




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (4.09 pm): I am very pleased to rise to support the Work Health and Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill, which creates a new standalone offence of industrial manslaughter, is a vital next step in the Palaszczuk government's efforts to protect the safety of working Queenslanders and hold people to account for unsafe working conditions. Informed by Tim Lyons's *Best Practice Review of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland*, companies will be held responsible for any negligence that contributes to these unnecessary and tragic deaths.

We have all seen awful tragedies at worksites on the news, but behind every one of these headlines is a family who has lost a loved one—who went to work one day and did not come home. While nothing can heal the pain these families will always carry with them, they deserve to see responsible companies held to account. An independent statutory office for work health and safety prosecutions will be established and the jurisdiction of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission will be expanded to allow them to consider and rule on health and safety disputes. Central to these changes is the application of the industrial manslaughter provisions. This means corporations can be held to account for the conduct of individuals that contributed to deaths. This will motivate corporations to set a company culture that values safety, and it will motivate them to invest in appropriate safety mechanisms and training. This increased vigilance will reduce the likelihood of injury and fatalities, and tragic deaths at worksites will be investigated and negligent companies will be held responsible.

There has to be an effective deterrence so that appropriate safety procedures are followed to the letter, that compliance is enforced and that everyone involved in a workplace is aware and educated about their rights and responsibilities to keep people safe. It will encourage proactive management of workplace safety because lives depend on it. According to Safe Work Australia, 120 Australian workers have been killed at work already this year to the end of September. One quarter of them were in construction, and half of them were in transport, postal and warehousing industries. That is 120 families left without a mum, dad, daughter, son, brother or sister. That is 120 families trying to get by without the wages their loved one earned. These lives matter, and the companies that create and profit from the conditions in which they work should be held to account.

It may suit their rhetoric for the LNP opposite to cry foul that the government is delivering changes sought by unions, but what they forget is that unions represent working people on thousands of worksites across Queensland—unions who have at the core of their very existence the protection of workers' safety and conditions. As an employment lawyer, I acted on behalf of many union members who were injured on worksites which were unsafe. I saw firsthand the terrible result of cutting corners, bending rules and not putting safety first.

The question is whether the LNP is capable of setting aside their obsession with unions for one minute to consider the safety of working Queenslanders. Would the LNP rather have unsafe worksites? Does the LNP accept workplace deaths are part of business? We do not on this side of the House.

Labor has restored the rights of injured workers to sue a negligent employer when they are injured at work, we have regulated labour hire companies and we have returned the balance to our industrial relations legislation. Today we are acting to ensure that Queenslanders come home from work and that when tragic events occur and they do not come home the person responsible is held to account. I commend the bill to the House.