

# CABINET MINUTE

BRISBANE, 8 / 8 / 1988

DECISION NO.

54870

SUBJECT: Department of Industrial Affairs -  
Construction Accident - Commonwealth Bank  
Building, Brisbane, 4th August, 1988.

(Submission No. 49466)

30 Copies Received at 10.00 a.m. 8 / 8 / 1988 Mr. Lester  
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## CIRCULATION DETAILS

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2	MR. AHERN	9	22	La apu	
3	MR. GUNN	9	23	he	30 Copy of relevant Submission attached
4	MR. GIBBS		24	Lue	29 Copy of relevant Submission attached
5	MR. GLASSON		25	olice	28 Submission attached
6	MR. AUSTIN	9	26	QCC	27 Copy of relevant Submission attached
7	MR. LESTER	9	27	J.D	26 Copy of relevant
8	MR. TENNI	9	28		
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C O N F I D E N T I A L  
C A B I N E T M I N U T E

Brisbane, 8th August, 1988

Decision No. 54870

Submission No. 49466

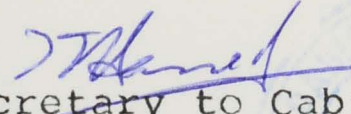
TITLE: Department of Industrial Affairs -  
Construction Accident -  
Commonwealth Bank Building,  
Brisbane - 4th August, 1988.

CABINET decided:-

1. That Cabinet note the contents of the Submission.
2. That the Board of Reference as proposed in paragraph 25 of the Submission be constituted to investigate and report on the cause of the accident which occurred at the Commonwealth Banking Corporation's project on the corner of Queen and Edward Streets on Thursday, 4th August, 1988.
3. That the Committee as outlined in paragraph 27 of the Submission be constituted for the purposes of examining the current legislation and the proposed occupational health and safety legislation to ascertain whether sufficient authority exists or is proposed to ensure adequate safety procedures are adopted in the building and construction industry.
4. That the Honourable the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Affairs give consideration to alternative options of restricting pedestrian access in the area of construction sites including the engagement of off-duty police at the construction company's cost.

CIRCULATION: Department of Industrial Affairs and copy to Minister.  
Premier's Department and copy to Premier and Treasurer.  
Treasury Department and copy to Minister.  
Department of Police and copy to Minister.  
Queensland Electricity Commission and copy to Minister.  
Department of Industry Development and copy to Minister.  
All other Ministers for perusal and return.

Certified True Copy

  
Secretary to Cabinet.



SECURITY CLASSIFICATION "C" - CONFIDENTIAL

49466

Submission No. \_\_\_\_\_

Copy No. \_\_\_\_\_ 21

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL AFFAIRS

FOR CABINET

Re: CONSTRUCTION ACCIDENT - COMMONWEALTH BANK BUILDING, BRISBANE  
4 AUGUST 1988

1. The following summarises details relating to the construction accident which occurred at the Commonwealth Bank Project, Corner Edward and Queen Streets, Brisbane at approximately 10.45 a.m. on Thursday, 4 August 1988.

Background Information

2. The owner of the project is the Commonwealth Banking Corporation. The constructor is Watkins Pacific (Qld.) Pty. Ltd. (Watpac). The management of Watpac has advised that International Rigging was the sub-contractor responsible for installation of the pre-cast concrete panels involved in the accident. However, this work had been sub-let by International Rigging to General Rigging.
3. During the construction of this project numerous complaints had been investigated by Inspectors of Construction Safety of the Department of Industrial Affairs. These included a number of accidents. Further, there were a number of strikes, involving safety issues which required thorough investigation by Departmental Inspectors. Some of the complaints in this regard were found to be warranted.



Attachment 1 gives some indication of the stoppages and incidents which have occurred in relation to this particular project. It is relevant to note that my Inspectors had seized slings in poor condition on previous occasions on this site. Further, since commencement of the project on 14 November 1986, 72 inspections have been performed.

Preliminary Assessment

4. A preliminary assessment of this accident indicates that two concrete panels were being transported along the line of the gantry to a location adjacent to the adjoining Westpac Building where they were to be fitted. The two concrete panels were slung using two synthetic-webbing flat slings utilising a normal slinging practice and attached to a safety hook on the tower crane. Each sling supported both ends of the panels. At the time of the accident the crane was apparently hoisting the load when it appears one sling broke. The concrete panels would have swung down as a result and slipped from the second sling. They then fell on top of another pre-cast concrete panel already on top of the gantry. It is unclear as to whether damage to one window and the fixed concrete structure of the building was caused by the panels during the failure of the slinging arrangement or during the fall of the panels.
5. The impact of the two falling panels onto the stationary panel on the gantry caused failure of part of the gantry resulting in other construction equipment, timber and broken concrete panels falling on pedestrians under the gantry.
6. Three persons died, including a young child and eight persons were injured. Inspectors of Construction Safety arrived at the accident site at approximately 11.10 a.m. at which time all Emergency Services had arrived and were attending to the dead and injured.
7. The aforementioned summary of events must be regarded at this stage as only a preliminary assessment until interviews are completed with key witnesses. Advice has been received from Watpac that the dogman involved in the slinging and directing of the panels has suffered a mild heart attack and will only be available for questioning in the presence of his Solicitor.



