



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard 4 September 2002

ELECTRICAL SAFETY BILL

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (2.49 p.m.): I am pleased to take part in this debate and support the Electrical Safety Bill. This bill aims to eliminate the human cost to individuals, families and the community of electricity incidents and accidents. It represents a significant reform of the legislative framework for the safe use of electricity in homes and workplaces.

This bill directly addresses two of the fundamental electrical safety issues in Queensland: working with and near live parts. New regulations, as part of this bill, will mean that the electricity supply will have to be cut in almost all instances before a contractor can undertake electrical work in a home or a business. Tragically, in the past 10 years in Queensland, nine electrical workers have died while working on or near live electrical circuits. Many more have been injured. Unfortunately, it has become common practice in Queensland and in other states for electricians to carry out live work even in instances where it is not necessary that the work is performed with the power still on. A recent audit of 1,000 electrical contractors throughout Queensland found a high rate of unnecessary live work and an incomplete risk assessment of jobs involving live work.

The view that work has to be done this way to reduce inconvenience to consumers and businesses is becoming more prevalent as workplaces begin to complete globally and operate on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week schedule. This bill makes it very clear that anyone who carries out live work in contravention of the new safety provisions breaks the law. So if people carry out any live electrical work without taking account of the new state provisions, they are breaking the law.

It is imperative, then, that the industry be made safer for everyone: electrical contractors, customers and the broader community. Importantly, the bill does not prevent all live electrical work; rather, it imposes restrictions on live electrical work and allows it only in situations where it is absolutely necessary. The Beattie government recognises that in some situations it is not practical to turn off the power. In those cases, the employer or contractor will have to ensure that a written risk assessment is prepared to ensure that the work can be done safely. The situation where this risk assessment is applicable includes testing and fault finding and in special cases where isolating supply would cause a public risk, for example, while repairing traffic signals. The new legislation strongly places the safety onus back on contractors to ensure that electrical work is carried out using a safe system of work and also to ensure that electrical work is carried out only when the installation circuits are isolated.

The restrictions are designed to limit workers' and consumers' exposure to live electricity in an effort to reduce the risk of injury or even death. As I stated earlier, too many people—in fact, nine in the past 10 years—have died because they were doing live electrical work. These regulations relating to working with and near live parts are simply about saving lives. No business operation, no work venture and no electrical job is more important than human life. I strongly believe that these live work restrictions in the bill establish more broadly the framework that addresses directly the unacceptable level of electrical deaths and incidents in Queensland.

I would like to conclude by congratulating the minister on the comprehensive consultation that he undertook and on bringing forward a bill that addresses the serious problems that have been experienced in our electricity industry in Queensland. I am sure that, as all members have stated in this House, he deserves the highest commendation that we have a piece of legislation that will stand Queensland householders, businesses and workers in the electricity industry in good stead. Therefore, I strongly commend the bill to the House.