




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

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

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (9.55 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016. Before I start I wish to make mention of another very similar bill before the House tonight: the LNP introduced Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2015. I would like to go into the background of why these two bills are even being debated. As has been mentioned by other members who have spoken previously in this debate tonight, around five years ago in August 2011 the greatest loss of life in a domestic house fire in Australian history tragically occurred. The fire started on the ground floor of a house in Slacks Creek. Tragically, eight children and three adult lives were lost. It was too tragic for words. After a coronial inquest was conducted in November 2014, it was found that smoke alarms were either not present or not maintained in the Slacks Creek residence. Two smoke alarms were found in the upstairs section of the house, however, sadly neither were working. It was further found that, had the alarms been working, there was a possibility that some, if not all, of the victims may have survived.

This tragic event rocked Brisbane, South-East Queensland and in fact Australia, to the core. How could something which may have been prevented through the use of smoke alarms have happened? The coroner recommended that as a minimum in all areas of a building where people sleep approved smoke alarms should be installed and that installation should occur in a staged approach. I accept, along with many members, that both bills before the House today implement the transition from ionised to photoelectric smoke alarms in domestic dwellings in Queensland. There is a practical distinction between the two approaches. The LNP bill provides the simplest and easiest transition process to deliver those changes and, importantly, in a much more timely manner. The greatest concern that I have, along with many of my LNP colleagues, is that having a 10-year phase-in period as the government bill proposes will obviously delay this important community safety measure for a decade.

The member for Waterford has already acknowledged the great advocacy work of Louie and Christine Naumovski from the Logan House Fire Support Network. I admire them greatly for what they do, and they are here in the gallery tonight. During a public hearing on 24 February this year, Louie stated that there were 1,908 house fires in Queensland last year which tragically resulted in 23 deaths. He further reinforced that a 10-year phase-in period could result in a further 20,000 house fires—20,000 house fires—and more than 230 deaths. Mr Naumovski stated the following at the public hearing on 24 February about the transition time frames, and I believe his words are worth quoting in the debate tonight. He stated—

With the new bill that was introduced yesterday—

the 2016 bill—

which would have a 10-year phase-in, we are looking at a further 20,000 house fires and over 200 deaths. If we had any other incident like this in this state, legislation would be passed so quickly with fewer fatalities. Some 230 Queenslanders could potentially die over the next 10 years.

Therefore, the priority for the LNP is to transition domestic dwellings from ionisation smoke alarms to photoelectric smoke alarms—there is no debate about the efficacy of photoelectric smoke alarms—as soon as possible. We on this side of the chamber would like to see a staged transition—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! Could I ask members to keep their conversations to a minimum. This is quite a solemn issue and I think every speaker deserves the respect of being able to be heard.

Mr MINNIKIN:—in accordance with the recommendations of the coroner, which would see dwellings with ionisation smoke alarms that comply with the law prior to 1 July 2016 replaced with photoelectric smoke alarms within three years. Furthermore, for dwellings with no smoke alarms complying with the 2015 bill on 1 July 2016, the owner must install a compliant smoke alarm before a transfer of the dwelling, at the end of an existing residential tenancy or rooming agreement or by 1 July 2017.

The government's bill, however, mandates that all alarms be interconnected and that smoke alarms be installed in each and every bedroom of a domestic premises, thus making it obviously a more time-consuming and costly exercise. By contrast, the LNP bill does not mandate that they be hardwired. Most importantly, home owners would have the option of hardwiring or using nine-volt 10-year lithium batteries. Home owners would simply have a choice.

History tells us that the harder and more expensive laws are to comply with, the less effect they will have as they will not be taken up on all occasions. This being the case, if the average Queenslanders cannot afford to obey the law then they are more likely to ignore the law. To me as a legislator, this makes the government's proposed law rather redundant. There is a golden law that we all learn at university in student politics, the politics that goes back to the ancient Greeks: do not legislate what you are not prepared to enforce. Despite the fact that smoke alarms are already required in Queensland, sadly there are still homes that do not comply with the current legislation let alone all of the requirements the government would like to introduce via their bill.

Moreover, if the government had just supported the LNP bill when it was introduced it would have already commenced, as at 1 July 2016, rather than being dragged out longer and longer. Having said that, I am hardly surprised given the 18-month track record of the Labor government.

Tonight all members in this chamber agree on one thing: saving lives. That aside, while I support the legislative move of both bills to see ionisation smoke alarms replaced with photoelectric smoke alarms, as a result of the evidence tendered to the committee I do not support a 10-year phase-in; nor do I support having each and every smoke alarm interconnected within a property.

My seat of Chatsworth is a typical middle-ring suburban electorate with a large, broad residential subdivision. The people in my electorate want to protect their families and their properties. Surely, the Labor Party could ditch the political games and introduce sensible, practicable and, most importantly, timely legislation in order to save precious lives. If we truly want to save lives in Queensland, we need to have more households with compliant and working smoke alarms sooner. This is why I cannot support the Labor government's bill and do support the private member's bill.