Consequently, interviews with key witnesses have been unable to be completed by Inspectors of Construction Safety or by the Police at this time.

#### Probable Cause

8. From a visual examination of equipment and structures at the site and preliminary discussions with some workmen, it appears at this stage that the primary cause of the accident was failure of one of the supporting slings. Both panels were solid concrete and the combined mass has been estimated by calculation at approximately 2.5 tonnes. A more accurate estimate of the load will be available as soon as drawings of the concrete panels are provided.
9. The slings were not marked in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Standard AS1353. This is of concern since a dogman would be unable to easily determine the capacity of slings. The slings appear to be in reasonable condition except that the leather sheathings around the slings were cut and abraded at various locations. Based on the cross-sectional dimensions of the slings and other available data it has been assessed that each sling should have been capable of lifting the 2.5 tonnes mass of the two panels. I would point out that AS1353, to which synthetic-webbing flat slings must comply, provides for slings to be capable of lifting six times their safe working load before breakage.
10. Another anomaly which has to be investigated in regard to the slings is that the leather sheathing on the slings is stamped "Civil and Civic" even though the constructor on this site is "Watpac", an unrelated company.

#### Current Investigations

11. Upon visual examination there did not appear to be any discernible damage to the sling in the area of the break. It was therefore decided to request the Government Chemical Laboratory, Department of Health to carry out extensive forensic examination and testing.



12. Verbal advice from Government Chemical Laboratory Officers has revealed that microscopic examination appears to indicate that the sling in the area of the break was damaged on both sides and that the sling appeared to have fractured under load at the centre of the sling. The traumatised nature of fibres at the sling centre appears to verify this.

It does appear at this stage that damage at the edges of the sling was in existence prior to the accident.

13. Further, upon removal of the leather sheathing from the slings, the safe working load stamped on the webbing indicates 2 tonnes as the load capacity on the slings.
14. On this basis the slings in the lifting configuration used would still have been capable of handling the load safely provided that the slings were in good condition.
15. The Government Chemical Laboratory is proceeding with more detailed and extensive investigation as quickly as possible.
16. There have, of course, been other suggestions in the media as to the cause of the accident such as a large steel bucket. However, such suggestions do not correlate with other factual information.

#### Accident Experience

17. Since the accident there has been a wide range of statistics quoted relating to the number of inspections conducted by Inspectors of Construction Safety in recent years. The following are the actual number of inspections carried out in the last three (3) years -

1985/86	1986/87	1987/88
20,813	13,770	17,274



18. There are varying reasons for the difference in these figures. In particular, I would stress that in 1986/87 there was a resurgence in the construction of high rise buildings not only in Brisbane, but in a number of the larger provincial cities. In addition, there was a large amount of construction work being undertaken on the Expo site. These developments required one Inspector to be involved on one specific job for lengthy periods of time. In 1985/86 with emphasis on smaller projects, Inspectors were able to carry out more individual inspections. The Department has also placed more emphasis on the training of Project Safety Officers employed by individual construction companies.

19. It is pertinent to mention that the total number of claims for workers' compensation has reduced in the last three years as follows:-

1985/86	1986/87	1987/88
86,370	79,400	77,540

This represents a reduction in claims for the years ending 30 June 1986 to 30 June 1987 of some 8%. From 30 June 1987 to 30 June 1988 the reduction was approximately 2%.

20. In 1983, the Department requested the Internal Operational Audit Service to undertake a number of reviews of the Division of Occupational Safety including the inspectorial functions in both the Machinery and Construction Safety areas. At that stage it was estimated that a total of 144 Construction Safety Inspectors would be required to undertake inspections of all notifiable work in terms of the Construction Safety Act. However, some construction work such as single dwelling units have since been exempted from the requirements of the Act. During the last three years the total number of Inspectors of Construction Safety in the Department's establishment remained constant at 39.



21. A similar situation exists with Inspectors of Machinery with substantial increases in Inspectors required if all machinery items were notified to the Department and if all of these items were inspected. Given the Government's policy on staffing levels it has not been possible to substantially increase the Department's complement of Machinery and Construction Safety Inspectors. However, the need for additional Inspectors was stressed frequently to the former Public Service Board for consideration in the annual Submissions to Cabinet for the allocation of additional staff.
22. Nevertheless, it is considered the Government should not be responsible for ongoing daily inspections of construction sites. This approach would not be cost effective. It will be appreciated that the situation with construction work is constantly changing and requires participative involvement of workmen in safety decisions to positively affect attitudes and behaviour within this industry.
23. In this regard most of the larger construction companies employ their own Project Safety Officers to reflect the aims of the Construction Safety Act. The Act requires the nomination of a Project Safety Officer for sites where the number of workmen is 30 or more. Workmen may elect Safety Representatives whose role is to report all known safety problems to the Project Safety Officer for attention. The Division of Occupational Safety regularly conducts safety training courses for Project Safety Officers and maintains a constant liaison with these Officers on construction sites.

