




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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**FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (DOMESTIC SMOKE ALARMS)  
AMENDMENT BILL; FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (SMOKE ALARMS)  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.23 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016. I am grateful to be part of a government that takes real action in making Queenslanders and Queensland a safer place. This bill recognises the importance of ensuring Queenslanders have the best possible chance of escaping a residential fire. As a former paramedic—and I know the member for Barron River, who was in the fire service and the ambulance service in Victoria, and the member for Burdekin, who was a police officer, can also attest to the following experience—I have witnessed firsthand the horrific scenes an emergency service officer is faced with when attending a house fire where people have been badly burnt, injured or, worse, die as a result of a house fire. They are, indeed, challenging and emotional scenes for all involved.

I have trained over the years with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services in self-contained breathing apparatus as part of my role in the QAS. After experiencing taking patients out of burning houses and over the past two decades treating way too many burns victims, I can say that, when you are faced with someone screaming in pain with their skin hanging off, that is the kind of thing that stays with you forever. We should do all that we can to reduce these horrific incidents. I would not do a firey's job for the world, whether it is rural, auxiliary or full-time. They are the ones who go into burning structures, and I commend every single one of our Queensland Fire and Emergency Services staff for the job they do in looking after our Queensland community.

We must acknowledge the fine work of our hospital staff, whether they are in the ICU or are paramedics, particularly those staff in burns units throughout the state. There is no doubt that this bill will save lives. In Townsville, which takes in the Thuringowa and Mundingburra electorates, the Townsville fire service responded to 285 residential house fires from late 2011 to late 2015 which resulted in two fatalities. That is two too many and there were many more significant injuries as well.

Let us fix this. Let us do our measured best as a responsible government to reduce the risk of house fires. This bill mandates that from 1 January 2017 newly built or substantially renovated homes will install photoelectric smoke alarms that are interconnected and positioned in every bedroom, between areas containing bedrooms, in any hallway servicing bedrooms and in any other storey of a residential dwelling. As we know, that is where these things start.

Another key feature of this bill in ensuring the safety of Queenslanders is the immediate replacement of ionisation smoke alarms with photoelectric smoke alarms. From 1 January 2017 a photoelectric alarm will need to be installed whenever a smoke alarm is replaced or a new one installed. These alarms are better at detecting slow-smouldering fires, which are generally the fires that lead to deaths in homes. I hate numbers, but there have been 68 deaths in the last four years across

Queensland. The fire service across Queensland responded to over 8,000 residential and structural smoke incidents across our state. Let us put the numbers aside—no, we should not because they are important: it is people who have succumbed. Let us just get on with making good policy. These alarms are more reliable and less likely to produce false alarm activations. The Queensland Fire and Emergency Services strongly supports the installation and use of those photoelectric smoke alarms.

If this bill is passed, all homes that are leased or sold—that is, at the time an accommodation agreement or contract sale is entered into—will be required to install photoelectric smoke alarms, interconnected and positioned in every bedroom, in any hallway servicing bedrooms and in any other storey of a residential dwelling. Commencement of this provision gives landlords and those people selling their home lead time to implement the changes to their homes. We have heard concern about the lead time, but just liken it for a moment to the pool safety laws that have occurred over a number of years in Queensland. It has taken a number of years for people to take that up, and I can see exactly where we are going with this particular bill.

It is estimated that rental properties comprise approximately 30 per cent of housing in Queensland and that sold homes comprise approximately six per cent of housing each year. Compliance after five years ensures that a significant portion of the homes in Queensland provide occupants with the earliest chance of escape from a house fire. For all other homes in Queensland, compliance reflects the requirements under Australian standards for smoke alarms to have a life span of at least 10 years, as well as the recommendation by all fire agencies to replace smoke alarms every 10 years.

Whilst 10 years seems like a significant amount of time, it has been designed to cater for the financial needs of home owners as well as adjustments to the supply and pricing of smoke alarms and services. The 10-year implementation time frame provides families with time to financially plan for and take into account any costs involved in complying with the provisions contained within the bill. This 10 years also gives manufacturers and retail outlets time to adjust their supply and pricing without undue commercial harm arising from the changes.

It is expected most home owners would progressively update their smoke alarms within a 10-year period naturally as their useful life expires. Therefore, providing time for compliance with the new provisions allows scope for this to occur as replacement of alarms is required anyway. In this way, the cost and inconvenience caused to home owners is reduced. The government remains committed to the safety of all Queenslanders but is also mindful of the impact that implementing the full coroner's recommendations will have on the families of Queensland, and that is why we have a phase-in period of 10 years.

This government is also implementing the changes to social housing and government employee housing properties within five years. I commend Minister de Brenni for his stance on this. The state's approximately 72,000 government owned homes will be installed with the photoelectric smoke alarms that are interconnected and positioned in every bedroom, between areas containing bedrooms, in any hallway and in any other storey of a residential dwelling.

I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to reducing the risk of death from fires in the home and keeping Queenslanders safe. I commend the bill to the House.