



Speech By
Hon. Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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QUEENSLAND BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION COMMISSION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. ST O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Youth) (8.35 pm), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the debate on the Queensland Building and Construction Commission and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill is simple in purpose but significant in its impact. It is all about making it easier and safer to build in Queensland. This is tranche 3 of our Building Reg Reno, our commonsense overhaul that modernises outdated regulation, aims to lift productivity and ensures the QBCC has the laws it needs to become the customer focused, 21st century building regulator that Queensland tradies deserve.

It builds on the reforms already delivered by the Crisafulli government and complements the major transformation underway inside the QBCC thanks to its new leadership. We do not just want Queensland to be the building capital of the nation. With our need for homes and record infrastructure pipeline, we have no choice but to make our state the best place to build in Australia. That requires an industry that is productive, efficient and able to help deliver things in a timely way. This bill supports these aims by making sensible amendments to support the QBCC in delivering services electronically and making the notification process for workplace safety incidents on building sites faster. I want to again thank both the parliamentary committee and all stakeholders who contributed to the committee's examination of the bill.

I will now address some of the matters raised by honourable members during the debate. Several members opposite attempted to rewrite history today, but Queensland builders, tradies and home owners remember what the QBCC was like under Labor. For a decade, the QBCC was in steep decline. It became slow, reactive, inconsistent and bogged down in red tape. Tradies waited months for simple answers. Home owners were often left in the lurch. Staff vacancies went unfilled. Digital systems were not implemented despite years of talk. Labor commissioned review after review, including their own 2022 governance review, but they never delivered the transformation this essential regulator needed. They knew the problems and they accepted the recommendations, but they left behind the task of transformational change. Now they are walking away from recommendations they accepted and were implementing just over 12 months ago. While the industry was crying out for reform, Labor simply looked the other way and ignored them. Driving regulations in only one direction has added to the housing crisis we are experiencing.

Contrast that with what the Crisafulli government has been able to achieve in the last year. We have appointed a reform focused commissioner and CEO in Angelo Lambrinos, supported by Greg Chemello as board chair, to deliver a modern, digital, customer-friendly regulator that supports productivity and protects consumers. Our new leadership team at the QBCC are listening and taking action to make it easier to do business with this regulator. This means an uplift in capability, finally recruiting to fill vacancies to manage workloads and be more responsive, driving a change in culture so staff stay and delivering digital transformation to bring the QBCC into the 21st century.

I have just been in Townsville, in Toowoomba and in my own community on the Gold Coast at a series of forums with the commissioner to talk to builders and tradies about our Building Reg Reno and to listen to their ideas about the next steps they would like us to take. I want to thank the commissioner, who is driving this change to make it easier to do business with the QBCC. He is committed to simplifying the way they work and getting back to what he calls the 'brilliant basics'. That includes modernising, streamlining and optimising how the QBCC works and uses technology. It is about having a laser-like focus on customers and outcomes. Members opposite now want to claim this transformation. They had a decade to do it themselves and they failed. None of them can be proud of the state in which they left the QBCC. We have acted to turn things around.

I turn to the issue on which most members contributed, that is, workplace safety. Frankly, Labor has tried to run a disgraceful scare campaign today. As I mentioned in my introductory speech, the current section 54A of the QBCC Act originally resulted from a tragic situation, the death of Mr Jason Garrels on a building site in Clermont in 2012. I acknowledge Michael Garrels for his strong advocacy for change to ensure that everything possible is being done to prevent what happened to his son from happening to anyone else and to hold the people responsible to account.

The double-reporting requirement introduced for QBCC licensees was fit for purpose at the time. I have said that before and I will say it again. However, this bill brings our legislation in line with how the process now works between the two regulators. It will create a faster and more accurate system. We are removing duplication, not responsibility. I reject the assertion that this is not paperwork. It is paperwork. It is paperwork for a serious safety incident. The claims that we heard from those opposite that these forms take just a few minutes to fill out are completely ridiculous. I would be concerned if a licensee was taking just a few minutes to fill out a form about a serious safety incident that should not have happened in the first place. Frankly, safety onsite is everyone's responsibility. No-one in this House is walking away from that commitment. What ultimately saves lives and prevents injury is effective workplace health and safety practices. The opposition is deliberately misconstruing the amendment before the House today.

Licensees report a serious safety incident to the workplace regulator. In the same form, licensees are required to advise whether they are a QBCC licensee. The workplace regulator then provides that information to the building regulator. That form is already in place. With our reforms, the penalty will in fact be stronger if licensees fail to report. The memory of Jason and of other workers tragically lost is honoured. In fact, you can see that in the improvements OIR have made in their systems and processes over the past decade. That truly is the legacy of such a tragedy.

It is because of these improvements that the former government's own QBCC governance review was able to recommend reduced duplication in the reporting of health and safety risks. That recommendation, which Labor accepted—and I will table for the House—was to—

Implement streamlined processes across regulatory agencies to reduce duplication in reporting and supports a customer focus, e.g., reporting of health and safety risks.

Tabled paper: Extract from Queensland Building and Construction Commission Governance Review—Implementation Report (as at 31 December 2023), page 6 [1852](#).

The streamlining of existing reporting requirements does not change the policy intent of those requirements. Members opposite claim responsibility for the digitisation reforms within the QBCC that they did not implement, but they will not commit to their own recommendation, which they accepted from the QBCC's governance review and which they supported at the time and for several years since—until today. That recommendation, which was accepted in full, again was about streamlining these processes to reduce duplication and they accepted it when they were in government.

