



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 26 May 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Environmental Management of Mining

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.06 a.m.), by leave: Before coming to Government, the Labor Party committed itself to a reform of the environmental management of the mining industry. Today I am pleased to announce that the Beattie Labor Government has introduced a new era in effective environmental management for the mining industry in Queensland. In this new era, environmental management will be undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency in conjunction with the Department of Mines and Energy. This momentous decision delivers yet another key election commitment of our Government. We said that we would do this, and we have done so in less than a year. Labor keeps its promises.

The Premier announced this new era for mining at the Jondaryan Community Cabinet meeting on 10 May. At the same time, a history-making joint press conference was held in Brisbane, at which the Queensland Mining Council and the Queensland Conservation Council sat down together—perhaps for the first time—and applauded the Beattie Government. Let me inform the House and the Queensland people of some of the glowing references that came from that media conference about this initiative.

The Queensland Conservation Council's Imogen Zethoven declared it to be "one of the most significant environmental reforms in Queensland's history". She said that it would mean a "safer, cleaner, healthier Queensland". The Queensland Mining Council's chief executive, Mr Michael Pinnock, said—

"It's open, it's transparent, it's in the hands of the Environmental Protection Agency and that, I think, gives it credibility and that is bound to lead to better outcomes."

Mr Pinnock also declared it a milestone in relations between miners and conservationists.

I wish to inform the House that Cabinet has approved interim arrangements which will see environmental management for mining, including assessment, licensing, compliance and monitoring, transferred to the State's new Environmental Protection Agency. Agreement on this new policy is the realisation of a positive and powerful partnership between the Queensland Government, the mining industry, conservationists and the broader community. It follows extensive consultation with the Mining Council, the Queensland Conservation Council and other community groups. Today I thank them publicly for their constructive involvement in this process.

I repeat the words of my learned colleague, the Minister for Mines and Energy, Mr McGrady, who has noted that this is the State Government's first major industry/environment policy under the new Environmental Protection Agency. The mining industry will now have a process that avoids duplication and provides clear standards for environmental management. This brings about greater certainty for miners and should promote greater public confidence in the industry and its environmental performance. For the first time there will be well defined roles and responsibilities for the Department of Mines and Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. Environmental conditions will be set through consultation on major projects between the Minister for Mines and Energy and me, and this brings to bear for the first time with respect to major mining projects the attention and whole-of-Government processes that they deserve and require.

The transfer of responsibility for environmental regulation to the EPA is already taking effect. The policy is in recognition of the growing importance of good environmental practice and performance to the economic security of the industry and to all Queenslanders. This move gives greater protection to the environment, greater surety to miners, and greater comfort and confidence to the community and conservationists that an independent, transparent and accountable management system will be put in place so that mining can be put on a path of environmental sustainability into the 21st century.
