



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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MINING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (3.03 p.m.): I rise to support the contribution of the Opposition spokesperson on Mines and Energy in the debate on this legislation. As the Minister said in his second-reading speech, the legislation has both the support of the Mining Council and the unions. The Opposition also supports the legislation wholeheartedly. Although the Bill is mechanical in nature, it obviously leads to some discussion about the future of the coalmining industry, because it relates to the superannuation provisions that apply to that industry.

It is fair to raise issues relating to the future of the coalmining industry and future employment within the coalmining industry, because people have to be employed to be entitled to draw superannuation. Many people are wondering what their future will be within the coalmining industry. As members are well aware, the industry is suffering tough times: prices are low and some mines are finding it difficult to operate. Recently, some mines have changed hands, which impacts on superannuation, severance pay and redundancy entitlements—all of the things involved with wages and payments to miners.

The Opposition—as no doubt is the Government—are very mindful of how changes in the mining industry impact on workers. We are also very mindful of the contribution that the entire coalmining industry has made to the Queensland and Australian economies. Queensland would not have the strong economy that it has today without the big developments in the coal industry. Many people have opinions about the contribution that Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen made to this State but, when the Opposition was in Government for that long period, one of the really outstanding contributions that Sir Joh made was to get the coal industry up and running in this State. That industry became the backbone of the Queensland economy and contributed to a lot of infrastructure development and employment in this State, which gave workers entitlements to superannuation and, unfortunately, redundancy payments because of the pressures in the world coal market.

There is no doubt that, this morning in answer to a question from me about the Surat/Dawson development, the Deputy Premier was right when he said that coal prices are very low. At this point, it is with some trepidation that people enter into the coalmining industry in Queensland, in other parts of Australia, or anywhere in the world, that is, if they take a short-term view. However, I believe that the Queensland coal industry has a very positive future, provided it gets the support that it deserves and it is allowed to access that increased demand for coal in the world market.

At this point, while prices for coal are low, the predictions are that there will be a rising demand for coal. The 4.1 billion tonnes of thermal coal in the Surat/Dawson development is top-quality thermal coal. That is why that project has a future. The predictions for an increased demand for thermal coal range from 4% to 6% a year. APEC, which is recognised by the industry, predicts that by 2010, the demand for thermal coal is expected to rise by approximately 41%.

So there is a future for coalmining, particularly in thermal coal. Like the expression "oils ain't oils", not all coal is the same. Hard thermal coal, steaming coal, particularly the Surat/Dawson Basin coal, has very good environmental—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I also draw the member back to the relevance of this Bill. The member is allowed to talk about coal and oil shale workers' superannuation, new explosives, and safety in mines.

Mr SLACK: Mr Deputy Speaker, I have been speaking for only five minutes. I have indicated to you that all of what I have said has an impact on superannuation entitlements. The future of employment in the coal industry is dependent upon developments in the coal industry.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will let you develop that.

Mr SLACK: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you accepted what I said in that, during the second-reading debate, there is a certain latitude in a debate on a Bill that is relevant to an industry.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: But you are not addressing the Bill at all. In not one way at all are you addressing the amendments in the Bill.

Mr SLACK: I am addressing the points that are raised in this document. The Bill is about tidying up elements in relation to superannuation in the coalmining industry. I am talking about a very important issue raised today in the Parliament relevant to the coalmining industry. We have a debate today on a coalmining industry related Bill and you are saying that I am out of order for referring to something raised in the Parliament today.
