



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

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MR W. ALLISON

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (11.18 p.m.): On behalf of the Queensland coalmining industry and, in particular, the mineworkers of this State, I wish to place on the public record our appreciation and best wishes in retirement to a man who has spent more than 20 years of his life as a district union inspector. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union's longest serving official of the Queensland district of the Miners Union, Mr Bill Allison, retired in late August. I have had the pleasure of knowing Bill as a friend and as an official of the Miners Union at the workplace and as a State member representing the coal industry of Queensland. While it would be untrue to claim Bill as a personal and close friend, I can rightly claim to have built a strong friendship through our working relationship within and outside the coal industry.

We both have one thing in common: a passion for the coal industry and for the absolute need to provide a safe and healthy workplace environment for the State's coalminers. There would be people at all levels of the coal industry who did not for one reason or another actually like Bill Allison, but for every person who disliked him there would be hundreds more who respected him as a man, as a miner and as an inspector. Bill had what it took to be an elected coalmine union inspector. He had an understanding of the industry, he had commonsense, he had guts and he was not afraid to make the tough decisions.

Bill Allison first started in the coal industry at the Avondale Colliery in New South Wales in January 1962, in the hard days when mining was done by hand and coal was hauled from the mine by pit ponies. In 1966 Bill had an experience that will stay with him forever. He witnessed his first fatality when a slab of coal came away from the rib, or side, of the workings and crushed a workmate to death.

Like so many other mineworkers, Bill took on mines rescue training and for 14 years trained in preparation for the possible rescue of trapped miners or restoration of a mine damaged by a roof collapse, fire or explosion. On 10 January 1972, Bill and two other rescue trained members were required to enter Sirius Creek Mine near Blackwater to retrieve the body of a young mine electrician who had lost his life in an explosion earlier that day.

In 1974 Bill moved to Moura, where he started work as a deputy at Kianga mine. On the afternoon of 20 September the following year the mine exploded, killing 13 men underground. Those men remain entombed there today. In June 1978 Bill was elected to the position of district union inspector. Over the next 22 years he was involved in the investigations of some 52 fatalities. He lost mates and brothers of the coal industry family. He shared in the heartache of those who lost loved ones in Queensland's most hostile work environment. He understood the anger and did what he could to promote a healthy and safe workplace.

During his time as a district union inspector, Bill was present at about a dozen underground fires at mines near Ipswich and at Laleham, Leichhardt, North Goonyella and Collinsville. Earlier this year he was involved in the investigation of two recent accidents in which miners lost both legs.

In the months leading up to his retirement Bill was also strong and vocal in his criticism of the way mining companies are using contractors who are inexperienced, how they are prepared to put outcomes ahead of safety and how they are prepared to accept the risk that fatigue brings to a workplace.

Bill Allison has done an outstanding job in making Queensland coalmines safer working places. Those new to the industry have a safer work environment, safer work practices, appropriate safety equipment and the world's best legislation covering coalmine health and safety in coalmines, largely thanks to Bill Allison. The best way to sum up Bill Allison's contribution to the coalmining industry is to use his own words. He said—

"Not having to attend another fatality or serious accident or pick up the phone in the middle of the night to be told there has been another disaster will be a great relief but one I don't wish on anyone else."

To Bill I say, "Enjoy your time in retirement. You have given so much in the interests of coalmine safety. Put aside, if you can, the sad times and the anger and be proud of your achievements in making our mines safer places to work. For the public record I thank you sincerely. Congratulations on a job well done. Good luck, and may you enjoy many years of good health and happiness with those you love and care for."
