




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

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PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE BILL

 **Mr KING** (Kurwongbah—ALP) (4.31 pm): Today I rise to make a contribution to the Plumbing and Drainage Bill 2018 which the Transport and Public Works Committee, the committee I chair, has reported to the House on. This bill was previously introduced in the 55th Parliament and work started under the previous committee I chaired, the Public Works and Utilities Committee. The bill lapsed when the previous parliament finished. The new bill has picked up on some of that hard work and made our committee's work somewhat easier, which was good.

The objectives of this bill are to: establish an up-to-date, simplified and flexible legislative framework for plumbing and drainage that will be clear and simple for the end user while ensuring both public health and the environment are protected and will meet industry and community expectations over the next decade; provide authority to make plumbing regulation that will be simpler to use, will reduce the regulatory burden on consumers, industry and local government and seeks to improve regulatory requirements for obtaining approvals for plumbing and drainage work; provide authority for the making of an up-to-date plumbing code that will include all plumbing standards which are required to vary and complement national plumbing standards; and help to protect public health and safety through the regulation of mechanical services work, including medical gas work, under the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act 1991.

It is the mechanical service licence that I wanted to talk about. As was tragically shown in New South Wales in mid-2016, the incorrect installation of medical gas can have fatal consequences. The outcome of the terrible mix-up of medical gas which allowed nitrous oxide to be administered by mistake was that one infant died and another suffered permanent brain damage. While Queensland's hospitals and health facilities have procedures to ensure that medical gas systems operate as they should, no formal licensing requirements exist. The introduction of a new mechanical services licence will enhance the health and safety of Queenslanders by ensuring that the individuals doing this work are suitably qualified. Mechanical services work also involves the construction, installation, maintenance or testing of mechanical heating or cooling systems in a building. Work of this nature not done properly can give rise to serious public safety risks by creating environments conducive to legionella.

These mechanical services reforms have been shaped and refined by a substantial amount of industry and community feedback. This consultation however did identify some broad concerns, as has been mentioned previously, if we base this licence purely on the Victorian model where only plumbers can do this work. At the public hearing Mr Graham MacKrill, the Executive Director from the Queensland and New South Wales Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors' Association, said—

Mechanical services plumbing is a highly specialised form of air-conditioning work in refrigeration and air conditioning, and air-conditioning technicians also function in that space of the whole of the trade. We have mechanical services plumbing, then we also have refrigeration and air-conditioning technicians working in that space and we would also be advocating to work towards having refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics occupationally licensed at some stage in the future.

As members can see, translating this model to Queensland may have resulted in air-conditioning and refrigeration contractors being displaced. Our government listened to this feedback and the new mechanical services licence will avoid this. As has been mentioned previously, there was a fair bit of confusion and concern from the refrigeration industry about small split system air conditioning installations. While this was outside the scope of the bill, at the public hearing Ms Kim Limburg, CEO of the Australian Refrigeration Mechanics Association, put it well in terms of one of the concerns she had about the work being unlicensed. She said—

From the moment the system is installed by an unskilled worker—I want to touch on the star rating. As consumers, we will go to a Harvey Norman or a Good Guys or whatever and say, 'Okay, that has a three- or four-star rating on the split system'. The problem is that that only applies while it is sitting on the shelf. When that system is installed, in this situation, we have as high as 75 per cent split-system air conditioners not operating efficiently, because that is how many are no longer being installed by the trade qualified.

With a cert II split installer's licence, it is a refrigerant handling licence. This is where there is a great deal of confusion. It is not an actual technical competency. A split installer will install that split system and we can pretty much guarantee that it will not be operating to its design parameters, so the consumer is paying a hell of a lot more in power.

They are her words, not mine. She continues—

That is a concern for us.

As an advocate for trades, I have to say that I do like trade qualified work and we do listen. The committee recommended to the minister that he consider investigating ways to help ensure the safety of contractors when installing and working with refrigeration fluids and single head split systems. It is very pleasing that the minister has taken this on board and will carry out these investigations. Because of these concerns, the amendments will allow the mechanical service licence to be divided into classes that recognise the specialised trades that perform this work.

Stakeholders have already provided feedback through the parliamentary committee process about the technical qualifications and scopes of work that should be set by regulation. These details will be finalised by closely consulting with industry. The Queensland Building and Construction Commission will administer the licence which will include being able to take action against individuals who perform defective work or operate unlicensed.

I want to touch on the plumbing and drainage side as well. This bill also responds to the growing and changing needs of the construction industry and will establish a shorter application system which will reduce by half the current time frame for local governments to approve standard commercial applications. It will go from 20 business days down to 10 business days. There has been overwhelming support for this change from the building and plumbing industries which will result in a reduction in holding costs for large and complex construction projects.

This will not only benefit hardworking plumbers and drainers but also provide benefits to all trades including carpenters, tilers, electricians and bricklayers who can now complete more work each calendar year. All Queenslanders can take comfort that there will be no change to the existing inspection process as a result of this reform, as all stages of plumbing and drainage work which require a permit will continue to be inspected by local government inspectors to ensure that compliance with the plumbing laws and codes is maintained.

I thank the members of the Transport and Public Works Committee for their bipartisan work on this bill. It was good to sit down and talk through the issues. We had some good conversations and input. At one stage some of the members—and I will not name them—went into car air conditioning. We had some pretty good chats about this bill. I thank the deputy chair, the member for Hervey Bay; the member for Aspley; the member for Bundamba; the member for Callide; and the member for Traeger. I also thank our hardworking secretariat, Deb, Margaret, Mishelle and Lyn, for helping to steer the ship when things became a little off track.

I also thank all of those who provided submissions to the parliamentary committee and attended the public hearing. It was really good to hear particularly from some of those fridges. Even though what they had to say was outside the scope of the bill, we took what they said on board, because they had some really genuine concerns. It is always good to work on legislation that has the overwhelming support of the industry and the community. I commend this bill to the House.