



Submission to Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee

*Mines Legislation (Resources Safety)
Amendment Bill 2017*

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 106 Victoria St, West End Q 4101
 GPO Box 1289, Brisbane Q 4001
 (07) 3840 1444
 (07) 3844 9387
 qnmu@qnmu.org.au
 www.qnmu.org.au

submission

Introduction

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) thanks the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Mines Legislation (Resources Safety) Amendment Bill 2017* (the Bill).

Nursing and midwifery is the largest occupational group in Queensland Health and one of the largest across the Queensland government. The QNMU is the principal health union in Queensland covering all categories of workers that make up the nursing workforce including registered nurses (RN), registered midwives (RM), enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AIN) who are employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors including aged care.

Our more than 57,000 members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from entry level trainees to senior management. The vast majority of nurses in Queensland are members of the QNMU.

General Comment

Our submission responds in general terms to the Bill. We support the main purpose of the Bill in delivering initiatives to ensure additional safety and health measures are in place to protect Queensland miners. The promotion of transparency and accountability in the Bill is commended. The Bill proposes to address fifteen matters identified for improvement in the resources safety and health regulatory framework which is supported by the QNMU.

The re-identification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP) or black lung disease in Queensland coal miners sent shockwaves through the mining community. The disease was thought to have been eradicated in Australia more than 20 years ago. The ensuing inquiry, the *Review of Respiratory Component of the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme* (the Monash Review) revealed major system failures at virtually all levels of the design and operation of the respiratory component of the coal mine workers' health scheme.

The Bill proposes the inclusion of long-term health surveillance of coal mine workers in addition to health assessment in the *Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999* (CMSHA) and the *Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999* (MQSHA). This extends health assessment and health surveillance of coal mine workers to include pre and post-employment assessments of workers. Nurses play an important role in this process providing health assessments, including spirometry and chest x-ray interpretation and

reporting (Monash University, 2016). QNMU supports health surveillance as one of the identified matters for immediate improvement.

History shows that CWP is preventable when workplace health and safety testing and monitoring standards are properly enforced to prevent exposure to coal dust. Workplace health and safety legislation, including the *Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999* and the *Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999* rely on self-regulation, yet clearly this approach has not been rigorous enough to prevent the disease recurring. QNMU supports the measures the Bill is proposing to address these concerns.

Industry, government, workers and their unions must work together to identify high risk areas to reduce coal mine workers' exposure to dust and achieve compliance with statutory exposure standards. It is important exposure and testing standards are rigorously applied. The health and welfare of the mining workforce whose efforts have contributed so much to this country's wealth, demands nothing less.

References

Monash University. (2016). *Review of respiratory component of the coal mine workers' health scheme for the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines: Final report*. Retrieved from https://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/383940/monash-qcwp-final-report-2016.pdf