



Speech by

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DANGEROUS GOODS SAFETY MANAGEMENT BILL

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (3.11 p.m.): I am pleased to speak to the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Bill. We are reminded too many times of the dangers in some industries as a result of workplace accidents. When the accident involves chemicals, hazardous substances or other dangerous goods, the results are not always limited to harming a worker. They can harm a number of workers, damage the workplace, the environment or even the local community. The results can be quite catastrophic.

As an ex-postal worker, I am conversant with the need to handle dangerous goods in a specified manner. Some members may remember that in the 1980s my work colleague was seriously injured while handling a small package containing starting caps at the State Parcel Centre. After the accident, the State Parcel Centre in Brisbane city resembled a war zone. The small parcel contained enough starting caps to blow out windows, crumble brick walls and toss furniture into the air like they were doll's house toys. It does not take much imagination to think of what a warehouse of starting caps could do to destroy lives, buildings and communities.

In Australia each year more than 500 people die as a result of a traumatic event in the workplace. Each year there are approximately 2,300 deaths from prior chemical exposure and 2,100 people die as a result of road accidents. Therefore, more people are killed in workplace accidents each year than in road accidents, which is frightening. A person goes to work and does not come home because of a workplace accident. That is a sad reality that occurs too often in our country.

This bill aims to minimise the risk of hazardous incidents and disasters happening in Queensland, therefore minimising the risk of harm to workers, workplaces, the environment and the local community. As a graduate student in workplace health and safety, I am very pleased to see this bill introduced. It keeps the focus on enforcing workplace health and safety laws by targeting serious hazards and high-risk industries.

The term 'hazardous substances' relates to substances that have the potential to harm the health or safety of persons exposed to them. Those substances include chemicals such as insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, solvents such as carbon tetrachloride, chloroform, benzene, toluene, and irritant gases such as chlorine, ammonia, sulfur dioxide and formaldehyde. That list contains only a small number of chemicals commonly used in the workplace. There are approximately 4.6 million chemicals, and approximately 100,000 of those are used in commerce. In Australia, approximately 40,000 chemicals are used in commerce. However, the number of chemicals about which there is adequate health or environmental data is fewer than 10 per cent.

This bill requires everyone involved with the storage or handling of hazardous materials and dangerous goods to achieve an acceptable level of risk. This bill focuses on three areas. Firstly, it focuses on major hazard facilities—they are large-scale, high-risk industrial facilities; secondly, it focuses on dangerous goods locations, which affect many of us because that term includes smaller premises storing and handling dangerous goods, such as petrol stations; and, thirdly, it focuses on the Hazmat Advisory Service, which is an advisory service conducted by scientific and technical advisers for emergency services and police at emergencies involving hazardous materials.

Major hazard facilities relate not to the quantities of hazardous substances stored or used in the workplace but to the risk to people, property or the environment if a major incident involving those

substances were to occur. For the first time, major hazard facilities representatives will have to consult with their neighbouring community when developing emergency plans. It will be necessary for them to involve the public as a legitimate partner in planning and evaluating the response to the risk. The occupiers of a major hazard facility must identify areas surrounding the facility in which there may be harm caused if a major incident occurs. They must consult with and inform owners of properties and other people in the area about the hazards at the complex. They must also consult and inform them of the safety measures that should be taken in the event of a major incident. This information must be updated as often as necessary to keep the community informed.

The bill is not only about the contents of a complex; it is also about minimising and controlling the risk to the environment. It provides for the creation of a buffer zone around the major hazard facility that will be designated a major hazard facility consultation zone, which will be taken into account when assessing development applications. A map of the area will be provided to the local government, and development applications for major hazard facilities, dangerous goods locations and sensitive land uses will be referred to the Department of Emergency Services.

I repeat that for the first time major hazard facility occupiers must provide information to the community about hazards and safety measures at the facility. In other words, the community will be informed and involved in decisions that affect them. In the words of Sir Thomas Legge, 'All employees should be told something of the danger of the material with which they come into contact and not left to find out for themselves—sometimes at the cost of their lives.'

Employees at major hazard facilities and dangerous goods locations will also be better informed, through appropriate information, training and education. In all occupations, workers have a right to know what substances they are being exposed to and the hazards present. They need training and resources to deal with these under normal working conditions and in an emergency situation. This bill requires the occupier to consult with employees at the facility in carrying out risk assessments. Under this bill, employees will be better informed so that they know their roles and responsibilities in the event of an emergency and can carry out their duties and responsibilities safely.

Occupiers will be required to conduct a systematic risk assessment. The purpose of the risk assessment is to evaluate the health and safety risks to employees and other people arising from the exposure to the dangerous goods and hazardous substances used at the facility. Because of the complex nature of some industries, this bill is needed to ensure the safety of people, property, the environment and the community. Major accidents are capable of destroying lives, the environment and communities.

Occupiers are also required to consult with Emergency Services and people or property owners close to or in the vicinity of the facility. They have an obligation to consult with and provide information about safety measures to all people potentially affected by the hazards under normal working conditions as well as in a major accident. This bill also includes the obligation on the part of the occupier to inform people of the action to be taken in the event of a major accident.

This bill takes into account all stakeholders—the workers, the employers, the local community, the environment and emergency workers. Major hazard facility occupiers will be required to record a near miss, investigate the incident and consult with employees about avoiding major accidents. This bill is not only about preparedness for a major accident; it also focuses on the prevention of major accidents or incidents. It demonstrates this government's commitment to safer communities, safer workplaces and the protection of the environment.

The key to the prevention of workplace injuries and illness lies in the development of adequate safety management systems. When accidents occur, they come at an enormous cost to the worker, the employer and the community. This bill ensures that those workers who have the potential of exposure to dangerous goods, hazardous substances or combustible liquids are provided with information and training on the nature of hazards and means of assessing and controlling the exposure and that any other relevant person should have access to this information. This bill is putting working people and the surrounding environment of their workplaces first.

The third major area of this bill is the authorisation for a hazmat advisory service. It will provide a 24-hour service throughout Queensland. Advisers will provide advice and scientific technical help for the effective management of hazardous materials emergencies. Dangerous goods are used in many workplaces. If not handled correctly they have the potential to cause death, severe injury and damage to property and the environment. This bill gives power to authorised officers to enter a place without consent or a warrant if they reasonably believe a dangerous situation exists and it is urgent that the authorised officer enter to remove or minimise the danger.

This bill goes beyond addressing the safety of workers. It incorporates measures to ensure the safety of all stakeholders and certainly addresses concerns of the wider community. This bill provides for consultation by all stakeholders and was developed through consultation with industry and community

bodies and government agencies in Queensland. Once again we see the collaborative approach of the Beattie government and its commitment to providing safe workplaces and safe communities.

The bill provides benefits for workers, the surrounding area, the environment, emergency services and industry. Industry benefits as the bill removes barriers and promotes national uniformity. Emergency services benefit from the bill as it contains measures to reduce the possibility of major accidents occurring. Emergency services are provided with more information to prepare them for their role, both fir when the incident occurs and in the prevention of a major accident. Emergency services have more input into emergency planning and, therefore, higher levels of safe operations will be achieved.

I congratulate all the emergency service workers and I especially congratulate those workers in Logan. When I talk with the people of Springwood, they tell me that they want a safe and livable environment for their children and their children's children. This bill is providing that safety.

The Dangerous Goods Safety Management Bill imposes high penalties for breaches of safety obligations, with extremely severe consequences. It is a framework of responsible regulation, inspection and enforcement. However, I believe that it is important that we have ongoing review on the self-regulatory processes involved. I commend the bill to the House.
