




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (10.17 pm): I rise to speak on the Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2015 and the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016. Yet again we find ourselves in a position of finding that this Labor government is not in control of the agenda, of finding that it is incapable of leading. Today we see another example of the government playing catch-up.

Last year the member for Kawana introduced the smoke alarms bill. The government refused to do anything about it and the bill sat while the government had to reinvent the wheel and come up yet again with its own legislation this year. If the government had just agreed to the opposition's bill, changes would have already commenced in July this year. The only approach the government takes in its bill is to impose overburdensome regulations, thereby demonstrating its complete inability to understand how people will react to those regulations.

As legislators it is critically important to understand the reaction and behaviour of people to impose regulations and obligations and whether they become self-defeating. It is also important to introduce changes in the right sequence. It is also important to take into account the economic impediments of government regulation. No-one disagrees that we should do something to make it safer for people, families, children, renters and home owners to live in as much safety as possible.

This year, we have already heard of the tragic deaths of a number of Queenslanders in house fires. During this winter, the Gympie region has not been left alone. Since June, the Gympie area has had four house fires: in Monkland, Mothar Mountain, Curra and, this week, at Pie Creek. Many in the community are still traumatised by the tragic death of 12-year-old Alexis Dean from a fire in Monkland in late June. Now, the community is rallying around to raise funds in support of a family of five which, this week, has been left homeless from a fire in Pie Creek. Just 10 days ago a Curra family lost their home of 30 years. In June, an extended family was left homeless and sleeping in tents on their property after the loss of their home. All of these fires touch our communities and we constantly ask: how can we make people safer? What else could have been done?

In creating a framework to provide safety, we should make it both simple and economical. Both of these bills are about transitioning from ionised to photoelectric smoke alarms, whether they should be hardwired or battery operated, whether to retrofit, what is really achievable in both new and older dwellings, about wireless, about the behaviour of residents when false alarms go off, the use of batteries, interconnectivity, which Australian standard to use, time frames, mandating locations, and whether we should have uniformity and leave it up to the Building Code of Australia, or the BCA.

The difference between these two bills is whether we understand how people react to regulations and whether we make things worse or better, and about getting changes implemented in the right order so that the compliance rate is high. The LNP's bill provides the simplest and easiest transition process to deliver those changes in a timely fashion. In its bill, the government's time frames are a decade away. It is important that we do as much as possible now, not in 10 years time. The priority to transition domestic dwellings from ionised to photoelectric smoke alarms is important. Measures such as mandating that alarms be interconnected and be in every bedroom only complicates the issue and potentially leads to behaviours where more houses will be less safe. We all know that history tells us that the harder and more expensive you make laws for people to comply with, the less effective they are.

There is no disagreement that smoke alarms should be prescribed to be photoelectric. The disagreement is that the government, in its high-handed way, intends to mandate that the smoke alarms be interconnected. We need to be mindful that interconnectivity creates its own behavioural problems. Anyone who has experienced a false alarm going off in the night knows exactly what I mean. We need to get this transition in the right order. It is far more important to install photoelectric smoke alarms in a timely way. Mandating interconnectivity may not make homes safer but, in fact, make homes more dangerous by hindering the timely installation of photoelectric alarms.

The government also proposes to mandate that alarms be in every bedroom. This is in addition to what is required at the moment. Already, smoke alarms are installed in accordance with the relevant sections of the Building Code of Australia. The technical details should be left to that code so that there is uniformity and less need to return to introducing legislation when changes are required. The code, which is constantly updated, provides significant detail about locations.

It is vital that smoke alarms must be economically replaced with photoelectric smoke alarms as soon as possible. It is vital that shorter transition time must be adopted with a minimum cost framework, because this issue is fundamental to saving lives. It is vital that we make transition simple and inexpensive so that compliance rates are greater. Only the opposition's bill achieves those goals. Only the opposition's bill is clearer, simpler, less costly, has shorter time frames, is easy to comply with and is less prescriptive. The only way to achieve this transition is to pass the opposition's bill.