



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 7 June 2006

TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT OF QUEENSLAND ROAD RULES) BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (8.11 pm): I am delighted to support this legislation before the House and commend my colleague, the shadow transport minister and member for Chatsworth, on introducing what is very timely legislation aimed at reducing the terrible and tragic unnecessary death of children who are inappropriately restrained in motor vehicles. Child restraints are not like hub caps; they are not there for looks and most times they require expert assistance when being fitted.

A friend of mine who was the owner of a baby shop undertook a very interesting exercise a few years ago working in partnership with a Queensland ambulance officer who was trained in fitting appropriate child restraints to the size of the child. They advertised this service publicly; I believe it was without charge. It was essentially a public service to raise awareness that, just because a person can buy a child restraint from a store and think they have hooked it up right, it may not in fact be appropriately fitted or be the right child restraint for that child at that point in their development. They were horrified at the number of cases of parents who did not know that they had inappropriately restrained their beloved child. These were parents who obviously loved their children—all parents do—but they did not know that despite their best efforts they had not appropriately restrained their children. From this small percentage of the population who did go along to this public service that they provided, they then found how many of them had inappropriately restrained their child with either the wrong restraint or the wrong fitting.

As has been noted, there is a good service provided by the Queensland Ambulance Service but there is very poor public understanding of the fact that the needs of a child in the restraint change over time and what that appropriate restraint might be also changes. It has been a while since there has been a proper public safety awareness campaign in this area to address what is anecdotally very poor compliance.

If it was not such a serious issue it would be amusing that the transport minister was outlining the different complexities in relation to finding the appropriate restraint for the child at various stages of their development. Why I say it would be amusing if it was not such a serious issue is that this goes to the heart of what we are saying: a lot of parents need expert assistance to understand what is the appropriate restraint, not only when the child is in their baby capsule but as they grow and they require other types of child restraints. There will be larger children under the age of seven who will not necessarily require a booster seat because of their stage of development and, as has already been noted by my colleagues, in such cases the appropriate child restraint will be a seatbelt.

The tragedy is that too many children who are restrained in child restraints, who their loving parents think are safe, are not. As we see from the explanatory notes to this bill, this amendment that the member for Chatsworth puts forward seeks to reduce the rate of child fatalities in Queensland that are a direct result of an unsuitable child restraint being used and/or being installed incorrectly in the vehicle. It aims to do this by ensuring that all parents or carers are given the best advice on selection, use and installation of suitable child restraints for their child and that any parent or carer wishing to have their child's restraint professionally installed can do so with the knowledge that the installation will be performed to the required standard by an accredited business.

The figures are quite telling. The RACQ found that 35 per cent of parents or carers indicated that they would never seek professional advice for the installation of child restraints, with 78 per cent believing child restraints are easy to install. I know that the transport minister laughed when I said that child restraints are not the same as hub caps, but unfortunately there are many people who think they are as easy to install.

Mr LUCAS: I rise to a point of order. I did not laugh. The honourable member is misleading the House. I find her a joke generally, but I did not laugh with respect to any contribution she has made here tonight. I did not laugh at her.

Miss SIMPSON: The minister's interjection is typical of his disdain for the issue we are bringing before the House which is one about child safety. He has chosen instead, in the typical bullying way of the Labor Party, to abuse me personally rather than address this serious issue of inappropriate child restraints. He chooses to attack me rather than look at the issue of inappropriate child restraints.

Mr Speaker, I know that you have talked about standards in this House and about how ministers should behave. I draw to the attention of this House that the transport minister tonight is indicating that he will ridicule people who say that this is good legislation. He will enter into personal ridicule rather than address the very real failure currently, not only in law but also in practice, with regard to appropriate child restraints in Queensland. A situation where children are dying due to inappropriate child restraints apparently is a laughing matter for the Labor government.

Mr LUCAS: I rise to a point of order. I find that grossly offensive. The honourable member suggested that this government takes the life of—

Mr SPEAKER: Are you asking the member to withdraw her comment?

Mr LUCAS: Yes.

Mr SPEAKER: The minister has asked you to withdraw the comment.

Miss SIMPSON: It was not a personal remark.

Mr Lucas: She referred to this government.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! You have been asked to withdraw the comment.

Miss SIMPSON: Could I have a ruling with regard to a reflection on the government as opposed to the minister?

Mr SPEAKER: Are you prepared to withdraw the comment?

Miss SIMPSON: I seek a ruling as to whether I have to withdraw an aspersion cast against the government.

Mr LUCAS: I rise to a point of order. I am a minister in this government. In the Joh Bjelke-Petersen defamation case, Nev Warburton was sued when he said that people in that government had their hands in the till on the basis that that identified cabinet ministers. Clearly it does. I resent that implication and I ask her to withdraw it.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Maroochy, I am asking you to withdraw it.

Miss SIMPSON: I note that this is a different ruling from previously but—

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Maroochy, I will tell you what we will do—

Miss SIMPSON: We will have a new ruling then, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: No, we will not. I will tell you what we will do from now on tonight. I have said before that I demand silence during ministerial statements. Do not laugh at me, please.

Miss SIMPSON: I am laughing at the minister, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Have a bit of respect. From now on I will have the same standards for the rest of this debate because you are complaining about the conduct of the chair. From now on there will be no further interjections. We will run it the way we run question time, thanks to you.

Miss SIMPSON: This Labor government is laughing at the issue of inappropriate child restraints by making personal attacks upon people who say that this is good legislation. This legislation is about addressing the gap that currently exists in legislation and in practice. As I noted before, when a very public event to raise this issue on the Sunshine Coast was conducted by a baby shop owner at that time, Mrs Marie Weh, and an ambulance officer particularly trained in this area, it showed clearly that a lot of loving parents cared about their children. However, when they saw the types of restraints they were using and how they were fitted they were horrified because the restraints were totally inappropriate. I do not think that it was because the parents did not care for their children but that they did not know.

I would respectfully disagree with the transport minister, even though he personally abused me earlier and then stood up in this place and took offence at my saying that the government was not acting on this issue. I would personally like to draw to his attention the fact that the system is not good enough. Children are dying because they were seated in child restraints but they were inappropriately fitted or they

were seated in the wrong child restraint. This legislation seeks to address the problem with regard to the need for the appropriate accreditation of people fitting these seats. I believe that parents who care for their children want good information.

It seems that more attention is paid to the toys that are in the sample bags at the Ekka than is paid to addressing this failure in law and administration of appropriately fitted child restraints in Queensland cars for our children. I say to the parliament: support this legislation. The current system is not working. This is a better way, but there needs to be a greater awareness of this issue.