

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION – Inquiry into Disability Care and Support

Dear Sir/Madam,

I had my right leg amputated through knee as a result of a motorbike accident in 1977. The accident occurred on the 2nd March and I returned to work as a boiler maker welder in June 1977. The first prosthesis made for me was complete with a foot. It proved to be quite dangerous at my place of work as there were welding leads and steel objects to maneuver around and the foot would become entangled in any object that came in its path, it would result in a fall and you had to be aware when you fell not to injure yourself. Having had this experience I had a peg prosthesis made which was more tolerant in the environment that I had to work.

When I had my Third Party Motor Vehicle Court Case I applied for two legs – one with a foot and one with a peg. This the court granted me and Veteran Affairs who were the limb makers at the time submitted to the Court the future cost of manufacture and repair of the limbs and the supply of stump socks. This the Court accepted. The Minister for Veterans Affairs Tony Messner wrote on the 16th December 1980 when I had paid \$12500.00 towards the cost of my limbs I would then be eligible to join the free limb scheme. I joined the free limb scheme some years ago and the situation has been okay until 2010 when applies for a new peg limb because my old one was beyond repair. On this occasion I was told by QALS that I could only have one prosthesis and I had to choose.

What a choice to be laden with? I went to court in 1977 and fought for two prosthesis and obtained future cost that Veteran Affairs required. I paid all the court costs Veteran Affairs didn't contribute to the court costs.

In 2002 I was faced with a job description change at the sugar mill which I had worked at for 38 years. I had worked as a boiler maker welder, sugar boiler, factory supervisor and I hold a 1st Class s team ticket which was my qualification to operate the console at the sugar mill which controlled the crushing plant and power station. Due to the job description at my age of 59 years I had very little choice but to take redundant and stay at home and concentrate on working on our property which we purchased in 1973.

CHOICE TO BE MADE

- (1) Do I chose a leg to work in and support my wife and myself and don't become a burden on society as at the moment we don't draw any Government benefits at all. I need the peg leg on the farm for much the same reasons as I needed it at the sugar mill. On the farm there is a tractor which has 3 steps to get on the driving platform, there is a usual mustering and branding and spraying the cattle, fencing, hay making, and you can't get away from welding maintenance, all the farm work is much safer and able to be done with the peg leg.
- (2) Do I choose the prosthesis with the foot and still go in public places and take my place in society and feel socially included and not be regarded as someone different as with the correct prosthesis and the right technique at walking one

can disguise ones difficulties quiet well. We were in New Zealand on tour and the

bus driver didn't realize I had a prosthesis until the tour was nearly completed. If I was to choose this prosthesis I would have to for go my activities on the farm and work towards a disability pension.

When I weighed up the pros and cons I was left with no choice but to choose the peg prosthesis. Even though I had the two prosthesis for 32 years. The result of this decision is unknown will it lead to withdrawals, depression, social misfit, non inclusion only time will tell.

I understand the reason for QALS cut back was lack of funding from the Commonwealth Government. Why should I be troubled with the lack of funding after all they took my money and I gave it to them in good faith 33 years ago. In return I have worked and paid taxes all my life and even now at 65 years I have not requested a pension at any time.

SUPPORT

Recently I had the misfortune have some vascular surgery on my stump. The surgeon told me I could come home from hospital but I required a wheelchair. I applied for a wheelchair through Community Health a Commonwealth Government Department in Queensland. Because I didn't have a Centrelink Card, Health Care card or no Veteran Affairs card I was entitled to nothing not even hand rails in the toilet or shower.

It is very distressing that people responsible for funding for the free limb scheme do not understand the heartache and distress that they can cause by not funding the scheme adequately. This leads to distress and anxiety purely because of the lack of funding.

This is an outline of my situation there are most likely patients worse off than me that will not for their own reason come forward and state their situation. The prosthesis manufacturers who have to work around these funding difficulties to keep us mobile and safe need a gold medal.

From this inquiry I hope that funding for my two prosthesis can be reinstated so I can lead a normal life. I am happy to contribute to this inquiry if you so desire as my quality of life is very dependant on the outcome.

Yours faithfully,

P.R.Whalan