




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNELL

Record of Proceedings, 2 May 2019

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Solar Farms, Code of Practice and Regulations

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (9.56 am): As a good role model, I did have my flu shot last Friday at my local chemist at the Gasworks. However, when it comes to unsafe electrical work, there are no second chances. That is why the Palaszczuk government has acted to ensure that we have the highest possible electrical safety standards for the rapid-growing solar farm industry. The solar farms code of practice and new electrical safety regulations will apply from 13 May this year to all solar farms with a total rated capacity of at least 100 kilowatts. The code and regulations clarify—and I repeat, clarify—existing legislative requirements for industry and will improve electrical safety by ensuring the mounting, locating, fixing and removal of solar panels is only performed by licensed workers under the act. Solar panels are live while they are being mounted and, more importantly, removed. Incorrect installation or earthing during mounting or removal can result in latent electrical safety risks such as electrocution, fire and system faults.

Mr Hart: Rubbish!

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government—did I hear ‘rubbish’ from the other side?

A government member: Yes, the member for Burleigh.

Ms GRACE: I take the interjection from the member for Burleigh, who is yelling out ‘Rubbish’.

Mr SPEAKER: Order, members!

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government acted to develop the code of practice and new regulations following feedback from industry stakeholders about reliance on unlicensed workers such as backpackers mounting and removing live solar panels. The member for Burleigh may want to play with workers’ health and those opposite may want to play with workers’ health, but we do not. Serious risks were also identified by the Electrical Safety Office—I will listen to it before I would listen to the member for Burleigh—and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland following the undertaking of over 200 audits of solar farms across Queensland. These audits identified a number of concerns about insufficient understanding of, and noncompliance with, existing legislative electrical safety requirements on solar farms and multiple instances of use of unqualified backpackers undertaking electrical work.

The Electrical Safety Office and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland have issued 67 statutory notices to solar farms for a range of breaches of work health and safety and electrical safety laws, including unlicensed electrical work, noncompliant electrical installations and inadequate safe work method statements and emergency plans. My department has also received 13 safety incident reports in relation to solar farms involving electrical shock, electrical burns, explosion and the risk of injury from damage to solar panels from grassfires and severe storms.

In July last year, we established a steering group of technical and safety experts to develop a solar farm code and advise on any associated regulatory changes. The membership of this group included the Commissioner for Electrical Safety; Powerlink; the National Electrical Contractors Association; Master Electricians; the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy; Energy Networks Australia; Energy Queensland; the Electrical Trades Union; the Electrical Safety Office and the Construction, Forestry, Mining, Maritime, Energy Union.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members to my left, I have already talked about outbursts that are completely uncalled for.

Ms GRACE: Outbursts, may I say, regarding the union representatives working on the committee.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, we do not need any commentary.

Ms GRACE: We have also consulted solar farm industry representatives, including the Clean Energy Council and the Australian Industry Group.

I also welcome the support of the industry, including Patrick Lau, the engineering director of eco-energy company EIWA Queensland, who was reported in the Bundaberg *NewsMail* as 'welcoming the changes'. He also said that the changes provided 'clarity' and 'will make things safer on solar farms'.

Under the code of practice and regulation there remains many tasks—many tasks—that can be performed by other workers who are not a licensed electrical worker or electrical apprentice, such as assembling the PV support structures. We welcome federal Labor's recent \$45 million commitment to support 10,000 apprenticeships in the renewable energy industry with employers able to access up to \$8,000 to take on an apprentice and apprentices receiving \$2,000 towards the costs of their education. It is essential that electrical safety comes first—there are no second chances—that electrical work is undertaken by a licensed worker or electrical apprentice and the updated code of practice and regulations will work to achieve this outcome.