



Speech by

Simon Finn

MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY

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WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (12.25 pm): No Queensland worker should leave home for work never to return home as a result of a workplace fatality. Every year, almost 100 Queensland workers die in workplace incidents—and that is almost 100 too many. Additionally, over 30,000 Queensland workers suffer a work related injury or disease each year, equating to an extraordinary 577 Queensland workers seriously injured each week, or 82 serious injuries in Queensland workplaces every day.

While workplace injury statistics indicate a decline in the incidence of serious work related injuries, there is always more to be done. That is why this government is committed to continually promote safety in the workplace and to educate Queensland employers and workers about how to work safely. In particular, employers and workers in the manufacturing, transport and construction industries need to be focused on safety. It is those industries that respectively have the highest risk of injury, with the manufacturing sector of particular concern, where the risk of injury is almost twice that of the transport and storage sector, the sector with the second highest risk. Members will be aware of recent media attention on safety concerns in the transport and storage sector. Workers in the transport industry face specific challenges because, in many instances, their workplaces involve long-haul travel or working alongside busy roads.

Earlier this year I attended a seminar organised by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and leaders in the transport and storage industry to bring together employers and worker representatives to focus on how safety can be improved in the industry. Currently, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is also coordinating a task force to address safety concerns posed by traffic controllers. Anyone following media reports on road injuries will know that these workers are at greatest risk of injury or death as they stand by often busy roads and are subject to the safe driving practices of motorists, including abiding by speed limits around roadworks. These are two examples of the work being done by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland to improve safety in the transport and storage sector.

It should also be noted that approximately 5,100 of the 30,000 work related serious injuries and diseases involve young workers in the 15- to 24-year age bracket. This group needs to be a special focus of our workplace safety efforts.

This week is Safe Work Australia Week and across Queensland activities will be conducted focusing on safety in workplaces and reducing the rates of serious injury. The primary goal of this week is to raise awareness of workplace safety issues and to promote and recognise those businesses, employers and workers who show innovation and commitment to workplace safety. Major events will kick off today, with Queensland's first Work Safe and Return to Work expo at the Convention and Exhibition Centre. This expo has come about through a partnership of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, the Electrical Safety Office, the Workers Compensation Regulatory Authority, along with WorkCover Queensland, the Australian Industry Group, the Queensland Council of Unions and the Association of Self Insured Employers of Queensland. The expo will showcase excellence in industry and enable participants to learn about the innovative safety efforts of businesses and people who are leading the way in safety practice, policy, implementation and innovation.

Tonight, as part of the expo, will be the announcement of the 2009 Work Safe and Return to Work Awards. It is important to recognise high achievement across a range of safety issues, but an important focus needs to be on return to work. While it will be difficult to eradicate injury in the workplace, excellence in rehabilitation and ensuring that workers can return to work with their health restored as quickly as possible is critical to best practice in our workplaces.

Safe Work Australia Week goes further than recognising excellence; it delivers a program focusing on targeted safety issues. Today in Mackay there will be a rural field day, with safety ambassador Shane Webcke focusing on farm safety, which the minister spoke about this morning. Many members in this House will know that farms as workplaces can be quite unsafe, particularly when they involve the use of tractors or four-wheel motorbikes. Shane will be a great ambassador for safety in the farm as a workplace. Activities will also take place on the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and other places around Queensland.

With the alarming statistics of 30,000 Queenslanders sustaining an injury or illness every year and almost 100 Queenslanders dying at work, the target in Queensland workplaces must be zero harm. This government puts in a lot of effort, through Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, towards achieving zero harm. Delivering a safe, fair and just workplace relies on partnerships between government, business, workers, industry leaders and peak bodies to develop and implement best safety practices and, importantly, to help each other—competitors and colleagues alike—to deliver zero-harm strategies at their workplaces.