



Speech by

Hon. P. BRADDY

MEMBER FOR KEDRON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Workplace Health and Safety Enforcement Framework for Queensland

Hon. P. J. BRADDY (Kedron—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.54 a.m.), by leave: This morning I have launched a policy which highlights a significant change in the way workplace health and safety is administered in Queensland. The new policy—the Workplace Health and Safety Enforcement Framework for Queensland—will be an important tool in making the State's workplaces healthier and safer. I am pleased to say that this new framework has the support of the Workplace Health and Safety Board and, importantly, the employer and employee representatives on that board.

The injury record in Queensland's workplaces is reason for concern. In 1998-99, WorkCover Queensland received more than 73,000 new claims for compensation, not including the claims made to the 21 self insurers, with an expected cost of nearly \$400m. Sadly, WorkCover was also notified of 93 fatalities.

But this is just the tip of the injury iceberg. In 1995, the Industry Commission reported the total annual cost of injury and disease at work in Queensland to be more than \$3.3 billion. The cost to Australia's productivity is frightening. Over two years in the mid 1990s, Queensland alone lost over 1.4 million working days as a result of work-related injuries. Based on figures in the Industry Commission's report, each year one in every 12 workers in Australia will suffer a work-related injury and illness—and almost two-thirds of these workers are expected to take time off.

However frightening these numbers are, the cost in human terms is far greater. No amount of money can ever truly compensate a family for the death or permanent disability of a parent or child. Clearly, there is substantial room for improvement in our health and safety performance. Our focus must be on preventing injury. The new WHS compliance framework is designed to tip the balance back from the self-regulatory approach of the past decade.

Management systems provide a focus to managing workplace health and safety by companies. But, as the royal commission into the gas explosion at Esso's Longford plant in Victoria found, systems that are not regularly inspected or checked can lead to complacency and disaster. Risk assessments are a proven method of addressing workplace health and safety issues, but, as the New South Wales Legislative Council's inquiry into workplace health and safety found, many small employers have shown that they have neither the expertise nor the resources to conduct risk assessments effectively. Some employers have not bothered at all. Here and now, we face new challenges to protect our work force.

A new approach to health and safety is called for. The new Workplace Health and Safety Enforcement Framework for Queensland will focus on robust enforcement of clear and effective standards. The framework that I have launched today will put Queensland at the leading edge of workplace health and safety enforcement in Australia.

There are two key parts to the Workplace Health and Safety Framework: the policy framework and the implementation plan. The policy framework consists of three new policies for enforcement, investigation, and prosecution. For the first time in Queensland, employers and the general public will be fully aware of the ground rules for enforcement of workplace health and safety legislation.

The implementation plan provides for a three-tiered, targeted approach to workplace inspections. It provides direction and focus for more than 130 workplace health and safety inspectors.

The three targets for 1999-2000 are serious hazards, high risk industries and poor performing employers. A blitz launched this month on unsafe practices in the residential construction industry has resulted in 550 notices being issued at 425 building sites in the first two weeks of the campaign. The package, though, is not a threat to employers or industries doing the right thing—or prepared to do the right thing.

I believe Queensland needs to be a society where workplace fatalities are as unacceptable as deaths caused by drink-driving. We need to be a society where workers can go to work, their families confident that they will return at the end of the day, safe and healthy. We need to be a society where workers' compensation claims spiral downwards thanks to a safe attitude, safe actions and a safety culture in our workplaces. We need to be a society where employers and employees will work together to create a healthy and safe work environment for their own benefit, for the benefit of the company and for Queensland.
