




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2024

**ELECTRICAL SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL;
WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr ZANOW** (Ipswich West—LNP) (11.37 am): I rise today to talk to the Electrical Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Mr Speaker, whilst I am on my feet, I know we have spoken about it offline, but your health is everything to you and I wish you well with your health and your family's health in the future.

The objectives of this bill are to give effect to a suite of recommendations from many reviews of Queensland safety frameworks. The bill amends the Electrical Safety Act 2002, the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, the Safety in Recreational Water Activities Act 2011 and consequently the Electrical Safety Regulation 2013.

We always need to ask: what is an acceptable risk? Of course, over the years, lots of great technology has evolved very well to reduce the risk when it comes to electrical safety. We now have these things called electric vehicles which I will talk a little bit more about very soon.

To achieve its policy objectives, the bill amends the definition of 'in-scope electrical equipment' to prescribe by regulation the voltage range of the equipment and where an item is not in-scope electrical equipment. It will also allow health and safety representatives and entry permit holders to take photos, videos and measurements and to conduct tests at workplaces. We have already heard from previous speakers from this side of the House that that does not sit well with us. It will also ensure the regulation-making power allows regulations to be made to provide the work health and safety regulator the ability to regulate the quality of authorisation training delivered by RTOs in Queensland. Of course, we have a changing environment when it comes to electricity.

Let's talk about the issues for a moment. The bill will clarify that HSRs and EPHs have the right to take photos, videos and measurements and to conduct tests at workplaces. I have been on many construction sites where the CFMEU have been present and, of course, they muscle in. It is shocking what happens at some workplaces under the guise of workplace health and safety. I have been to concrete pours costing hundreds of thousands of dollars that were pulled up because of a 'safety issue'. It was absolute rot; there was no safety issue whatsoever. Given the history of the CFMEU using bullying and intimidation tactics, the broadening of this power is concerning and something we need to think about carefully. This change would blur the line between the investigative and prosecutive powers of the workplace health and safety regulator and union officials, who have virtually unfettered access to worksites and who often weaponise workplace health and safety to increase union power. This is happening all the time and I have seen it firsthand in the construction industry over many years. This change is potentially dangerous.

I turn to electric vehicles. Realistically, we have only had electric vehicles over the last five to 10 years. The use-by date of an electric vehicle is usually 15 to 20 years or thereabouts, so in the coming years weekend warriors and backyard mechanics will be buying these vehicles and playing around with

them of a weekend. They will probably be making one vehicle out of three, pulling wiring and batteries out and changing things over. Good luck to them, because that is all they can afford, but that will come with real dangerous risks. These dangerous risks apply also to new electric vehicles. We know that unwary workers are at risk of electrical shock and serious injury because the voltages present in electric and hybrid vehicles are significantly higher—800 volts or higher—than the 12- to 24-volt systems in most vehicles these days. The battery systems may contain chemicals that can be harmful if released. They also store significant amounts of energy that can give rise to an explosion if not dealt with correctly.

Electric vehicles have introduced additional hazards into the workplace—that workplace might even be a backyard on the weekend—normally associated with repair and maintenance. We need to think about what happens if a vehicle breaks down or is involved in an accident. Who will recover it from a roadside, a lake or a river? Of course, there is a potential issue there with explosion and electricity. Also, the electric motors of the vehicles themselves may move unexpectedly due to magnetic forces within the motors.

It is very important that we think about the future when it comes to electric vehicles because stakeholders have said that electric vehicles would be captured by these changes and that a qualified electrician would be required to undertake work. The committee has urged consultation with the industry. I think we need more consultation with the industry when making decisions impacting on electric vehicles. I can foresee that, unfortunately, people will be killed or maimed while working on electric vehicles as they do not know anything about them.

The inspection and testing of emergency lighting is critically important. Most emergency lighting now uses low-voltage LEDs. As a lot of people who visit facilities may have been there only once or twice, if at all, the inspection of emergency lighting is critical. There are mixed views about who can inspect and test emergency lighting as well as who can install and maintain fire alarm systems as a contractor. There is also some concern that additional accreditation or licensing for electricians is required. The MEA has asked that it be legislated that this is not required; however, the National Fire Industry Association believes that a requirement for additional testing should exist. Critical signage in buildings is important.

Master Electricians Australia were broadly supportive of the bill but did raise issues with industrial manslaughter, licensing requirements for some emergency lighting and fire alarm systems, and the powers of HSRs and EPHs. The Queensland Law Society raised concerns about the powers of HSRs and EPHs as well as amendments to the industrial manslaughter provisions that would see the statute of limitations removed in some cases and the current provisions in the Criminal Code capture the same conduct as the industrial manslaughter offence does.

I would like to move on to WorkCover. The WorkCover system in Queensland is excellent. I will pick out some important parts of the review report, which was tabled on 24 October 2023. The review found that the scheme remains strong. While major reform was not recommended, the review identified emerging trends which may impact on the scheme's performance and viability. The scheme is well placed to respond to trends including: a rise in psychiatric and psychological injury claims including secondary psychiatric and psychological injury claims; lower rehabilitation and return-to-work performance compared to other Australian workers compensation jurisdictions; and delays in administrative decision-making by workers compensation insurers and workers compensation regulation.

In recognition of these trends, the 2023 review made 54 recommendations. Some of the recommendations I have personal experience of, having employed a lot of people over a long time. We talk about increased intervention to prevent the deterioration of physical injuries in secondary psychiatric or psychological injuries. Workers tend to bring their troubles to work and we need to address that and help them as best we can. Over my time employing people I have counselled a lot of workers, because if their head is clear and they are mentally prepared they will be physically prepared to carry out their duties at work. Addressing workplace issues that may cause worsening psychiatric and psychological injuries is important. Gig workers are being thrown in there, which is good to see. In conclusion, this side of the House approves of the bill.