



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**National Swimming and  
Water Safety Framework**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 13 February 2017**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Perrett, Graham, MP

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**Question No.**

**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton—Opposition Whip) (17:35): I rise to speak on the motion put forward by the member for Kingsford Smith. I thank him for the motion and also for the great work that he does as a clubbie for Maroubra. We are fortunate in Australia to have some of the most beautiful coastline in the world. We are drawn to its dazzling beauty just as much as to its cooling waves, particularly in hot weather such as we had in South-East Queensland over the past weekend. Even coming from the country, as I do, I know that many Australians make the trek to the beach in summer. Swimming at the beach is a part of our Australian life. Not many people had swimming pools when I was growing up, but now, particularly in Queensland, they are much more common and much more affordable. In humid Brisbane, an after-school swim on a hot day is almost mandatory before kids start their homework.

Sadly, the climate change scientists tell us that Australia is getting hotter. South-eastern Australia was reportedly the hottest place on the planet last Saturday, and such heat blasts will become the norm for our grandchildren. With temperatures spiking to 47 degrees on the weekend, Australia's obsession with the water is likely to continue every summertime. Sadly, what is usually a source of fun and relaxation can have deadly consequences. So far this summer, 70 people have drowned on our coastlines, in our pools and in our waterways. Tragically, there has been an increase in drownings in recent years, something that all politicians should be concerned about.

Although my electorate of Moreton is sadly not on Moreton Bay or the coastline, it does have the Brisbane River and Oxley Creek, and there are many riverside homes and parks in my electorate and, of course, many pools, both privately owned and great local public pools like Yeronga, Corinda and Runcorn. Many of our children have swimming lessons from an early age, particularly at school, and some, with a little talent, go on to represent Australia in international competitions. But, sadly, not all Australian children are so lucky. In 2017 there are still swathes of children who cannot swim to save themselves. Studies have shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children who were not born in Australia are more likely not to be water safe.

There are some very generous people who are doing all they can to ensure that children do not drown, such as one of my constituents, Craig Tobin, who operates Craig Tobin Aquatics. In fact, Craig was recently the recipient of a Moreton Australia Day award for his generosity in subsidising swimming lessons so children will be water safe, and I particularly note here in parliament his dedicated service to the Corinda community when he held the Corinda pool lease. Craig understands that swimming lessons can be a burden on families struggling to make ends meet. He has subsidised hundreds of hours of swimming lessons for families facing financial difficulties. Many of the children he has taught are from refugee backgrounds or are children with disabilities.

Milpera State High School in my electorate is dedicated to the settlement and English language development of recently arrived migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds. These students have even greater hurdles when it comes to water safety. Studies have shown that, for children not born in Australia, achieving the identified benchmarks for water safety is less likely to have occurred by the time they enter secondary school. Sadly, several years ago three children associated with Milpera school—one current student and two past students—drowned over the summer break. The school now provides two swimming instruction programs each year. Each program runs for five weeks, and 90 per cent of the students now complete that program.

The principal, Tom Beck, and deputy principal, Julie Peel, both said how grateful they are to be able to run this program for their students. They would like to be able to do more water safety programs with their students, but obviously, like most schools, they are limited by funding. For instance, they would like to reinstate a surf and safety program that exposed their students to the beach with the help of the Surf Life Saving association. This would be very useful for their students when they inevitably make their way down to the beaches on the Gold Coast or Sunshine Coast, which, I am sure the member for Kingsford Smith would agree, are the best beaches in the world.

For all children in Australia, learning to swim is vital. Lifesaving is essential. Perhaps because most of us have grown up frolicking in our beautiful waters, we have taken water safety for granted. We cannot afford to keep taking it for granted. There are many children in Australia who are not water-safe and not water-wise, and this is not good enough. We need to change the approach to water safety. We need to take a national look at this problem and find a national solution. In this country, in Australia, learning to swim should not be something that is dependent upon where you live, where you go to school, or whether your parents are wealthy enough. Every child should have basic swim-safety competence by the time they complete primary school. It makes economic sense to make this investment, and obviously when it comes to children we would all agree it is definitely the right thing to do. I commend the motion by the member for Kingsford Smith to the House.