



Speech by

**CHRIS CUMMINS**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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**WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CUMMINS** (Kawana—ALP) (11.59 a.m.): The Workplace Health and Safety and Another Act Amendment Bill 2002 aims to ensure that the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 continues to provide for an effective, modern regulatory regime that meets the needs associated with the changing nature of the labour market and ensure that appropriate health and safety outcomes are achieved for all workplaces and that appropriate consequential amendments are made to the Electrical Safety Act 2002.

While the focus for workplace health and safety must always be on prevention, particularly through increasing knowledge and awareness of risks to health and safety and strategies for minimising these risks, enforcement activity has a direct link with the level of compliance with workplace health and safety standards and the incidence of injury and illness at work. The legislation must also provide the flexibility for the introduction of new technologies and for businesses to function and grow in order to meet community standards and the needs of today.

Workplace health and safety representatives are representatives of workers who play a key role in fostering cooperation and resolving health and safety issues in and around the workplace. It is not mandatory for every workplace to have an elected representative; however, an employer must permit the election of a representative if requested by workers at the workplace. The legislation requires the employer to appoint only one representative at the workplace, unless agreed otherwise between the employer and the employees.

In order to improve the quality of consultation at the workplace, the amendments will allow representatives to request approved training and require employers to meet the cost of it. The nature and length of the training will be prescribed by regulation, subject to further negotiation with the parties. Consideration will be made for recognising the current training representatives may have. Where there is a dispute regarding issues relating to representatives, including their training, the parties may refer the dispute to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for resolution.

Extensive consultation has been undertaken in the development of this bill. As a result of the consultation in the lead-up to the introduction of the bill, there is broad support for the legislative framework as outlined. Sunshine Coast workers and employers alike rightfully applaud the minister and his department, realising that a new WorkCover office was opened at Warana on one of our main roads, the Nicklin Way, which ensures good access. I am very pleased that the new state government office is in my electorate of Kawana and will also serve coastal areas. It was opened on 21 February this year. I compliment Tony Hawkins, the CEO, and the chairperson, Ian Brusasco—two fine men who came along with various local members to open the facility due to the minister's absence as a result of industrial relations issues.

Any death at someone's workplace is one fatality too many. I am a proud third generation railway employee. I began an electrical apprenticeship in 1978 at the tender age of 15. Sadly, I must confess that skylarking and practical jokes were then part of the workplace. In the first decade of my working life I did see many substantial positive changes to workplace practices. Workplace health and safety officers were employed after constant lobbying by numerous unions, something all workers should be very proud of achieving. Bill McCrea was one workshop safety officer. I know how conscientious and professional Bill was in his position. Bill has since retired from QR. I know that many members in this House enjoy Bill's and his family's friendship.

Improvement has been seen in Queensland's workplace health and safety record in recent years. Queensland's incidence rate for injuries requiring a week or more off work has dropped over the last four years from 18.3 injuries per 1,000 in 1997-98 to 15.2 injuries per 1,000 workers in 2000-01. This reduction in injuries can be directly attributed in major part to the effectiveness of the workplace health and safety legislative framework.

Although we are improving, there is no room for complacency. As I have said, every fatality and every injury at work is one too many. I believe that the bill represents the next significant milestone in reducing the number of deaths and injuries right across Queensland. I commend the minister and his department and commend the bill to the House.