

WORKSAFE INSPECTORS, NUMBER

671. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

Given the recent commitment to increase the number of WorkSafe inspectors, can the Minister advise as to what will be the actual number of WorkSafe inspectors to enforce our State's Occupational Safety and Health Act?

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Hillarys to order for the first time.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for the question. As already announced by the Premier, we will be able to fund additional WorkSafe inspectors. That is very important, not only because we made a commitment prior to the election that we would review the level of resourcing to WorkSafe and support a more proactive role for WorkSafe inspectors, but also because far too many Western Australians are continuing to be killed in accidents in the workplace.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: Workplace inspectors alone will not fix that.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The member for Kingsley, who was the previous Minister for Employment and Training, clearly has an interest in this area, and I accept that, but the fact is that the former Government reduced the number of WorkSafe employees from 201 full-time equivalents in 1992-93 to 155 in 1999-2000. That is, the number of people working in WorkSafe over the period of the former Government fell by 25 per cent. While the former Government may have done a lot of good things in health and safety, it was not willing to make a commitment to WorkSafe as an extremely important element of changing the culture in the workplace. It is not just a matter of penalties and inspectors. It is a matter of changing the culture. If we as a Government do not take workplace safety and health seriously and if we do not put in the resources and do not put inspectors out in the field, then we cannot expect employers and employees to take it seriously. We are very serious about improving safety and health in the workplace. That is why the Government is making a commitment to 20 extra WorkSafe inspectors, which will take the total number close to 100 - something like a 25 per cent increase. That is only one element, but it is a crucial element in making sure we do something to make workplaces in Western Australia safer so that each year more workers will go home from work safe and healthy and we will have a marked reduction in the current rate of incidents, fatalities and disease. Major changes made by the Labor Government in 1988 led to a marked decline in the statistics relating to incidents and fatalities in the workplace. Over the past 10 years we have simply bumped along on a range of indicators. It is now time to take this to a new plateau of safety and health and have a marked reduction in fatalities and injuries in Western Australian workplaces.