



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard Wednesday, 7 June 2006

TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT OF QUEENSLAND ROAD RULES) BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (8.27 pm): It gives me great pleasure tonight to rise to support this bill introduced by the member for Chatsworth and shadow minister for transport, Michael Caltabiano. I congratulate him on preparing a document that is clearly based on common sense and, at the same time, provides security for our children and peace of mind for their parents.

There is not one member in this House who would argue the fact that the road toll in this state is increasing year by year. As such, no member can logically argue that a step to reduce that number should not be looked at seriously. If that step is based on proper research and provides an answer that is effective, there is no reason on this earth why it should not be implemented.

This bill clearly meets those standards and deserves to be passed by this House, but we can guarantee that that will not occur because this bill was not introduced by the government. It is as simple and as straightforward as that. Logic and reason has been thrown out the door because this government does not want to be seen supporting a member of the opposition and a reasonable bill before the House.

When one reads the bill one finds that very clear principles are enunciated. The current legislation only provides for a child up to the age of one to be restrained properly in a motor vehicle. By 'properly' I mean restrained by way of child restraint. Logically this bill goes to the next level by saying that children of two, three, four, five, six and up to seven years of age also need proper child restraints. This bill seeks to put in place a proper child restraint regime to protect the most vulnerable people in our community.

The second salient point is that a businessperson, as defined in the bill, must not sell or hire a child restraint unless that person has the accreditation required in the bill. Again, that is a protection mechanism. It is very clear and very simple. The parents of a child will then know that the person who has fitted the child restraint is qualified and accredited to do so. The bill also provides for protection for the person who actually installed the child restraint. It is very clearly a prudent step and one that ensures the child restraint is properly fitted at all times. If there is an argument that a child restraint being fitted by someone qualified to do so is an inconvenience to other people, whether family members or otherwise, well so be it. This House has an obligation to protect lives. That can on occasions put us in an unpopular position. This is the House's role. At times we have to make decisions that may be unpopular in the public arena. Be that as it may, that is the task given to us.

Queensland Transport's factually based evidence is that road crashes are the largest cause of child deaths amongst children, with six children under the age of six being killed and 312 being seriously injured whilst passengers in motor vehicles in 2004. Think about those statistics. They are frightening statistics for our young people. Every time we in this House hear of a child being killed or injured in a motor vehicle accident we cringe. We are terrified and particularly hate hearing of a child being injured or killed in a motor vehicle accident. No-one can deny that. The steps in this bill are perfectly logical and provide a safety net to a range of people.

There is not one parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister who would not put their hand on their heart and say that they would take all steps necessary to ensure a child who is in their care is in a

safe child restraint which is properly fitted and provides maximum protection. This bill is designed to provide education, to meet a need and to provide a means to ensure that a child restraint is properly fitted and is adequate.

The fact that a child restraint needs to be fitted by someone who is qualified is an obvious next step. We have to have somebody who knows what they are doing installing a child restraint. It is not, in my opinion, sufficient to have a parent with the best of intentions installing an apparatus that could theoretically be the cause of death of the child they place in that restraint.

As the shadow minister pointed out in his second reading speech, a survey found that 30 per cent of child restraints in south-east Queensland had one or more installation faults. Of those, 75 per cent would have life-threatening consequences in the event of a road accident. Here we have predominantly parents doing what they believe is the right thing but inadvertently putting their own children at risk. The intent of this bill is to reverse that trend and provide parents with an education and a point of call to provide them with assistance and support.

The same research showed that 35 per cent of parents and carers indicated that they would not seek professional advice in installing child restraints. Some 78 per cent believed that they were easy to install. Parents are acting with the very best of intentions and taking an action that they thought would be simple and straightforward. The end result could potentially be dire.

They are frightening statistics. Only 20 per cent of parents and carers purchased child restraints from a specialised baby store and only 15 per cent of sales staff seen by parents and carers were considered to be very well informed about the restraint's use and installation. Parents motivated by the best of intentions are placing their children at risk and in danger. The bill intends to provide these children with a child restraint until seven years of age, thereby putting them at less risk in a motor vehicle accident.

No-one disputes the necessity to protect children, particularly in motor vehicles, given the speed modern motor vehicles reach and given the fact that cars today are normally made of materials with less strength than yesteryear. The number of cars on the roads, the number of children in cars and the potential for accidents has multiplied to the point that this is a common-sense response. It is the next logical step.

We have an obligation to ensure that that step is taken and that we provide safety for the children of the future. To turn our backs on the provisions in this bill is to turn our backs on the needs of the children of this state. This government and this state cannot afford to do that. They are our future. Make no mistake about that. A child we put in a restraint in a car today may in 20 or 30 years time be leading this state. Our obligation is to ensure that we provide them with every protection.

This government has recently trumpeted an extra \$1 billion for education. I would have thought that saving the lives of children so that they can be educated would be equally important. If we save their lives then we can educate them. Saving their lives comes first and educating them comes next.

Are we going to see this government pass this bill tonight? Under no circumstances will that occur because it has been introduced by a member on this side of the House. Even though it reeks of common sense and logic it will not be passed. What we are simply trying to do is provide safety for our children, peace of mind for their parents, and education and knowledge for the public. I congratulate the shadow minister on this bill and commend the bill to the House.