In December 2023, their status update regarding this action recognised that work was underway to enable information sharing and improved processes. Further, there was work ongoing under the member for McConnel's own Work Health and Safety Board. In 2024, when the member for McConnel was in charge, an agency meeting record states—

Members discussed dual incident reporting requirements for the same incident under the WHS Act and the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act. The Office of Industrial Relations (OIR) advised it will be investigating a non-legislative solution.

At the Work Health and Safety Board meeting on 27 November 2024, barely 20-odd days into this government, when it was still very much the organisation that the member for McConnel had very recently run, it is recorded—

Members noted progress by the Office of Industrial Relations (OIR) on a non-legislative dual incident notification process with the Queensland Building and Construction Commission, including in-principle agreement by both Regulators and further consideration of operational matters.

That was the member for McConnel before the last election and we hear a very different member for McConnel now that the LNP is in government. I will table that for the benefit of the House, with some helpfully highlighted sections for the member.

Tabled paper: Extract from the WorkSafe Queensland web page containing summaries of Work Health and Safety Board meetings held in 2024 [1853](#).

The member for McConnel, who was the minister for industrial relations and had oversight of the OIR and workplace health and safety, is now doing a complete backflip. Is it because she does not trust the Office of Industrial Relations to honour the MOU with the QBCC that the former government put in place? Again, it is the MOU of the member for McConnel and the member for Springwood that they are now criticising.

This is not just about relying on an MOU. The QBCC and the OIR have been committed to improving outcomes related to safety notifications for some time. In mid-2022 they started discussions about the best option to achieve streamlined reporting and the outcome was then identified by the former government in their 90-day action plan associated with that QBCC review. Again, subsequent implementation reports as at December 2023—

Ms Bush: It is not about us. It is about you. You are the minister. Take responsibility.

Mr O'CONNOR: Who was that? This is December 2023 when you were in government, member for Cooper. Subsequent implementation reports as at December 2023 and December 2024, barely a month after the LNP came in, provide progress updates on the information-sharing arrangements, including the effective integration of QBCC requirements in the OIR's new platforms. The systems and processes have been developed with careful consideration, mostly by the Labor Party. Extensive testing has also occurred to ensure those systems and processes work.

Today, members opposite have claimed the bill removes a legislative obligation to report. Let me be clear: the requirement to report remains a legislative obligation for each and every licensee. All that is changing is the reporting pathway and our changes make that reporting faster. Today, Labor will be voting against clause 26. As I have indicated in my interjections throughout the day, clause 26 includes higher penalties for licensees who do not report. Tonight, Labor will be voting against higher penalties for licensees who do the wrong thing.

Under our changes, reporting will become simpler and faster with one source of truth instead of two. Duplicating paperwork does not keep workers safe. What keeps workers safe is compliance in the first place. When things go badly wrong, this change makes it easier and faster to get a single source of truth to the regulators that need it to take decisive action. The Labor Party are claiming that they are on the side of workers, but tonight they will be opposing stronger penalties for non-reporting of people who do the wrong thing by workers.

The member for Kurwongbah said he supports duplicated reporting and suggested it is as simple as sending an extra email. Again, duplicate reporting is not fast and easy. It takes time. It forces people to recount multiple times what can be difficult circumstances. In contrast, this bill is delivering one report that is shared between two regulators. It removes an extra duplicated step—a step that is now no longer required due to the improved information-sharing requirements that I have credited the Labor Party with introducing. What did not exist in 2012 was this automated daily information-sharing system between the OIR and the QBCC. The regulators are more sophisticated now and the information is shared regularly and reliably. The legacy of the change born of that tragedy is secure, thanks to that. Had these systems been in place 13 years ago, we would not be debating these changes today.

These amendments do not rely on individuals submitting two separate reports for the same incident, which reduces the risk of someone failing to submit both reports. Instead, a single report will be required under law with a legislative requirement for licensees to disclose. Before proposing these amendments, we made sure that there was a strong and effective notification system between the regulators.

Some of the members opposite have suggested that the sharing of safety notifications between the OIR and QBCC should be legislated. Since the tragic circumstances in 2012 that we have spoken about, it has become the expectation that these regulators share information as part of their core business. This is not unusual or novel. It has been occurring for some time. In fact, hundreds of processes across government happen every single day without the need for legislation.

The opposition have the opportunity to move an amendment during consideration in detail but they will not be. I will leave it up to members to judge how serious they are about the claims they have made today or whether they are just playing politics and trying to run a disgraceful scare campaign.

In relation to the member for Springwood's contribution, I am not going to be lectured to by the architect of BPIC. Protections are still in law and stronger penalties are proposed by the LNP government.

I will turn to the matters on which all members agreed. This bill delivers long overdue updates to the QBCC to make it a more productive, user friendly and efficient regulator. We are proud to be implementing what Labor did not do in their decade of decline.

In conclusion, this bill is a practical, sensible reform. Every bit of regulatory reform counts. It all adds up. If we are not willing to change anything then we will be stuck experiencing this housing crisis we inherited. We have to drive change and we have to move the needle. This bill strengthens safety, it removes duplication, it modernises outdated legislation and it helps create the kind of building regulator that Queenslanders expect—one that is responsive, transparent and focused on helping tradies do their work and not drown in paperwork.

I acknowledge and thank all those who discussed and made submissions to the bill. I acknowledge our committee chair, the outstanding member for Lockyer. I extend my thanks to the various officers of the public works part of my department and my ministerial team for their hard work on these changes. From the department there is Ainslie Barron, the Assistant Director-General, Building Policy; Michelle Hill, Executive Director, Building Policy; and Sarah, Alaster and Beth. I thank Christien from my office. I also thank our broader building policy team in the department. I commend the bill to the House.