




Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2016

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

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (7.51 pm): I move—

That the Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill be now read a second time.

I rise to speak as part of the cognate debate on the Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2015 that was introduced by my colleague the member for Kawana when he was the shadow minister for this portfolio and the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016 introduced by the minister. For ease of reference I will refer to each bill as the LNP bill or the government bill.

Before we go into the details of both bills and the rigour of the debate, I think we should all acknowledge the tragic circumstances in which this subject is being debated. In fact, it was only last week that we commemorated the fifth anniversary of the Slacks Creek house fire, an horrific fire event in which, sadly, 11 people passed away including eight children under 18 years of age. This was the greatest loss of life in a domestic fire in Australian history.

In November 2014 the coroner who reviewed this tragic fire event found that smoke alarms were either not present in the dwelling or were not maintained. Two smoke alarms were in the upstairs section of the house; however, neither was working. He also found that had the smoke alarms been working, there was a reasonable prospect that some or all of the victims could have escaped.

The coroner held three public hearings and the subsequent report, which was published on 28 November, identifies the cause of the 11 deaths including when, where and how they died; the response of the emergency services; the circumstances surrounding the deaths, particularly the cause of the fire and any factors that may have prevented the deceased persons from escaping the fire; whether any accommodation issues contributed to the circumstances in which the deaths occurred; and any actions that may be taken to help prevent deaths in similar circumstances occurring in the future.

To understand the importance of this issue—and it is a very important issue of community safety—I want to read a short passage from the coroner's report which describes the events of 23 August 2011 in Slacks Creek. It states—

A few minutes before midnight on 23 August 2011, a fire started on the ground floor of the house occupied by the Taufa family and Lale family at 60 Wagensveldt Street, Slacks Creek, Queensland. The first of twenty three ... '000' emergency calls was made to emergency services at 12.04am on 24 August 2011.

The Queensland Fire and Emergency Service ... crew at Woodridge Station were notified of the fire at approximately 12.05am. They arrived at the scene at 12.11am. By the time they arrived at the scene, police were already in attendance and the house was already fully engaged by the fire.

Eleven people lost their lives including eight children under 18. The deceased were: Fusi Taufa, aged 57; Teukisia Lale, aged 42; Anna Taufa, aged 23; Jeremiah Lale, aged 17; Lini Paul Lale, aged 17; Adele Lee, aged 15; Jeanette Lale, aged 13; Selemafi Lale, aged 9; Richard Lale, aged 7; La'haina Taufa, aged 6; and Kalahnne Taufa, aged 3.

As we debate the importance of smoke alarms and the best way to improve smoke alarm use in Queensland homes, we should also consider these 11 people who tragically lost their lives because they were either unaware or ill equipped to deal with a major domestic house fire. It is clear that both sides of the House support the need to increase awareness and use of smoke alarms in Queensland. Where we differ is how we do that and the best way to do that. I am pleased to see that the government followed our lead on this issue and in response to the recommendations of the coroner's report into the Slacks Creek house fire.

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, which considered these bills, could not agree that each bill be passed. They did make five recommendations though, namely: (1) the committee concurs with the majority of evidence from the many stakeholders and endorses interconnected alarms; (2) the committee recommends an alarm be powered by a prescribed regulation and be either hardwired or have a nine-volt, tamper-proof lithium battery with a 10-year warranty; (3) the committee recommends smoke alarms be located in accordance with the requirements set out in AS 1670.6 and as a minimum be installed in each bedroom of the residence; (4) the committee recommends the lessor check alarms at least once each calendar year and within 30 days before any new tenancy; and (5) the committee recommends the installation of time frames be provided for in accordance with the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016.

The reason we support our bill over Labor's bill is that we believe that it is important to have an affordable transition process that encourages Queenslanders to take up photoelectric smoke alarms over the older ionised alarm type. While many of the advocates who support these changes believe that cost should not be a factor when it comes to saving your life and the lives of your family, which is a good point, when governments bring in any new legislative and regulatory change it is important to consider the costs because often they can be one of the barriers for people. I make that point because Labor's bill increases the number of smoke alarms that are required in a domestic dwelling. As the case stands now, the requirement is that smoke alarms must be situated between the bedrooms and the rest of the house, in separated sleeping areas and on every storey of a multilevel dwelling.

