



Speech by

CARRYN SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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BUILDING AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (2.35 p.m.): The Building Amendment Bill 2003 addresses the incidence of drowning and near drowning of young children in domestic swimming pools. Approximately seven young children drown each year in residential swimming pools in Queensland. Another seven toddlers each year likewise suffer severe brain injury from falling into backyard swimming pools. Imagine the trauma for parents, carers and family members as a result of a child drowning. It would be horrendous. I am sure that honourable members all know somebody who has had this experience. The tragic fact is that most of these drownings could have been prevented.

The changes proposed in the bill will go a long way to improving swimming pool safety and reducing the number of toddler drownings. However, even the toughest legislation will not on its own prevent every drowning in Queensland. A crucial element in the equation is the appropriate supervision of young children near pools by responsible adults and carers. As members would know, we cannot legislate for appropriate supervision. Therefore, three matters need to be addressed. Firstly, the fencing requirements need to be as good as they possibly can be; secondly, there needs to be appropriate enforcement of the standards; and, thirdly, the level of public awareness needs to be increased.

I am pleased to say that the changes outlined in the House by the honourable minister, Nita Cunningham—and I acknowledge her presence in the chamber—do just that. By making five important changes, the lives of Queensland's youngsters will be made much safer under the Beattie Labor government. The first change which requires a sign to be installed on sites where new swimming pools are being built must be commended. Warning neighbours and passers-by that a pool is under construction alerts the parents, carers and others of the possible dangers that exist for young children in the area.

Secondly, local councils will now only be able to grant pool fencing exemptions if the occupant of the subject property has a disability which prevents the person from accessing the pool. For too long too many councils were issuing too many exemptions for pool fences. I am told that there are currently around 7,000 council-approved exemptions across Queensland. The third change to the requirements means that new swimming pools and spas on a deck or roof of a building will need to be fenced in accordance with the legislation. No longer will pool owners be able to leave pools and spas unfenced simply because they are attached to the house and, thus, are classified as part of the building itself.

Fourthly, the owner of a new residential swimming pool is to install a sign near the pool that details procedures to enable cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, to be undertaken. I believe that the sign will also provide the contact details for our emergency services. Certainly the 000 details are on a recently purchased sign bought from the local pool shop by my very responsible electorate officer, Mrs Ralda Reid. Ralda is a grandmother of a beautiful toddler and she is certainly mindful of safety around her pool when her grand-daughter visits. I was very proud to welcome Minister Nita Cunningham to Bribie recently to help launch the new laws.

Finally, the Building Act 1975 will be clarified so that the owner of an existing pool as well as the owner of a newly constructed pool must ensure that a complying pool fence is in place and maintained to appropriate standards at all times while the pool is filled with water.

In conjunction with the bill, it is also proposed that the State Penalties Enforcement Regulation 2000 will be amended to provide local governments with the power to issue on-the-spot fines for owners of pools that are not fenced or maintained to strengthen the local government's ability to enforce the pool fencing regulation. The issuing of on-the-spot fines as a result of an inspection program or a complaint lodged will act as a deterrent against non-conforming pool fencing and will ensure ongoing compliance and increased community awareness.

Recently, I read that there were some concerns expressed by some private certifiers about the inspection of pool fences. Let me say to them that swimming pool legislation has been around since 1991. They should know by now what constitutes a properly constructed pool fence. Some say that they do not want the responsibility of approving fences just in case something goes wrong. If they accept money for the job that they do, then they certainly should accept some of the responsibility.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you have heard me on numerous occasions talking about my involvement in the Caboolture Drug Awareness Team, of which you are a member, and of my desire—and yours—to make a difference to the lives of young Queenslanders by making our community a safer place.

Ms Keech: You work hard at doing that.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I thank the member for Albert. I know that these changes that have been made by the Beattie Labor government will make a difference to countless young people who will now be much safer.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Nita Cunningham, for again visiting Bribie Island in the electorate of Pumicestone recently to announce in that area the Beattie government's plan to protect toddlers and young children around swimming pools. The minister advises me that the Department of Local Government and Planning has prepared an extensive communications strategy to raise the level of awareness of pool owners and carers of young people of swimming pool safety, of the need to properly fence and maintain pools and of the need for constant supervision of young people around pools—even pools that are properly fenced. Therefore, I strongly support the bill and encourage all members of the House to do the same.