



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard Tuesday, 9 November 2004

WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (9.32 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2004. Essentially, the bill's primary objectives are to improve the workers compensation benefits for injured workers and to ensure the continued effective and efficient administration of Queensland's workers compensation, electrical safety and workplace health and safety arrangements. Tonight members have spoken on a number of provisions in the bill, but I wish to speak on the provision that will ensure the removal of workplace registration requirements.

The Beattie government is determined to ease the burden of timely and costly paperwork for Queensland businesses. The issue of workplace registration requirements on businesses is a matter that has been raised fairly consistently with me by business groups in my electorate, particularly chamber of commerce groups and individual small businesses, which have constantly raised the concern with me. In taking their representations to the minister, I am delighted that the minister has ensured the removal of workplace registration in the bill before the House tonight.

Currently, the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 requires various classifications of employers to register details of their workplace activities for a fee of about \$33.50, plus they have to pay an additional \$10 or \$16 per employee, depending on the nature of the industry. This bill will remove the requirement on Queensland businesses to register with Workplace Health and Safety, benefiting over 47,000 Queensland employers. This is great news for Queensland. The savings of registration fees alone will effectively release \$7 million back to Queensland employers. In the manufacturing industry, 6,500 employers will save \$2.5 million and in the retail and wholesale trade industries, 23,000 employers will save \$3.5 million.

The imposition of registration fees has been a contentious issue for employers for many years. I am sure that many members in the House have had representations made to them by business organisations. For businesses currently registered with Workplace Health and Safety their registration will expire as of 1 February 2005.

Historically, workplace classifications are based on classifications going back 80 years that bear little, if any, relationship to the risks of injury associated with the workplace type. This issue has also been raised by business groups. As such, many workplaces are not treated equally, with approximately 34 per cent of all workplaces excluded from paying the fees, for example, banks, insurance companies, schools, hospitals, government agencies and the majority of the rural industry.

Registration and business information is recorded by both Workplace Health and Safety and WorkCover Queensland, resulting in a significant administrative overlap. Subsequently, employers are filling in two sets of different paperwork at their expense, only to have their information duplicated by the two agencies. The reduction in red tape associated with workplace registration will provide enormous relief to many businesses. Importantly, the removal of fees will also remove the inequitable position for those industries required to register their businesses.

Before commending the bill, I wish to comment on the minister's amendments that deal with trading hours. As a Gold Coast member, I welcome the fact that the Gold Coast has been excluded from the trading hours provisions. The Gold Coast is a great tourism area, particularly over the peak Christmas season. We are delighted that the minister has excluded the Gold Coast. I am extremely surprised that the member for Currumbin did not speak up for the Gold Coast as she is the Liberal tourism spokesperson. She did not comment positively on this amendment and the exclusion of the Gold Coast from that provision.

I invite all the residents of Brisbane to come to the Gold Coast and do their shopping on Boxing Day. I am sure that when they return to Brisbane and other areas on 27 December, they will still be able to go to the sales there, and we are delighted about that. We will invite them to the Gold Coast. I look forward to the Gold Coast enjoying profitable sales on Boxing Day. I commend the bill to the House.