



Speech by

**Hon. P. BRADDY**

**MEMBER FOR KEDRON**

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Hansard 9 December 1999

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

#### **Building and Construction Industry Safety Task Force**

**Hon. P. J. BRADDY** (Kedron—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.52 a.m.), by leave: The building and construction industry is a major industry in Queensland in terms of both employment and its contribution to the economy of the State. Unfortunately, it also contributes a large percentage of the workplace health and safety incidents reported to the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and Workcover each year. It is one of the most dangerous industries in which to work. That is why the Division of Workplace Health and Safety, after close consultation with industry organisations, chose the residential construction industry and the mobile crane industry as the subjects of its initial safety blitzes carried out this year.

Honourable members will recall that earlier this year I announced the division's new policy initiative—the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Enforcement Framework—which details new enforcement, investigation and prosecution policies. The framework is the strategy used by the Division of Workplace Health and Safety to give effect to its legislation and to identify special hazards to workers.

In the past, workplace health and safety inspectors concentrated on encouraging voluntary compliance with workplace health and safety standards. The Enforcement Framework tips the balance towards a more robust regime to ensure health and safety standards reach a higher compliance level. The program aims to lower the unacceptable toll in workplace injuries and deaths in Queensland. It has been warmly embraced by the business community, with representatives of nearly 7,000 large, medium and small businesses attending information seminars held throughout Queensland in the last two months. Due to the overwhelming response, further information seminars will be held in the new year.

The aim of these policy initiatives is to reduce our workplace toll. In 1998-99 WorkCover recorded 93 fatalities and 73,000 compensated injury claims. These stark statistics underline the need for our new policy direction and the need to pursue a more vigorous enforcement policy. Both trade unions and employer organisations strongly support taking a more proactive stand on these important safety issues.

We know and recognise that there is enormous pressure on employers and workers in the building and construction industry. There is constant pressure to reduce costs and meet strict contract time schedules in an exposed work environment with both physical and natural hazards. In this environment there are claims that contractors cut corners in minimising costs and safety efforts. There are also claims that they often fail to comply with safety standards. This was particularly evident in the residential construction blitz.

Workplace Health and Safety inspectors concentrated on the critical issue of falls from heights. They found many dangerous sites where edge protection was not provided for workers' safety. The assessment of workplace health and safety compliance in the building and construction industry is complicated by the inadequacy of statistical information. In an industry with thousands of self-employed workers, many incidents and injuries are not reported. Consequently, data provides industry and Government with only a minimum indication of the problem.

Therefore, I wish to inform the House of a new initiative to further improve workplace health and safety in Queensland. I announce today the formation of an industry task force that will inquire into and

recommend strategies to improve workplace health and safety compliance in the building and construction industry. Therefore, the task force will not only consider strategies to improve compliance and workplace health and safety measures but will also look for ways to collect accurate data. The terms of reference for the task force are—

Consider strategies to improve compliance with workplace health and safety legislation in the building and construction industry.

Develop a package of measures to improve workplace health and safety in the industry.

Consider options for the collection of accurate data on health and safety in the building and construction industry.

The task force will report back to the Government by the end of April 2000. Its membership will be drawn from employers and trade unions and senior officers of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and WorkCover. This is a great opportunity for the industry to improve its workplace health and safety record in partnership with our Government.

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