While Queensland Fire and Emergency Services recommend that they be installed in every bedroom, it has never been legislatively required until the introduction of Labor's bill. Whereas in the past some homes may have needed just two smoke alarms, Labor laws will now require that they have at least five or six. We are not saying that this is a bad thing, but it needs to be done in a way that does not complicate the transition to photoelectric smoke alarms and does not make it harder for Queenslanders to comply with the new regulations. On top of that additional cost, it is also mandated that the smoke alarms be interconnected. For some people that could also mean purchasing alarms that wirelessly connect to one another, but for others it could mean hardwiring them, so there is a further additional cost of calling in an electrician. The LNP bill encourages home owners to interconnect but does not mandate that it must happen. If you make it too hard and too burdensome for people, they will not comply and put it in the too-hard basket. This issue is far too important to risk that happening.

While some of the other recommendations of the coroner's report are important, we believe that ultimately the first priority must be about transitioning Queensland homes to photoelectric smoke alarms, and the most affordable way to do this is through the LNP bill. We also think that a 10-year phase-in period is far too long. It gets the balance completely wrong. This is an issue in the here and now. We do not want to see another debacle like we saw with pool fencing, where there was such a long lead-in period that most Queenslanders forgot about it and, when the deadline came around, everybody was rushing around to madly comply and there was a backlog because the pool fence assessors were overbooked. We support the merits of an education and awareness campaign, but the timing of that campaign is crucial. From what we can ascertain, it seems that there is a 10-year education and awareness campaign planned which is spreading the funding too thin and over too long a period.

While I do not want to politic too much over this important community safety issue, from our point of view it is extremely disappointing that it took the government so long to act on this issue and respond to the 2014 coroner's report. Rather than simply introducing another bill and dragging out this process, the government could have just come to us and sat down to work out amendments to our bill if we were agreeable.

There are some people I want to acknowledge and thank as part of this debate. They are strong community advocates on this issue. Many people would be aware of, and probably know, Louie and Christine Naumovski from the Logan House Fire Support Network. The member for Kawana tells me

that the LNP bill and our support for these important changes stem from a meeting that Louie and Christine and the mayor of Logan, Luke Smith, had with the former shadow minister Jarrod Bleijie and Lawrence Springborg last year. The LNP were more than happy to take up this important cause. Despite the result tonight, if it was this meeting and our private member's bill that instigated these changes, we are proud of the fact that the community will be better protected from a fire event as a result. It is a well-earned saying that smoke alarms save lives, but it is so true and a core foundation of the coroner's report into what happened in Slacks Creek in August 2014.

I also acknowledge the advocacy of Sunshine Coast man Keith Golinski. Keith's daughter-in-law Rachel and three granddaughters Sage and Willow, twins aged 12, and Starlia, aged 10, tragically died in their Tewantin home on Boxing Day 2011. I table a photo of those four people and the tribute that was given to them on the back of this as a tribute to them and in memory of them as a reminder of why we are tonight trying to introduce these laws.

Tabled paper: Photograph depicting Rachel, Willow, Sage and Starlia Golinski and containing a tribute to them from a family friend [1419].

Like the deaths of the families in Slacks Creek, this is a human tragedy that leads up the fight to ensure that Queenslanders are better protected and safer in their homes. The coroner's report on the Golinski tragedy, which was released in November 2015, again pointed to the findings from the coroner's report into the Slacks Creek house fire and the importance of these reforms. We honour and pay tribute to the Golinski family as well tonight as we debate these important changes. Keith Golinski, with Louie and Christine Naumovski, have been community advocates for these important changes. During the committee's consideration of these bills Louie made the following plea about the importance of getting on with these changes and moving forward with these reforms. Members should bear in mind that this testimony is from 24 February this year. Mr Naumovski stated—

We have been to numerous fires. We have been to numerous fatalities. We are currently working on two fatalities right now. We are arranging two funerals for two families and possibly a third from two nights ago at Goodna. We are still waiting to hear the outcome of that one. He is in a critical condition.

What is common in all these situations is the ionisation alarms did not activate. That is how simple it is. We do not want to hear any nonsense about the cost. Cost never comes into play. We want this to be implemented as soon as possible. It is as simple as that.

When we had discussions with the shadow emergency services minister late last we were looking at implementing a requirement that from 1 July this year all brand-new homes must be done, 1 July 2017 all rentals must be done and 1 July 2019 all other residents must be completed. That is a three-year phase-in period. Last year there were 1,908 house fires in the state of Queensland and we had 23 fatalities. I do not know about you, but I do not want another 6,000 house fires over the next three years and I do not want to lose another 50 lives. With the new bill that was introduced yesterday, 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. Cost does not come into play.

Members, this is an issue that simply cannot wait much longer. We need to get on with these important community safety reforms and not delay over a decade. In this regard I urge honourable members to support the LNP bill that was introduced in 2015. In doing so, I thank the member for Kawana for all the work that he has done in putting this together and consulting with key community safety advocates. I commend the bill to the House.