




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (4.14 pm), in reply: Firstly, I want to thank all members of this House for their valuable contributions to our debate on the Work Health and Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. This bill meets the government's election commitment to prioritise and improve work health and safety protections in Queensland. I am very pleased that we have been able to debate this bill during Safe Work Month. This is Queensland's annual awareness month that encourages all working Queenslanders to get involved in work health and safety.

This government believes that every worker has the right to go to work expecting to return home safely to their family and friends at the end of each day. When it comes to safety, many hands make light work. We all need to work continuously towards improving our workplaces, not just in Safe Work Month but every month. We believe in genuine consultation, cooperation and respect in the workplace. We also recognise the long-term benefits of providing safe and productive workplaces where everyone shares the responsibility for improvements in work health and safety to prevent work related injury and disease.

Queensland has a diverse workforce. It is comprised of workers from all different walks of life: young workers, workers from other countries, workers from non-English-speaking backgrounds, workers who, unlike most of us in this House, work every day in high-risk industries. The removal of the right for a health and safety representative by those opposite last term was a great shame. It was removing an important protection for all workers. Health and safety representatives are incredibly important in developing safety cultures in workplaces. That cannot be understated. They are ordinary workers elected by their peers, prepared to undergo specialist training to assist in identifying and managing safety risks in their workplace. Despite this valuable role, the LNP placed vulnerable workers at risk when they removed the ability of an elected health and safety representative to assist them understand risks associated with particular circumstances.

This bill will help improve safety protections for all workers, including young workers and workers from non-English speaking backgrounds. This bill, among other things, empowers a trained health and safety representative to prevent workplace accidents from dangerous workplace activities that pose a serious and imminent safety risk by giving them the ability to direct unsafe work to cease. This will allow workers to be supported and advised by more knowledgeable, trained representatives who are better placed to identify hazards and potential risks in the workplace. This change also restores consistency with the nationally harmonised model of work health and safety laws. In addition to empowering trained health and safety representatives to assist workers directly, the bill also allows health and safety representatives to request the immediate assistance of any person at the workplace, removing the unnecessary requirement for 24 hours notice. This amendment will improve safety in the workplace by providing immediate access to external representatives who can provide more detailed and informed support to at-risk workers.

In addition, this bill returns the meaningful role that work health and safety entry permit holders play in inspecting and assessing potentially unsafe sites, helping to prevent workplace injuries. It does this by allowing entry permit holders immediate access to a workplace where they have a reasonable suspicion that safety breaches are occurring. This government will not tolerate the misuse of work health and safety laws by any rogue party, whether it is an employer, an employee or a worker representative for industrial purposes. However, I remind this House that in many circumstances in many workplaces immediate access is critical. Accessing a worksite to prevent safety breaches from occurring or continuing can prevent serious injury or even prevent fatalities. There is a strong evidential base for reasonable right-of-entry laws. The national review of the national model work health and safety laws found there was considerable evidence that entry permit holders play a valuable role in securing improved work health and safety outcomes and provide substantial support for elected representatives at the workplace.

During the debate those opposite have once again tried to make a bill that will improve work health and safety protections for Queensland workers all about their ideological opposition to workers and their unions. Twice yesterday the member for Mansfield referred to a poll about interest groups that influence the Labor Party, the same poll where 53 per cent of people said property developers and 52 per cent of people said mining companies have too much influence over the LNP—more than any interest group has over Labor. This bill is not about polls, it is not about the LNP's opposition to employee representation, it is about the safety of the constituency in every corner of Queensland at every type of workplace. This bill is about safety in workplaces and ensuring that workers and their representatives have a meaningful voice when it comes to the safety of their colleagues and also the safety of themselves.

The requirement to notify is to allow, where appropriate, for the investigation of incidents and potential breaches in a timely manner. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland also uses notified incidents as an opportunity to build intelligence and an evidence base to assist workplaces with information and guidance and to assist with compliance and preventative measures to minimise recurrence. Some of this information is also published in safety alerts to raise awareness of particular hazards.

The incident notification requirements currently in the act capture a range of serious work related incidents. However, they do not account for a number of other injury types, such as serious work related musculoskeletal disorders and work related mental disorders. Work related musculoskeletal disorders continue to be the most commonly compensated work related injury in Queensland and right across all Australian jurisdictions. This reason alone justifies the need for increased information of these types of incidents to assist in targeting prevention activities, including audits. In addition, it is also going to assist Queensland achieving its milestone under the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-22 of a 30 per cent reduction in musculoskeletal disorders.

The bill also meets an important election commitment made by the Palaszczuk government to improve electrical safety for workers by reinstating an independent Commissioner for Electrical Safety and two supporting committees for electrical safety education and electrical equipment, which were removed by those opposite. Amendments to the Electrical Safety Act 2002 reinstate the position of the Electrical Safety Commissioner. As members may recall, this important role manages the Electrical Safety Board and its committees and also provides direct advice to the department and advice to the minister on electrical safety matters. The Electrical Education Committee and the Electrical Equipment Committee, which were shamefully abolished by those opposite in 2012, are also reinstated by this bill. Those committees play a vital role in giving advice and making recommendations about the promotion of electrical safety in workplaces and in the broader community, and about the safety of electrical equipment.

Overall, the provisions in this bill meet the election commitments made by the Palaszczuk government to improve safety for all working Queenslanders and also employers. Despite the member for Coomera's suggestion that our election commitments are made for the union movement, we on this side of the House have listened and have certainly developed our policies with the people. We took our policies and ideas to the people. Do you know what? They supported us. We believe in a workplace environment that relies on genuine consultation and on cooperation and mutual respect between employers and workers to improve health and safety and to ensure everyone goes home safely to their family and friends at the end of every day. I commend the bill to the House.