

State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee

From: John Phillips <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, 14 February 2020 7:55 AM
To: State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Subject: Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020

Hi,

My name is John Phillips and I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed amendment to the Queensland Coal Mining Act 1999. Specifically the requirement for Ventilation Officer's and other Statutory Officials being employees of the company.

I am a qualified Mining Engineer, Ventilation Engineer and Registered Professional Engineer of Queensland. I work in the underground coal mines and care about what I do. I have to say I am appalled by the recent changes to the Coal Mining Regulations implemented by the Minister over Christmas. Many of the regulation amendments will COMPROMISE safety, NOT improve it. For instance, NSW considered some of the regulation changes that were put through by the Minister and decided not to implement them after consultation showed they were WRONG. I am very concerned the proposed changes to the Act will be pushed through and have the same negative impact.

Without having the time to digest in detail, the following concerns immediately come to mind:

1. In my experience, many long term permanent employees (particularly ERZ Controllers) who rarely vary tasks are not good at maintaining their competency as Statutory Supervisors. Contract Statutory Supervisors who go between sites are continuously required to maintain knowledge and skill as part of lengthy induction and appointment processes.
2. In my experience, contract employees often work safer when the Statutory official who supervises them knows them (as individuals) and understands what they do.
3. As one of the more experienced Ventilation Officers in Queensland I often assist mining operations and fill in as the Mine's Ventilation Officer for short periods such as leave coverage. I also have two small children, and elderly Dad and farm to look after. Putting my family second by taking on the restrictions of becoming an employee is not an option. I can think of a number of very experienced underground mine managers and ventilation officers who will simply retire. How does this make it safer?
4. Generally, it takes a graduate engineer 3-5 yrs to gain the experience to do the Ventilation Officer's job well. Most mines struggle to get one Ventilation Officer - now they will need two or three. How can this be done in 12 months?

How does legislating the terms of one's employment allow for and support:

1. Specialised training and mentoring? This is a requirement under the new competency for Ventilation Officers.
2. Future advances in technology such as remote mining?
3. Future workplaces that are more family friendly and supportive of women in mining?
4. Encouraging talented future leaders into the industry?

The current Act and Regulations were formulated after extensive consultation post the Moura Inquiry. Is this Bill an admission that the current laws only work under antiquated employment arrangements of the past where everyone is employed by the operator?

The Moura inquiry recommended maintenance of competence and no more tickets for life. Why isn't this considered more important than who you work for?! Would you go under the knife with a surgeon who hadn't practised for 20yrs? How does it make any meaningful difference to safety if his/her employment status changed a couple of days before?? Which other industries in Australia have such draconian employment measures? The aviation industry is often admired for it's safety standards and certainly doesn't have such absurd employment provisions. Believe it or not it has maintenance of competency!

Unlike the wide ranging and experienced task groups of Moura, the Brady report has a narrow focus and the minister must be careful not to make an implicit assumption that every aspect is correct. The Brady report starts with spelling mistakes in the table contents and in many regards goes downhill from there with comments about how all the data was taken as correct for instance.

Anyway, no doubt I have wasted my time writing this. The minister will continue demonstrate maintenance of incompetence just like he has with the recent changes to the Coal Mining Regulations, two bungled Coal Mining Recognised Standards - not to mention the Paradise Dam debacle.

Regards,
John Phillips

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