable time exploring the provisions of Bill 90 in more detail.

It has become apparent that there are broader issues that need to be addressed with the WCS than just those contained in the Bill. It is our hope that an immediate stakeholder review process will occur and that these important issues can be given proper consideration.

The Chamber recognizes, however, that Bill 90 may move forward in the House in advance of a stakeholder review.

Action

The Chamber has sent a letter to Minister Harrison, Chair of the Law Amendments Committee (copied to each of the political parties), saying that if Bill 90 goes forward, it should be amended to ensure that any changes made to the current system are **the very minimum changes necessary** to address the substantial appeal backlog.

The current legislation appears to be working very effectively. Bill 90 should focus on clearing the backlog of appeal cases in a manner which does not put

the long term sustainability of the WCS at risk, nor hamper the ability of Nova Scotia businesses to grow and prosper.

The two key issues that must be addressed relate to benefit payments for chronic pain and to the streamlining of the appeals process. Consideration of additional changes, above and beyond those related to the appeals backlog, should be deferred for a full stakeholder review process.

Bill 90 currently contains benefit enhancements in excess of \$20 million that will have **no impact on the appeals backlog**. These benefits **simply add to the approximate \$360 million unfunded liability** and will result, according to the WCB, in premium increases for all companies currently covered by the WCS.

The Law Amendments hearings have paved the way for a timely full review of the WCS to take place in an accelerated fashion. This would allow for a quick turnaround for stronger and more balanced legislation to replace Bill 90, and achieve any necessary adjustments to the WCS.

The Chamber looks forward to working with the government and other stakeholders in helping to make the WCS in Nova Scotia the fair, equitable and sustainable system it must

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