



Speech by

Rosemary Menkens

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT OF QUEENSLAND ROAD RULES) BILL

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (9.32 pm): I am happy to support the Transport (Amendment of Queensland Road Rules) Bill 2006, and I acknowledge the shadow minister's efforts and concern for the safety of children in Queensland. The road toll is a major and ongoing concern and often it is the most vulnerable in our community who suffer the most. The member for Chatsworth quoted the very alarming statistic that in 2004 the largest single cause of child deaths across Queensland was road crashes. During that period, six children under the age of six were killed and 312 were seriously injured whilst passengers in motor vehicles involved in road accidents. These figures and the significant findings by the RACQ that up to 58 per cent of the current child restraints being used in Queensland are fitted incorrectly is the basis for this bill.

Tonight I have listened to a lot of speakers discuss their personal safety measures for looking after their children and use a lot of arguments to try to justify why this bill is not common sense. This bill is not about personal anecdotes, it is not about what honourable members or I do; it is about the finding by the RACQ that up to 58 per cent of the child restraints currently being used in Queensland are fitted incorrectly.

The main purpose of the bill is to 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 done so by an accredited business with certified salespeople and/or installers. Findings again by the RACQ note that a large number of parents or carers were not using the correct child restraint for the child's height and weight and that the Queensland Ambulance Service has found installation problems in more than half of all baby capsules that it has inspected. The shadow minister has very carefully documented the findings of the RACQ research and the Queensland Ambulance Service findings, and I certainly will not waste the members' time by repeating them. Those figures are horrific and are more than sufficient evidence that this bill should have the full support of all members in this House. I congratulate the shadow minister on acknowledging those concerns and making a genuine attempt to address this very serious situation.

I note the findings that show that child restraints are being used by most people. I heard the member for Mudgeeraba say that she saw most parents when they leave the child-minding centre put their children in child restraints. But in so many cases they are not the correct restraint for the child's height and weight. How do we know that they have been correctly installed in a safe manner?

There are two major changes proposed by this bill, which are an increase in the age for the use of suitably approved child restraints from the age of one year to the age of seven and to legislate that businesses selling child restraints must be accredited by Queensland Transport and that one or more staff must have an approved qualification to fit or install those child restraints. Currently, sections 264 and 265 of the Transport Operations (Road Use Management—Road Rules) Regulation 1999, which are based on the Australian Road Rules, require the wearing of correctly adjusted and fastened seatbelts by drivers of motor vehicles and passengers 16 years of age or over unless an exemption applies. Section 266 applies to passengers under the age of 16. If the child is under one year they must be restrained in a suitably approved child restraint which complies with Australian Standards 1754 and it must also be suitably

fastened and adjusted. However, if the child is at least one year old but less than 16, the current regulation states that they must be restrained in a suitably approved child restraint that is properly fastened and adjusted or occupy a seating position fitted with a suitable seatbelt properly adjusted and fastened. The driver is responsible for ensuring that this regulation is complied with or an offence is committed.

Let me say that all parents want their children to be safe. The utmost safety of their children is paramount to all parents—to us all. However, as has been pointed out, many parents are not fully aware of how dangerous some incorrectly fitted child safety restraints are or how dangerous it may be for a small child to be restrained by an adult seatbelt. There is nothing more horrendous for parents than for them to be involved in a car accident where they may not be injured but their children are, particularly when certain safety risks may have been alleviated. I have no doubt that many of those parents would be most surprised to learn that the restraint that their child was in may not have been correctly approved or was incorrectly fitted.

I note that on the Queensland Transport web site there is an excellent section on child restraints which outlines in very great detail the safety requirements for children in child restraint systems. These include the infant restraints for babies weighing less than nine kilograms, child car seats for children weighing up to 18 kilograms—and it is suggested that this would be about four years old—a child harness that is used with an adult seatbelt and booster seats that enable the child's head to be at a safe height. This information is excellent. I found it really interesting reading. I have to say that it was only in researching for this speech that I read this information. But then it has been a few years since I have had children. I can probably relate a bit more to what the member for Toowoomba South said about carrying children. However, this should be compulsory knowledge for all parents and carers of children.

I have no doubt that many parents are totally unaware of these requirements and are unable to access this information. One of the strongest points on that web site was Queensland Transport's recommendation that when choosing a child restraint parents must keep in mind that a child's age is only a guide and that weight is the most important factor. The shadow minister has also pointed out in this bill that the child's height is important. It is also outlined on this web site that no restraint will work properly or prevent injury if it has not been fitted in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. As there is no supporting legal compliance that these restraints be fitted in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction, I believe this bill outlines a very necessary piece of legislation that needs to be put in place.

It could be construed that the bill will introduce another layer of bureaucracy and red tape. There may be a perception that we are creating a situation where salespeople and installation agents may feel they are being unfairly targeted when they have to get a ticket or accreditation to do something they may feel they have been doing successfully for many years. Be that as it may, the safety of our children is a vitally important issue. Just as we have accepted blue cards as an essential criterion for the protection of children, so is this just as important, if not more so. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.