It is considered that more emphasis should be placed on the need for Project Safety Officers to be employed by construction companies and it is suggested that this avenue be further explored with a view to ensuring that all legislative requirements relating to construction safety are complied with. The onus is, of course, on the constructor to ensure that safe practices are adopted and that the provisions of the relevant safety legislation are met.



Action

24. Under Section 50 of the Construction Safety Act, the Minister may set up a Board of Reference with the function of investigating, determining and reporting on the cause of accidents. The Board of Reference must comprise three members of whom -

- (a) one shall be chairman appointed as such by the Minister;
- (b) one shall be a representative of the constructor, sub-contractors and employers concerned in the construction work on the site where the accident occurred;
- (c) one shall be a representative of the workmen engaged in and in connexion with the construction work on the site where the accident occurred.

25. Subject to the concurrence of Cabinet, I would propose that such Committee comprise the following -

Mr. R. Wyatt - Occupational Health and Safety Manager of SEQEB and Immediate Past President of the Safety Institute of Australia, Queensland Division (nominated by the Minister);

Mr. G.J. Rossow - Director and General Manager - Construction, Watkins Pacific (Qld) Pty Ltd (WATPAC) (representing the constructor);

Mr. W.W. Trohear - Secretary, Building Workers Industrial Union (representing workers on the site).

26. Section 50(2) of the Construction Safety Act provides for wide powers under which a Board of Reference set up to investigate such accidents shall operate. For this purpose the Board is deemed to be a Commission within the meaning of the Commissions of Inquiry Acts 1950-1954 and its members are deemed to be Commissioners within the meaning of those Acts. Any assertions which have been made in regards to the lack of authority to conduct an Inquiry are quite incorrect.



27. After meeting with Employer Associations in the Building Industry and the various Building Unions on Friday, 5 August, I also propose to establish a committee to review all current legislation and whether the approach being adopted with the proposed Occupational Health and Safety Legislation is appropriate and contains sufficient authority to effect changes in attitudes in the building and construction industry. I would suggest this Committee be also chaired by Mr. Wyatt and comprise the following -

Mr. G. Hutchins, Thiess Watkins (Construction) Ltd. representing the Queensland Master Builders' Association;

Mr. R.E. Cush, Building Manager, Barclay Bros. Ltd, representing the Australian Federation of Construction Contractors;

Mr. V. Dobinson, representing the Builders Labourers Federation;

Mr. W.W. Trohear, representing the Building Workers Industrial Union;

Mr. C. Hooper, Assistant Under Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, Department of Industrial Affairs;

Mr. M. Atkinson, Acting Manager, Construction Workplace Branch, Division of Occupational Safety, Department of Industrial Affairs.

28. I THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT

- (a) Cabinet note the contents of this Submission;
- (b) the Board of Reference as proposed in paragraph 25 of this Submission be constituted to investigate and report on the cause of the accident which occurred at the Commonwealth Banking Corporation's project on the corner of Queen and Edward Streets on Thursday, 4 August 1988; and



- 9 -

- (c) the Committee as outlined in paragraph 27 of this Submission be constituted for the purpose of examining the current legislation and the proposed occupational health and safety legislation to ascertain whether sufficient authority exists or is proposed to ensure adequate safety procedures are adopted in the building and construction industry.

VINCE LESTER  
MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT,  
TRAINING AND INDUSTRIAL AFFAIRS

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL AFFAIRS

BRISBANE

8 AUGUST 1988



ATTACHMENT 1

COMMONWEALTH BANK PROJECT

Reported Incidents

1. Report of stones falling on Police car - cause not identified.

2. 30 November 1987

Bus ran into concrete panel which was being hoisted from a vehicle onto the building.

3. March 1988

Report of a plate falling from the 25th Floor striking a pedestrian.

4. 28 May

Concrete block fell from skip striking employee's car.

5. Friday, 24 June 1988

It was reported that an excessive number of people were seen to be riding in a man box attached to the hook of a crane. Seven (7) men were allegedly in the box. (Maximum number permitted three (3).)

Strikes

6. 14 and 15 January 1988

Workers on strike over alleged safety issue. Project Safety Officer stated that safety was not a problem at this stage. Inspector states that there were minor items but not of a serious enough nature to stop a project.

On 25 May 1988, the workmen on the project went on strike over a matter of safety. The Construction Safety Branch were advised and an initial inspection was carried out. It was noted that there had been a deterioration in safety. On this date, Floors 1-3 were inspected and directions given on various matters.



On 26 May 1988, Floors 4-28 were inspected and directions were given to rectify matters on these floors.

On 27 May 1988, a further inspection was carried out on Floors 1-14. Construction Inspector permitted normal work to proceed on Floors 1-14.

On Saturday, 28 May 1988, an inspection was carried out on Floors 15-28. As a result, the remainder of the project was cleared for normal work to proceed.

The main complaints over this period were -

1. Poor general housekeeping; and
2. Incorrect erection of mobile scaffolds and an occasional hand rail missing.

#### Recent Inspection

On 27 July 1988, an inspection was carried out on the construction site. The site was found to be in a safe state. However, the Inspector did seize two (2) lifelines in a poor condition being used on a swinging stage.