**Transformation of a responsive regulator: a safer Queensland**

Dr Simon Blackwood

Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland

Music Playing

**Dr Simon Blackwood:**

It may seem that we, as a health and safety regulator, have had an epiphany. Well, it’s something we’ve always known really, but it’s only in the recent past we’ve started to point the full arsenal of human knowledge and endeavour at what really drives safety performance – human behaviour. Human behaviour at all levels of our complex working environment. Individuals within teams, teams within businesses, industry leaders and all within our uniquely Australian community.

Historically, we have responded to high health and safety risk by predominantly using only one part of the arsenal - by increasing regulatory requirements, together with compliance and enforcement action by inspectors - a more punitive, fear-based and one-size fits all approach.

Over recent times we have realised that, while the traditional regulatory response with the regulator at the centre has its place and has achieved reductions in workplace injuries and fatalities, a different approach is required in order to build sustainable and ongoing improvements in health and safety across industry.

At the same time businesses have matured. They’ve become better equipped, adopted their own health and safety management systems, induction processes and self-auditing capabilities.

So now, we are thinking, and acting, more broadly. We don’t default to trying to solve every safety problem through the development of more regulations and excessive paperwork. We’re using deliberate strategies to actively engage with all parts of the complex systems that interact to drive safety outcomes.

[Work Safe TV advertisement plays on video]

Background Music playing

I’m Dr Simon Blackwood, and I head up the Workplace Health and Safety, Electrical Safety and Workers' Compensation Regulators in Queensland.

Our goal is to have the lowest rate of work-related and electrical fatality, injury and disease in the country and we’re striving to achieve that in many ways.

What you’ve just seen is just one example of how we’re thinking more broadly about what really influences people’s safety choices and how we’re focusing our interventions in innovative ways. We want to see work safety become top of mind for everyone in the community and this public awareness campaign is designed to prompt individuals to think about the moments in their lives that are worth working safely for.

What I’d like to do now is talk to you about some of our initiatives that are helping us strive towards our goal and demonstrate our evolution as a responsive regulator.

There are four key things we do to drive our responsive regulator approach. These include:

1. using an evidence-based approach in everything we do - to drive our activities and, more importantly, to empower industry;
2. actively assisting industry to reduce fatalities and injuries and make their workplaces safer;
3. targeting our regulatory effort; and
4. permeating everything we do with enhanced service delivery.

I’ll go through each of these in more detail, and provide examples of how we are applying them, so you can see what I mean.

One of the things that flows through and influences everything we do is our strong commitment to ensuring we have an underpinning evidence base. We use this evidence-based approach in two ways:

* first, to make sure our services are targeted on the areas of highest risk, and checking that they are working; and
* second, to push data and evidence to industry to empower business with knowledge and information to take action.

For example, we provide data and evidence to industry - broken down at industry, occupation and regional levels - allowing businesses to gain intelligence about the relative size and types of health and safety risks unique to them.

Businesses then use this intelligence to target and manage their own safety and health interventions at the enterprise, industry or regional levels. And they are doing just that – regional and industry networks continue to build around Queensland with the culture of sharing safety information being fertilised and continually growing.

The second key principle represents the most important shift in our evolution as a regulator – our increased efforts to use existing systems in business, industry and the community to make workplaces safer.

In order to do this there are some key things we do:

* We engage industry and community in the safety culture debate;
* We collaborate with industry to reduce fatalities and injuries and make their workplace safer. Specifically, we help businesses understand:

1. what compliance looks like for them, so that they can successfully regulate their own safety activities. For low risk industries, for example, there will be fewer key things they need to focus on to be compliant while high risk industries will need to do more in order to comply. This means developing programs and products that are clear, concise, practical and targeted to the business segments;
2. the perennial 'what’s in it for me and my business', providing much more concrete evidence about return on investment; and
3. how to build a mature safety culture so safety behaviour can be influenced by positive safety systems, leadership, attitudes and motivations.

An area where business has told us they often struggle is understanding what compliance looks like for work-related mental health.

An example of a business tool we have developed in collaboration with university partners is the People at Work Project. This important work provides tools and resources for business so they can independently assess:

1. Do we have a higher risk of mental health problems at our workplace? And,
2. What the work characteristics, unique to our business, that creates this higher risk?

