




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

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WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KING** (Kallangur—ALP) (9.29 pm): I rise to support the Work Health and Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I am sure that I am not alone in this place in my feelings that even one workplace death is too many. In fact, at the International Workers' Day memorial this year in Brisbane on 28 April, we remembered 41 workers who have died at work since the beginning of this year. That is 41 deaths this year to 28 April. Last year 185 workers lost their lives at work. No-one should ever go off to work with any other expectation than to return home to their families safe and in the same physical and mental condition as they left.

Under the previous government, the rights of an HSR, health and safety representative, to direct work to cease if he or she had a reasonable concern that a dangerous situation could occur were removed. I have, as previously stated in this place, spent the majority of my working life in the electricity supply and mining industries, working predominantly on high-voltage equipment and apparatus. In these industries the role of an HSR is vital not only to the wellbeing of workers but also to help the company avoid system and equipment failures when and if an error in judgement occurs. They are the eyes on the ground, making sure that their workmates' lives, health and safety and the security of the electricity supply network is not compromised. An HSR is a trained role—that is, an HSR undergoes a training package which explains the requirements of the role and the responsibilities which come with the role.

Within the electricity supply industry, the role of high-voltage switching and access is without doubt one of the most dangerous elements of work and, although highly regulated and prescribed, incidents can and occasionally do occur. We have a saying in the industry, 'Keep your focus on the job because one flash and you're ash.' When performing high-voltage switching, it is not time to be thinking about what is happening on the weekend. It is a critical task that requires the highest concentration and focus. If an error is made, not only will lives be lost but also the impact on our state's electricity network and consumers is dramatic when transmission incidents occur, particularly now the requirement for N-1 was removed by the previous government. N-1, for those who do not know, was a redundancy built into the network so that outages to allow maintenance could occur and minor feeder and substation faults could be absorbed while allowing supply to continue in most cases.

I have been an HSR in the industry and on numerous occasions over the years I have had to ask for work to stop before an incident occurred. Under the legislation before the House, an HSR will always still be required to consult the person in control of a business or undertaking prior to issuing a direction to cease work, unless there is an imminent safety risk where the consultation must occur as soon as possible after. This will address any concerns about rogue actions from health and safety representatives. The person in control of a business or undertaking can also direct a worker to carry out other suitable tasks until the safety concern can be addressed, which will address concerns about using safety as a scapegoat to avoid work. An HSR will also be able to seek assistance from a workplace health and safety entry permit holder in limited circumstances without a 24-hour notification period.

Let's talk about the 24-hour waiting period. Investigations into breaches of workplace health and safety should be immediate like any investigation and anyone responsible for conditions or actions which could harm a worker should be held to account. Imagine the police called to a road accident where there is a fatality and told they have to give 24 hours notice to investigate! That would be ludicrous. This change to the role of workplace health and safety representative is not going to do anything except promote health and safety in the workplace, and for the life of me I cannot understand why anyone would oppose legislation which enhances the safety of workers.

On the reinstatement of the role of electrical safety commissioner, the people of Queensland lead the way in adopting the benefits of electricity. Indeed, this very building was proudly the first parliament house in Australia to have electricity connected—that was in 1886. Almost 140 years later the people of Queensland continue to lead the country in adopting new and emerging technologies for using and making electricity, including the exciting new opportunities for electro technologies such as solar, wind generation and battery storage. These technologies will challenge our traditional outlook on our electricity supply industry and, during this technological transition, Queensland needs informed oversight to ensure that electrical safety is not lost or diminished.

I am proud to be part of a government that will re-energise the role of the Commissioner for Electrical Safety, to give oversight and direction to the Electrical Safety Act, which is an important piece of Queensland legislation directed at reducing the human cost of electrical accidents by Queenslanders in their homes, workplaces, businesses and the community.