




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 15 November 2023

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Work Health and Safety

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (9.49 am): The Palaszczuk government has a proud history of delivering nation-leading work health and safety laws. Our unwavering commitment to worker safety is based on our heartfelt belief that all workers have the right to come home safe at the end of every working day. Any workplace death is one too many, and I extend our deepest sympathies to the families and friends of those affected by workplace deaths.

In 2017 we created the new criminal offence of industrial manslaughter in Queensland, becoming the first Australian state to do so. Our industrial manslaughter laws are backed by strong penalties. We have also established an independent Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, charged with prosecuting breaches of our health and safety laws. We can always do more, which is why last year an independent five-yearly review of our workplace health and safety laws was undertaken, to ensure they remain contemporary and fit for purpose. The government has accepted all 31 recommendations from this review and we will legislate to implement them.

Queensland is also leading the nation in addressing the devastating health impacts of engineered stone, a known cause of silicosis. We have audited all known engineered stone benchtop fabricators in Queensland and provided health screening for more than 1,000 workers through WorkCover. I have long been calling for coordinated national action on engineered stone, and this includes writing to the Morrison LNP government six times—with no real action. We absolutely back a ban on this dangerous product, and I am very pleased that at long last we have a willing partner in the Albanese government, supporting our stance on the need for action on engineered stone. Industry is starting to vote with its feet. I welcome the announcement from Bunnings, which will end the sale of engineered stone by the end of the year, and from IKEA, which has also announced it will phase out the sale of engineered stone.

Employers bear the primary responsibility for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for workers, and where they fail to live up to these duties we have a regulator that will not hesitate to take action. I can inform the House that Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is currently conducting a targeted compliance blitz, with a focus on mid-rise construction and concrete pumping. In addition, there will also be a focus on young workers and apprentices to ensure they are fully inducted and have a safe working environment.

From day one the Palaszczuk government has sought to reverse the previous LNP government's weakened safety laws to ensure the protection of workers. We have proudly restored Queensland's workplace health and safety laws to some of the best in the nation. We will never stop our efforts to protect Queensland workers.