The organisation is then able to link to a suite of risk control options unique to their risk profile.

We are putting a lot of tools and resources online to assist business. One example is our online ‘cost calculator’ to enable businesses to calculate the direct and indirect costs of a workplace injury.

You can see that this exercise enables employers to more fully recognise that even minor health and safety incidents at work can involve substantial losses to the business. Currently we are expanding the current injury cost calculator to include a return on investment program for work health and safety interventions.

We also have a large number of short ‘how to’ film clips published to YouTube that focus on single issues within a specific industry.

Creating a positive safety culture in business starts at the top. Leaders in all types of businesses can have an impact on safety by creating a positive organisational climate which values good work health and safety practices.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland established a Leadership Program in 2009 which helps share and showcase business safety initiatives. The program now has over 300 business members.

TV, radio and print advertising is a key component to engage with the broader industry and community to change attitudes, motivations and safety behaviours. As well as the 'moments that matter campaign' that I showed you earlier, and the 'Homecomings' campaign you may recall from recent times, we have also engaged in advertising to change very specific safety behaviours.

Let’s take a look at the electrical safety in ceiling spaces campaign advertisement.

[Stay Safe – electrical safety TV advertisement plays]

While it is important to engage with business and to partner with them to build a mature safety culture, it cannot be done at the expense of dropping the ball on regulatory efforts. We need to ensure our responses are targeted to high risk industries, hazards and poor performers.

When regulator intervention is necessary, we make sure it is proportionate to the risk and generally starts with the more cooperative strategies, using the more coercive or punitive sanctions when the cooperative strategies fail.

Examples of our targeted response strategies include industry action plans and targeted hazard interventions. These plans have been developed for seven high risk industry sub-sectors, including meat processing, metals manufacturing, road freight transport, horticulture, working with livestock, civil construction, and construction trades. The plans are a valuable tool for both us as a regulator and for industry to know where efforts are being targeted.

Similarly, we have targeted responses for high risk hazards such as musculoskeletal disorders.

We have a joint program with our workers’ compensation insurer (WorkCover) to assist employers that have high workers’ compensation rates and costs compared to other businesses of similar size. Dedicated advisors work with these businesses through multiple visits to identify and address issues in their safety management systems.

You can see on this graph that over the '12-'13 period, IPaM employers experienced an 8.4 percent reduction in statutory workers’ compensation claim numbers, a 14 percent decrease in average days off work and a reduction in claim costs of 7.4 percent.

To support the focus on both business engagement and targeted regulator responses, a renewed service delivery structure is being put in place. Inspectors and advisory staff are being reorganised into compliance and business engagement service delivery teams so that traditional inspectors are actively undertaking business engagement activities.

Mobile work teams are also being introduced to ensure greater flexibility in the delivery of state-wide services.

Services are being moved online to improve access to services, particularly for those in remote and rural areas and to provide access to services outside of traditional business hours. For example, workers are able to renew their High Risk Work licences and change their contact details online 24/7.

Workers' compensation services have also been moved online with businesses able to set up, renew and cancel insurance policies online, with online renewals doubling since 2011.

A One Stop Shop is being established with a single telephone number and a single website for all work health and safety and workers’ compensation services in Queensland.

As a result of these collaborative efforts - and I have to acknowledge the hard work and effort of many Queensland businesses and workers - we have seen significant improvements in health and safety outcomes in Queensland.

After working in this important and rewarding area for a number of years, I know that I am in a privileged position, where I can influence the health and safety of Queenslanders.

What I’ve come to realise though, is that every single one of us is in the same privileged position.

I am proud of all the many important things we have done and continue to do to improve safety outcomes. I see the fruits of our labour born out in the reductions in fatalities and injuries.

But are we there yet? Most certainly not. I’m of the view that you’re never really 'there' when it comes to safety. It takes relentless and ongoing concerted efforts that we should never back away from.

I am confident, though, that by using an evidence-based approach, by standing shoulder to shoulder with industry, by providing the tools and data to enable industry to leapfrog in their safety performance, all the while never shunning our important role of enforcing the law in a professional and high performance service delivery environment, I am confident that our evolution as a responsive regulator, will continue to reap safety rewards.

Thank you.

[End of Transcript]