



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Wednesday, 7 June 2006

TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT OF QUEENSLAND ROAD RULES) BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.26 pm): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I would like to welcome to the public gallery the Queensland Young Liberal President, Tim Rawlings.

I rise to offer my support to the Transport (Amendment of Queensland Road Rules) Bill. I would like to congratulate my colleague the coalition shadow minister for transport, Michael Caltabiano, on this bill—the 67th bill introduced by this side of the House. Only three months ago, on 13 March, we were reminded in the *Courier-Mail* that children under the age of 12 are now—from 1 April this year—compelled to wear life jackets in dinghies and other small boats in a bid to reduce the incidence of drowning in Queensland. Parents and operators will face fines if they do not ensure that children are properly protected. I would like to use the words of the transport minister in justifying these new laws in the *Courier-Mail*—

It's unfortunate that we need to regulate for something that should be common sense, but this is about protecting some people from their own actions.

Minister Lucas went on to say—

This is even more important in the case of young children who are dependant on the good sense of their parents or the person operating the boat.

However, it seems that if we change the word from 'boat' to 'car' this government suddenly says it does not have to legislate, despite the consistent evidence that more accidents occur in cars than boats. I notice we also have not heard that there was a problem with legislating for behaviour in the case of people having to wear life jackets and that the sorts of people who would not wear life jackets anyway would not buy the life jackets. We did not hear that argument from those opposite when that legislation was brought in, but suddenly it is different when we talk about car restraints.

It is the reasoning that Transport Minister Lucas gave in relation to boats that the Labor government may care to listen to when it comes to its senses and offers support for this bill: it may not be something that we should have to legislate for, but the safety of our children is worth specific legislation.

The policy behind the member for Chatsworth's private member's bill is simple: these amendments seek to reduce the rate of child fatalities in Queensland which are a direct result of unsuitable child restraints being used and/or installed incorrectly. The bill will ensure that parents and carers are given the best advice on selection, use and installation of suitable child restraints for their child and any parent or carer wishing to have their restraint installed can do so knowing the installation will be done by an accredited individual from an accredited business.

This bill will amend section 266 of the Transport Operations (Road Use Management—Road Rules) Regulation 1999 to create a legal requirement that all child restraints sold, hired and professionally installed in Queensland are by an accredited business with certified salespeople and/or installers.

The statistics produced by the RACQ in its 1999 report *Child restraint advice and fitting service* in Queensland were alarming to say the least. They have already been pointed out, but they are worthy of recapping. Forty per cent of parents and carers were not using the correct restraint for their under three-year-old's height and weight. Fifty-eight per cent of four- to seven-year-olds were in the wrong restraint and

94 per cent of parents believed incorrectly that adult seatbelts are fine for children under seven. Only 20 per cent of restraints were bought from specialist child baby stores—stores with employees who may not understand the proper specifications for restraints. Holden has conducted its own surveys which show that around 70 per cent of restraints are being used incorrectly or fitted wrongly.

In the April-May edition of *The Road Ahead* it is reported that during 150 Brisbane inspections the RACQ found that only a quarter of children aged four to seven were seated ideally in the right type of restraint and without fitting flaws. Even more alarmingly, one in every 10 toddlers was travelling in the front seat where seatbelts are designed to slow adult torsos. As a parent myself, I find these statistics frightening. Any measure put in place that will make these statistics less shocking and will make more children safe will gain my full support. RACQ Executive Manager of Traffic and Safety, John Wikman, recently said—

One of the most common mistakes we observed was parents thinking their child had outgrown a forward facing child restraint and was ready to use an adult seatbelt.

They couldn't be more wrong. Children should remain in either a booster seat or harness until at least 26 kilograms, when they can progress to an adult seatbelt.

Even then, they should stay in the back seat until they turn 12.

If we look at the situation in the United States we see that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children, with more than 1.5 million crashes each year. Recently Reuters reported that hundreds of thousands of American children are too obese to fit into their child car seats, leaving them at risk in the event of a crash. According to a report published in the journal *Pediatrics*, properly restraining toddlers in car seats reduces the risk of fatal injury by more than half. Nowhere in the current legislation that this bill seeks to amend is consideration or guidance given to the height and weight of the child, and I know that lots of members referred to that this evening. The height and weight of the child are the major factors in determining the type of child restraint that should be used for the child. The current legislation does not regulate the industry in any way. In fact, I note the comments of the member for Maroochydore about the fact that we look at the toys at the Ekka more than we look at the suitability of child restraints. As a result, there are no mechanisms in place to prevent the sale of unsuitable child restraints and to prevent the damage that can be done by them. Some industry regulation would have a positive effect on the effectiveness of child restraints in Queensland and would, most probably, dramatically bring down the number of related fatalities and injuries.

I note that, if this bill were passed, there would be related administrative costs, for example, for the training of staff to afford them accreditation. But no cost can be put on the probable saving of a child's life. Industry giants BabyCo and Bubs Baby Shop, together with the RACQ, have acknowledged this but welcome the bill. There is just so much confusion out there about which child restraints should be used and when and for how long. This bill aims to eradicate this confusion which is putting our children at risk. I commend this bill to the House and urge government members to support it as well.