



Speech by

Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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BUILDING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (9.13 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2). The key focus of this bill is to implement the next stage of this government's pool safety reforms.

It is often said that one of the great Australian dreams is to own your own home. It may also be said that the great Queensland dream is to own your own home with a pool in the backyard. Queenslanders love the water. We love our lifestyle. But, sadly, the great Queensland dream can sometimes turn into a living nightmare. Sadly, families all around Queensland have been dealing with terrible tragedies involving children and swimming pools. What is worse is that some of these tragedies could have been prevented. There is no denying that these accidents can happen and may always happen. However, some of these accidents can be prevented. Even if this government through its pool safety reforms can prevent just one of those accidents into the future and save just one life, then these reforms have achieved something. The safety of our children is the key priority guiding these reforms.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, this bill represents the culmination of the Queensland government's swimming pool safety improvement strategy. It builds upon this government's previous reforms and seeks to introduce a nation-leading implementation and compliance scheme for a strategy designed to reduce the incidence of immersion injuries and fatalities. The reforms outlined in this bill will reinforce the effectiveness of swimming pool legislation and will help protect young children from the risks associated with residential swimming pools. These risks are real and they are often frightening.

As consecutive stages of our pool safety program have been rolled out and particularly through each legislative initiative that has advanced this strategy, this House has heard exactly how many children have died each year because of incomplete or inadequate pool fencing. To remind you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House, in the period from 1 January 2004 to 18 May 2010, 41 children drowned in Queensland swimming pools. Of these 41 deaths, 10 occurred in public pools, 33 occurred in in-ground private pools, two occurred in above-ground pools, two occurred in wading pools and one occurred in a homemade pool. Last year alone, we lost eight children under the age of five. Even these figures are dwarfed by the number of immersion injuries that present to emergency departments each year. Children who survive are all too often robbed of a lifetime of opportunity due to permanent brain damage.

In spite of such sobering statistics, these tragedies are not an inevitable part of Queensland's future. I wholeheartedly support this government taking decisive action to improve upon that record and promote the safety of young children around swimming pools. If this legislation, if this whole strategy, saves even one life, then it will all have been worth it.

As parents and carers are the first line of defence against an immersion incident, I am pleased to see that this government will promote supervision and vigilance as the primary means of ensuring a child's safety around swimming pools. Teaching children to swim as early as possible is an effective means of preventing drowning tragedies. In recognition of these facts, I am pleased to see that this state Labor government has more than tripled its funding for this year's summer safety campaign. The government's campaign will again remind parents that supervision and swimming skills are the primary forms of defence against an immersion incident involving a young child.

I understand that the opposition is supporting this bill but will move some amendments. I particularly understand that the opposition will move an amendment to make the pool safety inspection a condition of sale. From my background as a property solicitor, I have some reservations about the foresight that goes with that particular amendment.

Mr Gibson: No different from smoke alarms or the earth certificate.

Mr RYAN: Perhaps if the member for Gympie had spoken to the self-appointed champion of property conveyancers, the member for Kawana, who has often spoken passionately in this House in defence of property conveyance lawyers and also real estate agents, he would know that one of the primary aspects of property transactions is providing certainty to both buyers and sellers. One of the primary aspects of providing certainty to buyers and sellers in property transactions is to limit the number of options for people to get out of their contract. The priority of this legislation is to improve pool safety. The priority is not to create additional burdens and uncertainties for purchasers and sellers of residential property. So the obligation is correctly placed in this legislation on people to ensure that pool safety is improved but will not create additional uncertainties and burdens on people who are parties to property transactions.

Although I welcome the opposition's support, the particular amendment that will be moved by the member for Gympie poses some threat to the certainty surrounding property transactions for buyers and sellers and does not improve on the safety position in the legislation as it is drafted. Whilst I appreciate that some people may question the rigorous extent of these pool safety standards, it is critical that we place the safety of children first. It is important that this parliament now act to further improve pool safety as soon as possible. I take this opportunity to commend the minister, his staff and the department on their work in respect of the bill. With those comments, I commend the bill to the House and encourage all members to support it.