



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 4 September 2002

ELECTRICAL SAFETY BILL

Mr CUMMINS: (Kawana—ALP) (4.01 p.m.): I am pleased to be here in Townsville for this very historic 50th parliament sitting. My mother in fact grew up here and went to the Railway Estate State School.

A government member interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes. In 1955, she topped the annual scholarship exam. My father worked here in the Townsville railway workshops and swam, I believe, with the Arcadia Surf Club. I am very pleased to contribute to the Electrical Safety Bill 2002. Queensland's incidence of electrical fatalities and safety regulatory performance have clearly established the need for new stand-alone electrical safety laws. It has been clearly demonstrated that there is a need for improved performance in the delivery of electrical safety services in Queensland and the need to reduce the incidents of electrical fatalities and incidents in Queensland work places and homes.

This bill is very significant. It introduces Queensland's first stand-alone electrical safety legislation to improve the state's electrical safety performance. The bill gives effect to the Beattie government's public commitment to introduce electrical safety laws to help turn around the unacceptable number of deaths and injuries arising from contact with electricity in Queensland.

Electricity is now used in all aspects of our daily lives and is an essential product in the modern world. It is vital to Queensland's current and future development. With increased use of electricity in a broad range of circumstances that would not have been thought of just a few years ago, Queensland needs a progressive legislative regime that addresses the circumstances under which electricity can be safely used both in work places and homes. The legislation must provide the flexibility for the introduction of new technologies and allow businesses to function and grow. Queensland is embracing the Smart State ideology, and new technologies and innovation is our future. This bill therefore represents significant reform of the legislative framework and standards for the safe supply and safe use of electricity in order to meet community standards and the needs of our society.

There has been extensive consultation in the lead-up to the development of this bill. Following the recommendations of two public reviews into electrical safety, the majority of recommendations of these reviews are now being implemented. I am particularly conscious of those Queensland families who have lost a family member in tragic circumstances and I hope that their pain and suffering can be eased. To those members of GRAVES—Group Requiring Action for Victims of Electric Shock—who have participated in consultation on the development of this bill, I give thanks on behalf of my community and also extend my deepest sympathies. They, like me, must be amazed at the comments of the opposition when suggesting that possibly non-qualified persons should be considered to be allowed to wire domestic homes. This is just not on. My question is: why does the opposition hate tradespeople? There will be an additional 22 new senior electrical inspectors to be employed, increasing the number of inspectors and specialist officers to 38.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: I shall quote the opposition—

All I am saying is that there are other places around the world which have a less stringent regulatory environment insofar as home wiring and repair of electrical equipment is concerned and which have lowered death rates.

The opposition is trying to do electricians out of job; it is a joke. These officers will undertake functions of authorised persons currently carried out by electricity distributors on behalf of the Electrical Safety Office and will create greater transparency and accountability for officers. I am advised that the Department of Industrial Relations will locate the new inspectorate statewide, with inspectors based in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, central Queensland, Wide Bay, the south-west, the beautiful Sunshine Coast, north Brisbane, south Brisbane, Ipswich and the Gold Coast. It is a result of intensive consultation in the lead-up to the bill that there is broad support for the legislative framework as outlined. I trust there will be continued strong participation of stakeholders with the implementation of the bill and support of educational strategies. I believe the bill will provide the safety and flexibility needed to foster growth in industry and help lead a reduction in the unacceptable number of deaths in industries, creating safer work places and safer homes.

In closing, in 1978 I began my working life as an apprentice electrical fitter mechanic—an electrician. I have met hundreds of tradesmen and women and I acknowledge that Townsville and north Queensland has hundreds, indeed thousands, of hard workers in all trades.

A government member interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, there are a few electricians on this side of the House. Having worked in the electrical trade for years, and having known a few who have died from electrocution, I assure the House that electricity is a vital part of modern day life, but we must be extremely careful and aware of its fatal abilities. I am a proud member of the ETU. I also point out to members opposite, realising that I do not believe there is an electrician amongst them, that AC power, or alternating current, does not mean that we get electricity every second day.

In closing, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I compliment the role you and your staff have played in this historic sitting of the 50th parliament. Realising the success it has been, I officially request that the beautiful Sunshine Coast be seriously considered to host the next regional sitting of the Queensland parliament. I know that the new Innovation Centre would be an ideal venue. I commend the minister—and indeed those earlier ministers involved in the legislative process—and the relevant staff. I commend the bill to the House.