




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2016

MOTION: CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY, INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATIONS

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumba—ALP) (6.14 pm): I rise to speak against this motion and in support of those Queenslanders who, like these workers on the Sunshine Coast University Hospital site, take protected industrial action to protect themselves. Let me reiterate that there are no orders on this site. I rise to speak in favour of an industrial relations system that is based on a cooperative approach, not the combative and divisive approach adopted by the ABCC and the LNP.

Let me start by saying that we can always expect Queensland workers to take action to protect their rights and to protect their lives. All too often Queenslanders who work on construction sites do have to take action to protect themselves from injury or death because Queenslanders are dying on construction sites at a rate that is unacceptable. I talked to Andrew Ramsay from the CFMEU and Eddie Bland, a CFMEU organiser who lives in my area, about this issue. Their stories about workmates who have been severely or fatally injured on worksites make you realise how potentially dangerous construction sites can be. Andrew and Eddie told me the story of a major infrastructure project in Brisbane which endured three fatalities during the construction phase. One worker was fatally crushed when a beam he was cutting fell on him. There was a near fatality at a major infrastructure project in my area. A worker put his head into a lift well and his skull was almost crushed by a lift that was operating.

These are horrific stories, but the statistics on construction fatalities are even more horrifying. From February 2008 to April 2016, there were 74 construction fatalities in Queensland—74 deaths between 2008 and 2016—yet none of these 74 fatalities was on a unionised site. The prevention of workplace fatalities on construction sites like the Sunshine Coast University Hospital is what many do not hear about construction unions. Let me outline just how they prevent injuries and fatalities on sites such as this. They train health and safety reps in keeping sites safe and what to look for. They form safety committees on sites. They hold regular meetings. Delegates and organisers do site inspections and walk-throughs and advise builders and contractors on safety problems they have discovered. They use iPads with a specialised app to record any hazards. The CFMEU arranges training for many workers for a certificate IV in workplace health and safety. This range of proactive actions to prevent fatalities is why we need unions, business and government working together in a cooperative model.

People should have the freedom to negotiate and reach agreement on whatever workplace outcome they want, but this freedom would be severely curtailed by the ABCC. The Turnbull government still wants to adopt an adversarial model and prosecute and pursue those unions through the ABCC. If reintroduced, this body would make no productivity gains. If it were brought back, unions fear fatalities would actually increase, as they did under the previous incarnation of the ABCC. If brought back, the ABCC would have unchecked, broad coercive powers, and these powers are stronger than those provided to even the state or Federal Police to compel workers to give evidence. There is no right to silence or representation by a lawyer of their choice.

Ironically, this is a body that is supposed to pursue lawlessness; yet in Victoria not one criminal conviction was recorded as a result of its information over its seven years of existence. In those seven years there were 255 deaths in Australia on construction sites and 356 deaths within the construction industry. Now the federal government wants to sideline workplace organisations that have an unparalleled record in preventing workplace fatalities. Instead of pursuing an ideological agenda, the federal government should adopt a cooperative workplace model to stop injuries—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr WHITING: It is very ideological—at sites like the hospital, as the member says. The reason is, and I repeat it: there have been no fatalities in Queensland at CFMEU sites since 2008, while there have been 74 deaths on non-union sites. In my inaugural speech I said that I wanted to address fatalities at construction worksites, and I am speaking here tonight as a step to address this. I oppose this motion. I want to highlight how the ABCC will not lower rates of injury and fatalities but how a cooperative workplace model will save the lives of workers.