



Speech by

DON LIVINGSTONE

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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ELECTRICAL SAFETY BILL

Mr LIVINGSTONE (Ipswich West—ALP) (3.36 p.m.): I rise in support of the Electrical Safety Bill. As a former electricity worker I am pleased to have the opportunity to play a role. I worked in the electricity industry at Swanbank for 17 and a half years. For a lot of that time I was chairman of the liaison committee for the workers in the electricity industry. One of the many jobs we had was to look at safety. Certainly over the years there have been a lot of problems.

I started in the electricity industry in 1969 and finished in 1987. During that time we saw some really horrific accidents. Most of those accidents could have been avoided. I recall that on one particular occasion in one of the power stations some people went into the switch yard to isolate a particular area for workers to come over and carry out some very urgent maintenance work. They isolated what I believe was section 5A and later the workers went over, put their ladders up and climbed up section 5B. As the powerlines were in the vicinity of 270kVa, I do not need to tell members the result. While it was certainly tragic for the person and his family, a lot of the workers that were left to pick up the pieces were certainly traumatised by the whole affair.

Safety in the electricity industry in those early days was nowhere near as good as it is now, but we need to continue to work on it. We regularly used to see people walking around dragging trolleys with steel wheels. They would regularly be running over the top of electrical lines where other people were working. That certainly left a lot to be desired.

I believe that this new legislation provides all Queenslanders with a comprehensive, balanced and long-awaited overhaul of electricity supply in this state. As part of this historic debate, I must commend all those stakeholders who contributed to the final result. It was so important that players large and small were encouraged to have their say, and so many did. Employees, employers, unions, industry, community groups and the families of victims of electrical incidents have made an invaluable contribution and have combined their experiences to create this bill, which will set Australia's best practice in the area of electrical safety.

As we consider this new bill today in this wonderful city of Townsville, we are indebted to all the stakeholders who have put so much effort into the legislation. I commend the minister, his staff and the departmental officers, because I understand how much work has gone into bringing this bill before parliament today. I congratulate the minister for the work he has done in such a short time in the job.

I turn to the code of practice developed in consultation with industry and now forming a key feature of this bill. We have all heard of codes of practice that are used in many areas of industry and business—for everything from quality control to work standards, ethical service guides and consumer needs.

Under the Electricity Safety Bill, a code of practice will provide practical advice on yet more ways of meeting electrical safety obligations. This code must be observed at all times, unless there is another method that achieves the same results or better. Obligation holders who do not meet or exceed the code of practice are likely to be failing to discharge an obligation and could be liable to a maximum fine of \$75,000 or two years' imprisonment. Therefore, from the time the legislation commences, everyone who carries out electrical work in this state needs to know that a

code exists and what it covers. The three codes will be approved by the minister when the bill commences. The codes are for: firstly, working near exposed live electrical parts; secondly, electrical work; and, thirdly, the supply industry. These codes will become required reading for obligation holders in the industry.

The proposed code for working near exposed live electrical parts will provide valuable guidance about meeting obligations for non-electrical workers, including carpenters and painters, crane operators and concrete pumpers, rural industry workers, transporters of high loads, repairers of electrical appliances and anyone who clears vegetation near overhead lines. The codes have been developed with national standards in mind and include, for instance, workplace health and safety processes and safe approaching distances. When we are talking about the electricity industry, we need to bear in mind how close people can get to wires. It must be realised that a person does not have to reach out and touch wires to be injured. If a person gets close enough to wires, the wires will arc and be attracted to them. When dealing with 275 kVa lines, people can get into a lot of trouble.

It is proposed that electricity workers be covered by the code of practice for electrical work and the code of practice for working near exposed live electrical parts. The code of practice for electrical work establishes a model for performing safe electrical work. It emphasises the practice of working de-energised and managing common electrical hazards. For those parts of the electricity industry, choosing to work de-energised will be a significant cultural change. Electrical contractors and electrical workers should become familiar with the code of practice for electrical work. Among other things, they should develop appropriate documentation—for example, safe systems for working live—and should become familiar with key management systems.

The third code for the electrical supply industry has been specifically prepared to give guidance to electrical entities on the safe management of earthing systems, underground cable systems and supporting structures for overhead lines associated with their work. Under the new legislation, obligation holders will be required to actively manage risk exposure. They will have to make significant decisions on how to conduct their own work. I commend the codes of practice to all obligation holders and I commend the bill to the House.